

Win Your Next Job with Three Essential Interview Skills

By Deborah Walker

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**Win Your Next Job With Three Essential Interview Skills**  
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With competition for good jobs at an all-time high, candidates who conduct their job search as a sales campaign consistently win out over those who don't. When job seekers practice the skills of sales experts they learn to apply the strategies of a sales presentation to their job interviews.

To get to the top of the candidate list, you'll need these three essential sales skills:

1. Pre-interview preparation
2. Finding and using the interviewer's "Hot Buttons"
3. Closing on the next step of the interview process

1. Pre-interview preparation

Every great sales presentation starts with pre-sales preparation which includes client research, and product analysis. Job seekers prepare for interviews similarly: research on the prospective employer and a thorough catalog of their own accomplishments to illustrate their potential contribution and worth to the employer.

Thanks to the internet, company research is relatively easy, especially on publicly held firms. A few good sources are Yahoo, Hoovers, Wall Street Journal archives as well as company web sites. Information on privately held companies is often readily available as well. One of the easiest ways to get such information is simply enter the company name in your favorite search engine and see what pops up.

Minimally, you'll want to find out company size, products or services, major competitors, branch or head quarters and any recent news items. Time allowing, it's also very helpful to know some of the major players in their organization; a little history on them and future products, markets or growth objectives.

Once you've done the research, prepare to communicate your value through your accomplishments. Examine your career for examples of how you have solved problems, saved money, increased revenue, or created revenue opportunities for your former employers. As much as possible, dollarize or quantify your contributions. Do not depend on your ability to "wing it" through your interviews. Ask any high-producing sales professional, they will tell you that it is impossible to wing your way to success. It takes preparation and practice.

Once you've prepared for the interview, don't forget the next essential sales skill:

2. Finding and using the interview "Hot Buttons"

An interviewer's hot button is his/her unspoken concerns or wishes.

It's your job as the interviewee to uncover the interviewer's hot button. If you don't ask, he/she probably won't tell you. There are two magic questions that will reveal the interviewer's hot buttons.

1. "What do you see as the greatest challenge for this position?"
2. "What qualities do you see as most important for this position?"

Once you've asked the all important questions—shut up and listen!

After the interviewer has revealed his/her hot buttons, use the information to frame your answers to his/her questions. You'll connect with the interviewer much faster once you sell yourself based on his/her motivations.

Now that you have their attention, don't forget the most important skill:

3. Closing on the next step of the interview process

The term "closing" as a sales term that means influencing one to agree to take certain action (as in signing a contract or writing a check.) A complex sale involves a number of small closes before the ultimate closing purchase. The interview process is a series of closes leading up to the final job offer.

If you've purchased a car lately you know that the sale starts with the test drive and moves forward through a series of carefully crafted questions such as "do you prefer silver or black?" "Which of you will be the primary driver?" "Shall we park this in the sale-pending area" "Do you wish to trade in your car, or shall we finance this 100%" The effective sales person knows what closing steps must take place—attempt to skip the steps and he may lose the sale altogether.

As a clever sales person identifies the small closing steps needed to move the sale forward, so must the job seeker understand the closes necessary to keep the interview process moving forward toward a job offer. Those steps look something like this:

1. The cover letter must entice the reader to read your resume.
2. The resume must motivate the reader to call you in for an interview.
3. In the first interview ask for a second interview.
 - * "When would you like to schedule our next meeting"
 - * "Is there any reason you wouldn't consider inviting me back for second interview?"
 - * "Who will I meet in the second interview?"

4. In the second interview ask to speak with the decision maker.

* "Who, besides yourself, will make the final hiring decision?"

* "When is convenient for Mr. /Ms. Decision Maker to meet with me?"

* "Is there any other presentation materials I should bring when I visit with Mr. /Ms. Decision Maker?"

5. When speaking with the decision maker ask for the job offer:

* "Are there any objections that prevent you from extending an offer?"

* "When would you like me to start?"

* "What challenges would you have me tackle first?"

Asking for the next interview or the job offer may seem bold, but try it. You'll find yourself invited back more often and feel much more in control of the interview process.

Once you've mastered and applied the three essential sales skills for effective interviews you'll see your job-search efforts accelerate and your confidence soar.

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