



The
Ultimate
EXECUTIVE
CAREER GUIDE

6

**MASTER
YOUR NEXT
INTERVIEW**

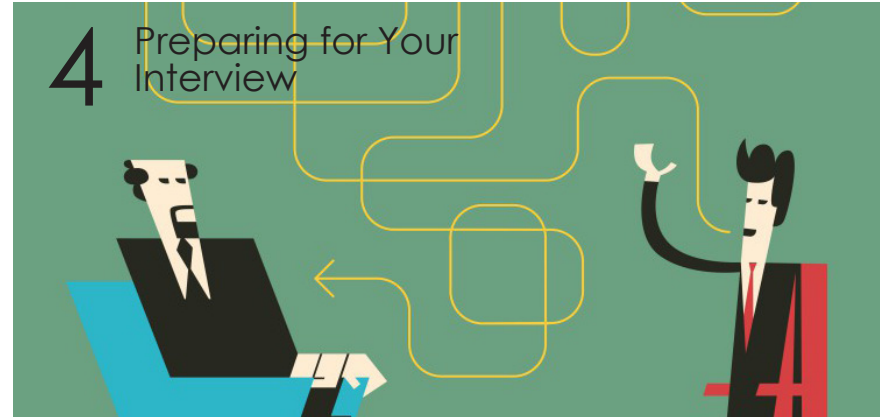
 **BlueSteps**

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UNDERSTANDING THE INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE

No matter how suited you are for the role, you still have to convince the interviewer that you are the best candidate. To prove the value you can bring to their organization, you will have to participate in a series of interviews during which you will need to explain how your previous experiences and achievements can drive their organization forward.

Numerous candidates go into an interview with the belief that the best qualifications will get them the job, but this is only the first part of the screening process. Once the search consultant or hiring executive decides that your qualifications meet the criteria for the role, they'll start to conduct interviews to figure out how each candidate would do on the job based on their past experience, core skills, culture-fit, and other factors.



PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW (Section 1 of 2)

Confidence can be an attractive quality in a candidate, but being overconfident can derail your interviews. It's easy to focus solely on your brand, networking, and your resume/CV, since those are the things that will land you the initial interview, but you also need to

prepare in advance for the interviews themselves. Executives often fall into one of two categories – introverts and extroverts – both tend to make very different mistakes when they are not prepared for an interview.

An extroverted executive tends to be an excellent, charismatic speaker. Yet, no matter how good they are at striking up a conversation and relating to their interviewers, they're not going to perform well without deep knowledge of the company's needs and astute, relevant ideas. If this profile most closely resembles your interview style, you will need to focus your interview preparation on researching the company thoroughly and preparing responses that contain real examples that relate to company needs and industry trends.

Unlike extroverted executives, introverted executives are much more focused on gathering knowledge about the company and industry. The types of interviews and questions introverts often struggle with are those less-related to their

job, such as company culture, as well as less-formal group interviews. Introverts can better prepare for an interview by practicing with a friend or in front of a video camera to become better at connecting with their interviewers. Also, preparing a few ice-breakers or current events-related topics is an easy way to show that he or she has a friendly, open demeanor.

No matter which side of the spectrum you fall on, or even if you're more towards the middle, preparation and significant practice will be necessary before each and every interview.

LET'S TRY THAT AGAIN: PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE



Now that you've committed to practicing before your interviews, you'll need to set aside some time to do so. The most effective method for practicing for an interview is to record or

videotape your responses and self-edit. This will help you see and hear what the interviewer will, and decide how your responses and mannerisms can be improved.

When analyzing your recordings, you should ask yourself:

- Are my answers too vague?
- Am I explaining my accomplishments or simply my job duties?
- Am I answering the question?



PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW (Section 2 of 2)

- Is my answer too long? (Most answers should be about 1-2 minutes.)
- Does my voice communicate enthusiasm and interest?

GATHER INFORMATION



After scheduling your interview, it's important to start gathering information as soon as possible about the company and the search consultants and hiring executives who will be

conducting the interview. Start by asking for the names of everyone who will be interviewing you and researching them on LinkedIn and Google. While conducting this research, you should look for any commonalities between you and your interviewers, such as same employers, same university, and other interests. These will help you emphasize your cultural fit. As you gather information, be sure to take notes so that you'll remember everything later.

Taking an in-depth look at the company will also help you come up with well-informed questions. It will also contribute to your interview answers, making them much more effective and relevant to your potential employer. A plethora of resources are

available online for researching specific companies and industries. For the most effective research, go beyond scanning the company's website and annual report (though these absolutely should be looked at and remembered). Also take a look at recent articles, industry reports, online reviews, and anything else you can find online.

In addition, find out as much as you can from people in your network who are connected to the company, including vendors, employees, social media connections, etc. The more you invest in researching the company and weaving that knowledge into your interview responses, the better your performance will be during the interview.

LOOK THE PART



Your job interview starts when you walk into the building. Once you're inside, your interviewer or others at the company will see and hear you – start projecting your best self when you walk in the door. Your outfit alone will not likely make or break your interview (unless you're dressed extremely informal), but it will play a big part in how you're perceived. Unless otherwise

stated by the interviewer, you should always dress "business formal" for an interview. This means a suit and tie for men and a suit or business dress for women. It's fine to show some personality in your outfit through modest jewelry, but for the most part, an interview is not the place to wear your "statement" pieces, bright colors, or ornate patterns.

ARRIVE 15 MINUTES EARLY



Showing up to your interview on time is absolutely essential as it shows that you care about the interviewer's time and are reliable. Be aware of any potential travel issues by giving

your journey to the interview location a practice run. This will help you know how early you need to leave. If you are unavoidably delayed, let your interviewers know as soon as possible. On the other hand, you don't want to arrive too early because that can send a message of desperation or an inability to manage your schedule. If you arrive more than 15 minutes before the interview, wait in your car or at a local coffee shop before entering the building.

ACE YOUR INTERVIEW

Lack of company culture fit is one of the most common reasons new hires end up leaving. To assess a candidate's fit, companies often conduct multiple interviews during which the candidate has to meet with various employees. This section will cover some ways you can ace your interview and be sure to move on to the next stage of the hiring process.



KEEP CALM AND TURN OFF ALL ELECTRONIC DEVICES

Turn your phone off and put it away before you walk into the company building. This will guarantee that you are not distracted. Pay attention and make eye contact throughout the interview. Sit up straight, with your arms and legs unfolded. When asked a question, take a few seconds to think before answering so that you can give a thoughtful response. Most importantly: Have fun! Share your ideas and insights into the industry and ask questions that will help you learn more about how the company works and where they fit into the industry.



BREAK THE ICE

Go ahead and make the first move when you're meeting an interviewer by extending your hand for an introductory handshake. If the interviewer doesn't already do so after you are both settled in, try to break the ice by talking about something you noticed you both have in common during your research. If you didn't find any commonalities with this person, mention something related to the research you did about the company. This shows that you are an open, confident person (even if you are not), and makes the interviewer feel comfortable with you.



SPEAK IN SOUND BITES

Our attention spans have gotten shorter, so to perform well during your next interview, you'll need to answer questions in one to two-minute sound bite stories. Try to respond using interesting, relatable stories that answer the question succinctly, precisely, and include examples that reinforce your brand message. An excellent way to approach this is by using the CAR method (Challenge with context, Actions, and Results). This approach allows you to show how you've handled challenges that relate to the questions asked by the interviewer by briefly explaining the situation and context, what you did to solve it, and how everything turned out, including any achievements you made.

Also, keep in mind that failed projects are not always a negative if you excelled and learned from them. During an interview, be prepared to offer examples of your weaknesses and failures and explain how you moved past the situation, what you learned, and anything you gained from the experience.

As you answer each interview question with these sound bite stories, find ways to make them as relevant as possible to the position and company you're interviewing for based on the research you've conducted beforehand. It's human nature to remember stories better than lists or numbers; so besides being more engaging, this method will ensure that the interviewer remembers your responses better. You may even decide to prepare 10-12 stories as you get ready for the interview so you can answer as many questions as possible using this engaging method.



SELL BRAND YOU

During the interview, your interviewers are

trying to figure out how you're different from the other qualified candidates they're speaking to. Therefore, you must differentiate yourself from other similar executives. You can do this by creating five unique selling points and weaving them (with real-life supporting examples) throughout your interview answers. What do you want your interviewers to remember about you?



ANALYZE CULTURE FIT

The interviewers are not the only ones who should be assessing culture fit – you should be too. Before the interview, prepare a list of three to five questions that will give you additional insights. As you speak with various hiring executives and search consultants about the company and the role, look out for any red flags and pay attention to your instincts. If you feel like this may not be the right career move for you after the interview, don't move forward with the interview process.



END THE INTERVIEW ON A HIGH NOTE

If you've paid attention during the interview and have done research beforehand on the company, you should be able to pull together a final one to two minute statement that explains why you think you'd be the best person for the position. After your final statement, reiterate your interest in the position, remind the interviewer of your unique selling points, and talk about the next steps in the hiring process. Never leave an interview without being clear on what the next steps are and if there are any action items you need to take next or further information you need to send.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Section 1 of 2)

The majority of interview questions will focus on experiences from your past, but at the executive level, interview questions are more than likely to go beyond that level of difficulty. By asking non-traditional interview questions, hiring executives and search consultants can find out how you will perform in the position, uncover your problem-solving skills, see how you react to unpredictable circumstances, and numerous other traits that could make you successful or unsuccessful in the role.

Here are some examples of traditional and non-traditional questions and suggestions on how to formulate your responses. As you prepare for an interview, you may consider putting together some notes and stories with examples. Also, take the time to prepare a few questions of your own for the interviewer. Some examples of these types of questions are listed towards the end of this guide.



TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

As one of the most common interview questions, it is probable that you will be asked this during at least one interview in the hiring process. By asking this question, interviewers are looking to see how you adapt and what things you decide to focus on while talking about yourself. The best way to answer this question is by summarizing

your career thus far (highlighting key achievements that relate to the role you're interviewing for) and where you see your career going in the future (reiterating why you think working for this company fits your future goals).



WHAT WAS YOUR REASON FOR LEAVING YOUR LAST EMPLOYER?

Be honest when answering this question, but don't be too negative. Point out positive developments that transpired as a result of leaving the company and explain that you are keen to enter the following stage of your career.



WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS?

This question should be answered using two or three attributes or skills that are relevant to the position for which you're interviewing. It's important to cite evidence of these strengths through CAR stories and by citing reviews or observations coworkers or superiors have made about your performance. Otherwise, it will seem like you're simply bragging.



WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES? OR TELL ME ABOUT A FAILED PROJECT.

This question can be difficult for interviewees at all levels, but that's what

makes it a great question from the interviewer's perspective. Rather than focusing on all the things you may not be as good at, you should choose one weakness or failed project and explain a situation where you've improved or overcame that weakness or project (again a CAR story could be very effective here).



DO YOU HAVE THE KEY SKILLS THIS POSITION REQUIRES?

Numerous interview questions often place emphasis on key skills for the position, so make sure you prepare examples of your ability for all the key skills required for the role.



WHAT IS THE ONE THING YOU WOULD CHANGE ABOUT OUR COMPANY IF YOU COULD TODAY?

This question helps the interviewer find out how much you know about the company. It also gives them some insight into what kinds of strategies you would focus on if you were to be hired for the position. Don't worry about being overly detailed when answering this question. The interviewer will be looking to see how much you know about the company, your thought process, attitude, and priorities.

TYPES OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

(Section 2 of 2)



DO YOU UNDERSTAND OUR COMPANY CULTURE?

Culture fit has become a top priority for companies, especially at the executive level where the company culture could be impacted by an executive's leadership style. Ensuring there is a company culture fit is as much for your own benefit (personal happiness) as for the organization's. You'll be able to gain an understanding of the company's culture from their website, public image, and by talking to current and former employees.



CAN YOU TELL ME ABOUT A SITUATION INVOLVING CONFLICT MANAGEMENT?

This situational interview question allows you to show off your experience managing employees and dealing with coworkers. The best way to answer it is by telling a CAR story about a situation where conflict occurred and how you listened, negotiated, persuaded, etc. to solve it.



WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY REQUIREMENTS?

This question can be difficult because neither party wants to show their compensation

hand first for fear of giving away too much or too little. In case the interviewer is not willing to state the salary range first, you should be prepared before the interview to answer this question with a compensation or salary range. You can do this by researching the average pay for similar positions on various salary sites and by speaking with others in your network. You'll also need to factor in cost of living and additional parts of your compensation package, including bonuses and perks. Learn more on how to figure out your compensation in part 5 of this guide series.



WHY IS THERE A GAP IN YOUR EMPLOYMENT? WHY HAVE YOU CHANGED JOBS SO OFTEN?

If your resume shows gaps in your career or numerous job changes, you should be prepared for these questions. It is common for people to take time off to raise children or undertake charity work, so as long as you have an explanation, these types of situations shouldn't raise a red flag to the employer. Find a way to answer these types of questions in a positive way, but don't lie. Remember that this is about fit on both sides. Be truthful, and if it is an issue with the company, then there may be a culture fit problem.



WHAT ARE FIVE TRENDS IN OUR INDUSTRY?

This question directly assesses your knowledge of the industry and your ability to think strategically under pressure. If you're not very familiar with trends in the industry you're interested in working in, deep preparation and research will likely be necessary to be able to answer this question.



TALK ABOUT A SITUATION THAT REQUIRED YOU TO CHANGE RAPIDLY.

As an executive, you must be able to adapt quickly to change. The interviewer will ask this question to assess how well you can do this, as well as your personality and leadership style. Answer this question with an engaging CAR story.



HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO FIRE SOMEONE FOR POOR PERFORMANCE? HOW DID YOU MANAGE IT?

This question gives insight into both your management style and your conflict management abilities. If you've never had to fire someone thus far, you may choose to discuss how you've kept your employees performance up during difficult situations.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS



PHONE SCREEN

ONE OF THE INITIAL INTERVIEWS AN EXECUTIVE WILL COME ACROSS. IF YOU RECEIVE A SPUR-OF-THE-MOMENT CALL, ASK TO SCHEDULE A MORE APPROPRIATE TIME.



TRADITIONAL

MOST EXECUTIVES HAVE PARTICIPATED IN THESE. FOCUS ON HIGHLIGHTING HOW YOUR SKILLS, EXPERIENCE, AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS PROVE YOU ARE THE BEST CANDIDATE FOR THE ROLE.



VIDEO

SAVES THE CANDIDATE AND COMPANY MONEY ON TRAVEL COSTS, BUT STILL ALLOWS INTERVIEWERS TO OBSERVE THE CANDIDATE'S CHARACTER. PREPARE FOR THESE AS YOU WOULD FOR AN IN-PERSON INTERVIEW.



GROUP

THE HIRING TEAM INTERVIEWS A NUMBER OF CANDIDATES AT THE SAME TIME. THIS IS NOT VERY COMMON FOR MOST EXECUTIVE ROLES.



PANEL

PANEL INTERVIEWS CONSIST OF NUMEROUS INTERVIEWERS ASKING A CANDIDATE QUESTIONS. THESE INTERVIEWERS BRING VIEWPOINTS FROM DIFFERENT DEPARTMENTS WITHIN THE COMPANY.



LUNCH OR DINNER

THIS INTERVIEW IS MEANT TO SEE HOW YOU FIT WITH THE REST OF THE TEAM, NOT TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A FREE MEAL. EAT SOMETHING LIGHT AND CLEAN SO THAT YOU ARE NOT DISTRACTED.



STRENGTH-BASED

UNCOVERS WHAT THE CANDIDATE "LOVES TO DO" INSTEAD OF WHAT THEY "CAN DO." COMPANIES CONDUCTING THESE WANT TO BE SURE THE CANDIDATE IS PASSIONATE ABOUT THE ROLE.



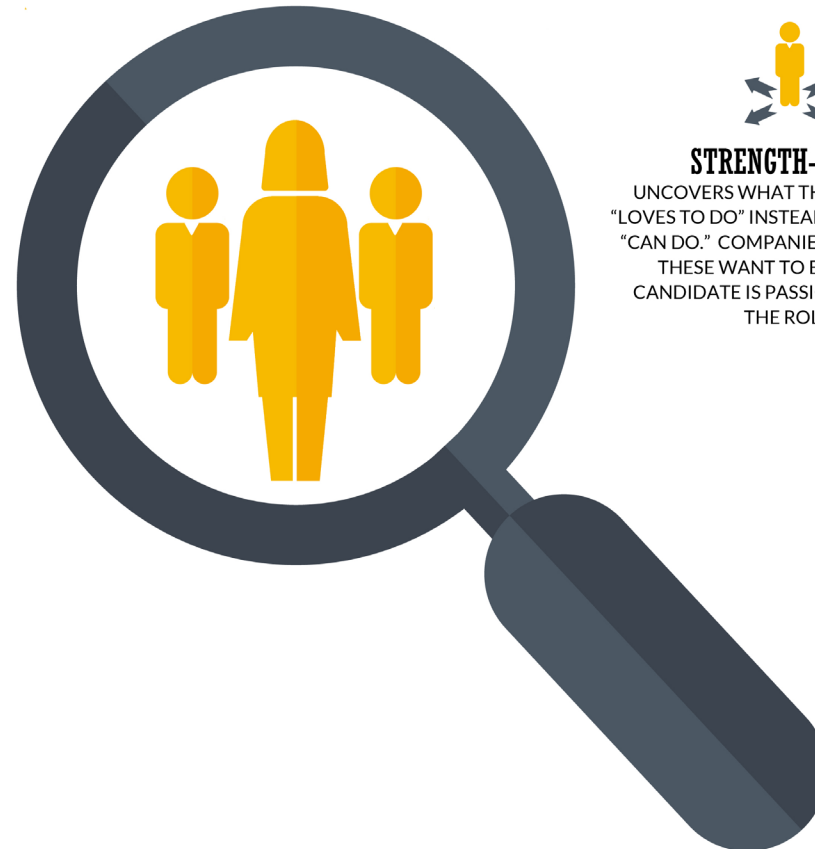
INFORMATIONAL

INVESTIGATIVE MEETINGS WHERE THE CANDIDATE IS NOT BEING CONSIDERED FOR A PARTICULAR ROLE. OVER-PREPARE, KEEP YOUR EXPECTATIONS LOW, AND APPROACH THE CONVERSATION WITH GRATITUDE.



BEHAVIORAL

TESTS YOUR SELF-AWARENESS BY FOCUSING ON WHAT YOU HAVE DONE IN DETAILED SCENARIOS. THE INTERVIEWER'S MAIN OBJECTIVE IS TO TRY TO UNCOVER HOW YOU SOLVE PROBLEMS.



QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

HOW WOULD I BE MEASURED?

WHY IS THIS POSITION OPEN?

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS IN THE HIRING PROCESS?

WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT WORKING HERE?

WHAT ARE THE PEOPLE I'LL BE SUPERVISING LIKE?

WHAT DO YOU EXPECT THE PERSON IN THIS ROLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN THE NEXT SIX MONTHS?

WHICH DEPARTMENTS WOULD MY ROLE INTERSECT WITH THE MOST?

TELL ME MORE ABOUT THE TEAM I WOULD BE MANAGING.

WHAT ARE YOU LOOKING FOR IN AN IDEAL CANDIDATE FOR THIS POSITION?

WHAT ARE THE COMPANY'S GOALS FOR THE NEXT FIVE YEARS?

WHAT ARE THE NEXT STEPS?

HOW DOES THE COMPANY DEAL WITH CHANGING PRIORITIES?

HOW ARE NEW EMPLOYEES ONBOARDED?

WHAT IS THE COMPANY CULTURE LIKE?



AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The interview is over, but that doesn't mean it's time to relax just yet. This section will recommend a few steps you should take post-interview to maximize your job search success.



REFLECT

Take time to jot down notes and think about how the interview went. This will help you write up your thank you note/s and prepare for potential follow-up interviews. Think about questions you may not have answered as well as you should have and what information was left out. If you were interviewing with multiple people, you may also find it useful to jot down with whom specific things were discussed. Some questions you can ask yourself as you reflect include:

- How well did you present yourself and your brand message?
- What important information was provided about the company and role?
- What role does each person with whom you interviewed have in the hiring process?
- What were the agreed upon next steps?
- What do you believe you have to offer that your competition doesn't?
- What problems does the interviewer have and what solutions will you recommend?



FOLLOW UP PROMPTLY

Send a personal thank you email the day after the interview to each person with whom you interviewed. In that email, thank them for their time, mention a detail or two from your conversation, reiterate your interest in the role and company, and end the email by emphasizing your skills and competencies and the need they will fill at the company. If necessary, you can also clarify something you didn't answer completely during the interview.

If further interviews or follow-up projects are requested, make sure you arrive or submit the requested deliverables on time and as instructed. Candidates who cannot keep up with the process will be taken out of the running.



LEVERAGE YOUR NETWORK

After an interview, you should connect with those in your network who helped you find this opportunity and update them on how it's going. They may be able to provide additional advice or insights into the company hiring process. You could also reach out to anyone you know who might have a connection with someone at the hiring organization to see if they could provide a reference. You'll also want to make sure your references are prepared in case the hiring company or search consultant requests a reference list.



FOLLOW UP

If the interviewer or search consultant doesn't get back to you by the time specified during your interview, then follow up. Hiring often takes longer than expected, but following up every so often will remind the search consultant and hiring executives that you are still interested. For example, you can say: "I am following up to see if you have everything you need from me to assist in your decision making since you mentioned that the second round of interviews would begin this week."



ACCEPT REJECTION GRACEFULLY

If you're not chosen for the role, send a thank you email to the search consultant and hiring executives reiterating your appreciation for being considered. This can set you apart from other top candidates and keep you in mind should a future position open up. In addition, be sure to stay connected with the search consultants with whom you worked during the interview process. Doing so will keep you fresh on their mind should similar searches come up at other organizations.

PREPARE NOW FOR THE BEST RESULTS

Interviews can be intimidating, even for the most experienced executives. Like with any major career step, the key to a successful interview is preparation. Recruiters and hiring managers are looking to see if you have the ability, skill, and fit to succeed in the role at their organization.

Our finest moments are most likely to occur when we are feeling deeply uncomfortable, unhappy, or unfulfilled. For it is only in such moments, propelled by our discomfort, that we are likely to step out of our ruts and start searching for different ways or truer answers.

~ M. Scott Peck



Are You Ready to Take the Next Step in Your Executive Career?

Get Started With BlueSteps

BlueSteps, the confidential career management service of the Association of Executive Search and Leadership Consultants (AESC), helps busy executives like you advance their careers, track their goals and stay visible to the right recruiters. We are proud to include your program in our Global Business School Alliance Program, which includes over 40 of the top business schools.

BlueSteps Guides You Through



Executive Job Searches

Finding a new role with our Opportunities Page, featuring 400-600 executive-level opportunities, including ones exclusively shared on BlueSteps.

Learning about executive search, what the process looks like and how to effectively leverage it as part of your career plan.



Executive Recruiting

Making lasting relationships with executive recruiters who align with your interests using our database of 9,000 AESC members around the world.

Creating a BlueSteps profile to increase your visibility to AESC member recruiters who fill 80,000 positions each year.



Career Management

Building short-term and long-term career strategies with our Guide Series on topics ranging from compensation negotiation to landing a board role.

Gleaning the latest insights with 40+ reports and digital magazines on trends in the C-Suite and executive job market.

As a benefit of your school's membership in the BlueSteps Global Business School Alliance Program, alumni and current students receive an exclusive **30% discount on their membership and complimentary lifetime Premium Services** using the discount code **BusinessSchool30** at checkout.



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