

the *Interviewing Edge* for Job Seekers with Disabilities



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Trainer's Guide

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The data cited in this section come from the article "Secrets of Successful Job Interviewing" presented by Benci-Ventures, Inc. in the September-October 1996 issue of *Employment In The Mainstream*. Specific sources for the statistics come from surveys conducted between 1994 and 1996 by three executive research firms: Robert Half and Associates, Hodge-Cronin & Associates, and Benci-Ventures, Inc.

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I. Never Be Late for an Interview

You may have the best excuse in the universe, but it doesn't matter, because the employer is thinking: "If he's late for the interview, he's going to be late for work." And that's one of the main things all employers hate: Someone who's chronically late. Because no matter how talented or skillful you are, if you don't show up, you can't do the work.

And being on time for an interview is especially important for someone with a disability, because many employers buy into the stereotype that people with disabilities are going to be late, are going to be absent more often, and are going to be less productive than their able-bodied co-workers—even though studies show that that simply is not true.

So the first thing you can do to dispel that myth is not simply to be on time, but to be 5 to 10 minutes early for the interview. This indicates to the employer that you are raring to get to work!

II. Your Attitude and Body Language

Communicate Your Abilities

Project your skills and abilities to an interviewer through your body language. You want to have good posture, a firm handshake if possible, and good eye contact. Just as important is to project enthusiasm.

III. Little Secrets of Big

Interviewing Success

1. What percentage of the time does the most qualified candidate actually get the job?
 - a. 85% of the time
 - b. 55% of the time
 - c. 35% of the time

The answer is “c.” Only 35% of the time does the best candidate—on paper—get the job. The reason is that people are not usually hired by computers or robots. They are hired by fellow human beings, and even professional interviewers are influenced by all kinds of other things, like the applicant’s body language, appearance, promptness, and perhaps most important of all, attitude.

Others may have more experience, training, and skills, but when you get the interview, you have as much chance as anybody else to get the job if you can market yourself and your abilities effectively.

2. To give a good, complete answer to an interviewer’s question, how much time should you take?
 - a. Under 30 seconds
 - b. Between one and two minutes
 - c. About five minutes

The answer is “b.”

While employers don’t like short, monotone answers, they don’t like people who go on and on talking about themselves either. Research shows that those who can give crisp, clear responses in one to two minutes are usually successful job candidates. And this is something most people can learn to do through constant rehearsal.

3. In an ideal interview, what percentage of the time does the job applicant do the talking?

- a. 25% of the time
- b. 50% of the time
- c. 75% of the time

The answer is “b.” The interviewer has all the power, but the applicant should do his or her best to turn the interview into a two-way conversation in which there is an equal exchange of information. That may seem like a difficult thing to do, but again, this is a skill that you can learn through constant rehearsal.

4. If you were given the option, when should you choose to be interviewed?
- a. First among the candidates
 - b. In the middle among the candidates
 - c. Last among the candidates

The answer is “c.” Research has shown that the first person interviewed gets the job only 17.6% of the time. But the last person interviewed is hired 55.8% of the time.

The reason: As in most human endeavors, people are wary of accepting the first choice they’re offered. Therefore, I counsel job seekers to try to be last in line and that way you’ll end up being first, if you get my message.

That means waiting a week before you respond to a job announcement. And if the employer actually gives you a choice of when to be interviewed, remember: the later you appear in the interviewing process, the better your chances are likely to be.

5. Which is the worst day of the week to have a job interview?
- a. Monday

b. Wednesday

c. Friday

If you said “c.,” Friday, you’re absolutely... wrong. It’s “a.,” Monday. There is no best day of the week, according to research, but try to avoid a Monday interview if at all possible.

6. When is the worst time of day to have an interview?

a. First thing in the morning

b. Right after lunch

c. Late afternoon

According to research, the answer is “c.,” late afternoon, probably because the interviewer has his or her mind on other things by that time of the day. Also, people have a tendency to be a little sleepy and unfocused right after lunch, so I advise job seekers if you have a choice, try to schedule your interview for sometime in the morning.

7. Successful applicants mention the name of the interviewer’s company how many times as often as other candidates?

a. There is no difference.

b. Twice as many times.

c. Four as many times.

The answer is “c.” Dropping the employer’s name into the interview now and then is a subliminal message that you’re not out to get just any job, but that you sincerely want this one.

Also, it’s a good idea to say the interviewer’s name once in a while. It’s a nice ego stroke and shows you’re trying to establish a relationship beyond the interview. But don’t get on a first name basis unless the interviewer invites you to.

III. Interviewing Situations Unique to Job Seekers with Disabilities

1. When is the best time to disclose your disability to a prospective employer?

- a. When you first apply for the job.
- b. When you're offered the interview.
- c. Never.

There really is no one correct answer. When, if, and how to disclose your disability is up to you. But employers don't like surprises. So when a candidate who is blind or deaf or uses a wheelchair shows up for an interview not having revealed his or her condition beforehand, many employers feel resentment.

Others say: "It really throws me off and I feel unprepared." So you have to decide whether disclosing your disability will have a positive, negative, or neutral impact on your ability to get the job.

2. The best way to determine whether an employer has a positive attitude toward hiring people with disabilities is:

- a. Through their job announcements.
- b. Through their Web site.
- c. Through company publications.
- d. Through individuals who work for the company.

Actually, doing all of these things is a good idea. Study the employer's job announcements and ads. Do they say anything about being an affirmative action employer? Is the term "people with disabilities" or simply "D" used in their affirmative action statement? If there's a phone number, is there also a TTY number given? Those are tip offs that this employer is at least open to the idea of employing qualified individuals with disabilities.

Find their Web site on the Internet. What, if anything, does it say about their hiring practices regarding people with disabilities?

Ask the employer to send you their brochures and annual reports. Do they feature or mention employees with disabilities?

But your best sources of information about an employer are people who've actually worked there. Ask around; see if you can find someone who has worked for that employer and pump him or her for information. Ask questions like: "Do they have a good attitude about hiring people with disabilities?" and "What's their policy on providing reasonable accommodations?"

3. During the job interview, who should first bring up the provision of a reasonable accommodation?
 - a. The interviewer.
 - b. The job applicant.
 - c. A third party representing the applicant.

Employers say job seekers with disabilities should take the lead in discussing reasonable accommodation issues. For one thing, interviewers are restricted by the law on how to broach the subject. For another, it impresses an employer when a job seeker demonstrates initiative.

When applicants discuss their accommodation needs in a positive manner, showing how the accommodation will make them more effective employees, they're demonstrating that they're thinking what's best for the employer, not just for themselves.

Employers love that kind of attitude.

However, whether to discuss your accommodation needs during the interview is just like the disclosure issue. It's up to you to decide whether you want to talk about accommodations at all.

4. If you decide to discuss them during the interview, when should you mention your accommodation needs?
 - a. At the beginning of the interview.
 - b. When the employer asks you what your qualifications are for the job.

- c. Near the end of the interview.

Just as employers shouldn't focus on an applicant's disability in the interview, neither should job seekers start the interview by making accommodation requests. First, you should sell your abilities, then discuss your accommodation needs. And remember to put your needs in a positive way, such as: "I need this accommodation to be a more productive worker for you."

5. What should you do if you are asked an illegal question?

- a. Refuse to answer and point out it's illegal, but continue the interview.
- b. Stop the interview and go file a lawsuit.
- c. Give the employer the benefit of the doubt and continue the interview by answering the question.

This is another case where there's no simple answer. Although it was the intent of the Americans with Disabilities Act to end discrimination against individuals with disabilities, the reality is, of course, different. Employers, intentionally and unintentionally, break that law every day. In the employment interview, they often ask questions that are not "job-related" or of "business necessity," as the ADA requires.

You should consider these things when you're asked an illegal question: What is the employer's motive for asking that question? Is he or she trying to screen me out or is the interviewer looking for assurance that I can do all aspects of the job? Is the interviewer seriously considering me for the job or just going through the motions?

Be aware of your legal options: The first is to refuse to answer the question and point out it's illegal.

You can even go so far as to file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission—although experience shows that the odds of you winning the discrimination complaint are heavily against you. Nevertheless, the employer may learn a valuable lesson from the experience if you do decide to file a complaint.

The other option is to give the employer the benefit of the doubt-that it was not an intentional breaking of the law-and answer the question in as positive a manner as you can.

It really has to be your decision. No one else should try to tell you how to respond to an illegal question.

6. What is the most important attribute all employers say they are looking for in potential employees?
 - a. Outstanding qualifications for the job
 - b. The right attitude
 - c. Knowledge of the business

While outstanding qualifications and knowledge of the business are certainly important, the one thing employers say over and over again is that "I'm looking for people with the right attitude." Unlike most other things, that is something you do have some control over. When job seekers with disabilities project a positive attitude about themselves and their abilities, they go a long way toward convincing employers that they are qualified for the job.

IV. Typical Interviewing Questions

1. Could you tell me a little about your job experience?

Job interviews should link your future—what you’re going to do for your new employer—with what you’ve done in the past. Therefore, focus on specific things in your past, whether job-related or not, that show the interviewer what you can do for him or her. Perhaps you have good computer skills and the job requires that ability. But you’ve only had summer jobs in retail stores. If that’s the case, tell the interviewer how you’ve used your computer skills in your home or at school. Always focus on what abilities the employer is looking for in the ideal candidate and not job experience that doesn’t speak to those abilities.

2. Why did you apply for this position?

Don’t say something like “I need a job” or “the money looks good.” Job interviewers realize you need to make a living, but that’s not why they are going to hire you. They want to hear that you really want this particular job because you believe it is a perfect fit for your abilities and you believe you can be a real asset to the employer.

3. What do you consider your greatest strengths to be?

Try to relate your responses to the relevant qualifications (for instance, “excellent communication skills,” “detail-oriented” and so on) of the job for which you are interviewing. But don’t simply say something like, “I’m really good dealing with all kinds of people,” and leave it at that. Give the interviewer an example of how you have dealt “with all kinds of people.” If you don’t have much or any work experience, use things like school activities, hobbies, or extracurricular activities to make your point.

One more thing about “greatest strengths”: Try to come up with three and be prepared to give an example that illustrates each of your strengths.

4. Do you have any weaknesses?

An interview is not the time to let it all hang out. The best approach may be to list a few “weaknesses” which may actually be advantages, such as being impatient to get things done or that you have a tendency to take your work too seriously.

If you are new to the workplace, you may want to state the obvious in a positive way, such as: “Well, my weakness is that I’m young so I don’t have much job experience. But I’ve always done my chores around the house and I’ve always worked hard in school and I believe those qualities will serve me well in the world of work.”

5. What are your long-range goals?

Here’s what you don’t want to say: “I have no idea,” or “I want to be your boss someday,” or “I thought I’d work here for a little while and then move on.” Your best answer may be something like: “I’m looking for the opportunity to show how well I can perform in this job and hope to go as far in the organization as dedication and hard work will carry me.”

6. Do you have any questions for me?

If you say no, the interviewer may think you aren’t very interested in the job or simply don’t have an inquisitive mind. There are many substantive questions you should ask—such as with whom you would work, how work is evaluated, how you can learn more about the job now, and (turning the question around), what are the employer’s long-range goals.

The one question you don’t want to ask is: “What will my salary be?” Interviewers don’t like candidates who seem more interested in the money than the job. You can ask about benefits; employers don’t mind that. But at some point, and it may not come up until you’re actually offered the job, the employer will have to discuss salary.

The interviewer may ask you: “What are your salary expectations?” A good response is to ask whether there is a salary range and what it is. Then you can begin to quietly negotiate.

For more tips on successful interviewing, check out this
Web site: <http://editorial.careers.msn.com/gettinghired/interviewing/>

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Some people are naturals at interviewing but most of us are not. That's why you need to look for any edge you can get over other applicants. This training program covers essential strategies for persons with disabilities to effectively compete against other job candidates in the interviewing process. Covers:

- Uncovering the little secrets that can lead to Big Success in the job interview.
- Learning to handle the unique interviewing issues
- The below-the-radar factors that can influence and increase your job interviewing success.
- What your best options are, in dealing with such issues as disclosure and illegal questions
- How to prepare your answers for the interview before it ever takes place.

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