



**EXECUTIVE
CONNEXIONS**

Accelerate your career success



The Executive Job Interview:

HOW TO CROSS THE FINISHING LINE

WELCOME!

Any job interview can test the best of us, but executive level job interviews can be even worse. They frequently last for days, or several stages, and involve tough tasks and decision-making exercises.

But what if you had an unfair advantage?

Perhaps a set of executive job interview tips that seem to automatically convince the job interviewers that you're the right person for the job?

In this white paper we'll give you some top tips, and some of the key interview questions to nail before attending the interview.

So, what are the 5 best executive interview tips that will help you land your dream role? There could be hundreds of potential questions and variations but focus on a few core questions to build you confidence when feeling under pressure.

TOP INTERVIEW PREPARATION TIPS

1. Prepare to win

As Tony Robbins quote states that “People are rewarded in public for what they practice for years in private.” and this is no different when it comes to executive job interviews. Nowadays you can find every job interview question under the sun on the internet, from your standard “What are your weaknesses?”, to the more obscure Tony Hsieh question, “On a scale of 1-10 how weird are you”. Going through all the industry specific questions will stop you getting caught out by tricky questions and help you preserve your unflappable quality.

ACTION STEP

Produce a spreadsheet of likely interview questions and recruit your partner or coach to conduct a mock interview.

2. Master your body language

You may be the most effective executive on the planet, but if you don’t have an executive presence and aren’t likeable then you won’t last long. Simple things like eye contact, sitting posture and clear speaking patterns all help you convey confidence and competence.

ACTION STEP

Visualise the interview going well beforehand and conduct a series of “power poses” (like the superman pose) to increase confidence and certainty.

3. Gain a deep understanding of the company

The success of many of your interview answers will be dependent on context i.e. The answer will be strongly dependent of the company’s goals, challenges and culture.

Make sure you know the company inside and out to show you’re the right man to lead the company forward.

ACTION STEP

Reach out to anybody you may know (or even a random employee) and ask them about the culture and any tips that may give you a competitive advantage in an interview.

4. Show leadership qualities

In a regular interview, leadership qualities are important, but in an executive interview they're vital.

How does he/she make decisions? Can he/she deal with difficult situations? Can he/she make tough decisions? These are all executive job interview questions employers think about before hiring an executive.

ACTION STEP

Convey your leadership qualities by showing the process of how you make decisions, no matter how tough they may be.

5. Have a vision

A vision is what drives a company forward, which is why it's such an important quality for executives to have. It combines a deep understanding of the company with the biggest opportunities and challenges of growth.

ACTION STEP

Imagine you've just been given the executive job. What are your priorities? How will you ensure growth in your first 6-12 months? Where will the company be in 5 years under your leadership?

After acting on these executive job interview tips you should have a great chance of landing your dream role.

YOU WANT MORE TIPS? OK!

Scenario: Recently, you've received an interview invitation from an executive recruiter. The senior level role at a successful company sounds like a good fit for your skill set and work experience. To make this life-changing career move you need to excel in your executive job interview.

Gain as much information about the company and the executive job role you're about to be interviewed for. Knowledge means power, possessing the essential information will make you feel comfortable on the spot and meet the expectations of the hiring manager with ease. Research more than other candidates will.

First impression. Thorough preparation is the key to building a strong first impression. Being familiar with the specifics of the business and its background, knowing the revenue numbers or quote statistics will leave a positive trace. The day of the interview, arrive ahead of time to avoid any delay. When interacting with the interviewer, make eye contact, smile and gesticulate in a natural way. Listen carefully and make certain you understand the executive interview questions and word your answers thoughtfully.

Strengths and Weaknesses. Anticipating what executive job interview questions you may be asked is the key to providing satisfactory answers. What are your strengths? is among the most common executive job interview questions. Think of the strong qualities you possess that will be beneficial to the company. When asked about project failures, mention only one and describe your proactive approach and the smart action you've taken to fix the issue.

At the end of the interview, be certain to verbally express definite interest in the position. Don't keep it to yourself assuming the hiring manager will see your enthusiasm and eagerness and come to a right conclusion. Send out a letter thanking the executive recruiter for taking the time to see you. Use this chance to once again pinpoint your strong qualities and express the desire to contribute to the business.

ANSWERING TOUGH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

This general guide on how to craft striking answers to the toughest executive interview questions is designed to assist you with interview preparation.

While practicing the responses, make sure they don't sound *rehearsed* on the day of your interview.

Why did you choose to leave your last position?

This is a straightforward question which requires an unambiguous answer. But what if you were made redundant? As in many other cases, honesty proves to be the best policy. Try to demonstrate your layoff had a specific reason behind it. The product or service you've been responsible for might have been discontinued. Or the business has moved abroad. By asking this executive interview question the recruiter wants to find out if you will be a good fit for the client's company. Highlight any positive outcome of your departure (e.g. a new more challenging job) to show you're not a conflict maker who holds on to the past.

What's your management style?

Senior executive positions require supervising other team members. To get this question right, start with providing your understanding of a good manager profile. Setting the background in advance will allow you to demonstrate you fit the profile. Also, you will be able to speak of additional qualities which make your management style exceptional. Some evidence – a brief story from your real work experience – will be in place to back up your vision.

Tell us about projects that failed.

Don't be taken off guard by this tricky question. Nobody is perfect and in the business world things can easily go off track. This trap question is an ideal opportunity for you to present your leader qualities. You can tell the recruiter how you managed to bring the team together and effectively brainstorm, when you realized you failed to meet the deadline. Don't dwell on the negatives, describe the result and the priceless experience you've gained.

Why should we hire you?

This question directly co-relates to your strengths. Determine how your strong points and experience align with the company's current needs. Share your vision of the business thriving under your mindful management. Pinpoint that you will bring on board valuable experience and fresh ideas.

Salary expectations.

When asked about your salary expectations keep the balance between naming a figure which is too high and selling yourself too short. Best policy is to come up with a range based on your previous research in this field of business. Another effective tactic is to ask the interviewer about the company's compensation policy.

A brief factual response to all the executive interview questions above is not what the executive recruiter, or interviewer is looking for. The hiring manager pays close attention to your communication skills as the executive-level position acquires team management (leadership) and participation in board meetings. Instead of giving concise answers, create engaging stories to make the facts compelling.

HOW WOULD WE HELP YOU?

Let our clients speak for themselves:

Buster, a CFO

'Very black and white (realistic) advice on future roles, providing clear, independent, but very objective opinions. Able to question and pin-point motives and pit falls. Excellent advocate of the mock interview, studying the potential interviewer (including the business), and really playing the devil's advocate. Then surmising the discussion and pinpointing all the strengths and weaknesses: my coach's feedback was instrumental in the approach I then took with two (independent) company interviews, from which I received two job offers. I really believe that I would not have been as well prepared (or got the job offers) had they not drilled, prepared, guided, and importantly – been the devil's advocate asking those tough questions. It is difficult to fault them on what I asked them to do!'

BONUS CONTENT

JOB INTERVIEW VOICE PROJECTION

Is the sound of your voice sabotaging your job interview?

It's not WHAT you say so much as HOW you say it.

According to one leading theory, 55% of human communication is with body language. You are left with just 7% on content and a *whopping 38% on what you sound like*.

After 48 hours, 90% of a conversation is forgotten – **what is remembered is the impression made**. Your voice and speech habits will influence a person's perception of you. But do you know how to create that all-important lasting impression?

We asked our voice and presentation coach, Matthew Clarke, for his top tips on how you can prepare your voice for a senior executive job interview.

Prepare

There is nothing better if you want to sound confident about your subject than to actually know your subject well. In addition to studying your prospective employer, you'll want to brush up on common interview questions. A review of your CV should help you identify questions you're likely to be asked (expect to answer in-depth questions about your abilities and achievements). Fully prepare suitable answers to potential questions. It's helpful to get someone to dummy run some trickier questions as well.

Know that interviewers will judge you not only on the content of your answers, but also on how you convey them. Bad speech habits can reflect poorly on your performance; therefore, it is important to examine your speech patterns. Recording yourself as you practice your responses to expected interview questions can be a valuable tool to improve your pitch, tone, intonation, inflection and speaking volume.

Relax

Your inner tension will display itself in your voice. This may be because you are anxious and have started to breathe shallowly. Breathing exercises are excellent for anxiety management, decreasing the body's stress response ('fight or flight'). Look up some basic relaxation breathing exercises online.

Use these to calm yourself before an interview and oxygenate your blood fully. This will mean that your brain is at peak performance.

Relaxing yourself before an interview also relaxes the vocal chords. When they are tense, the sound of your voice will be higher and raspier. Relaxed vocal chords will produce lower notes. These notes in your speech can be interpreted as more authoritative.

Studies show, senior executives with a lower voice are likely to achieve higher positions of leadership.

Researchers found that executives with voices on the deeper (that is, lower-frequency) end of the scale earned, on average, \$187,000 more in pay and led companies with \$440 million more in assets.” (The Wall Street Journal)

Posture

How you sit, or stand does not only show your inner self visually, but it also comes across in your voice. In an interview situation, you need to have a level of alertness to be mentally able to answer questions clearly and calmly but also to sound engaged with the questions being asked of you.

The best way to deal with your posture is to learn to sit with your back straight and upright in the chair.

A good way of doing this is to sit slightly forward on the chair so that you are not actually using the back support at all. Being a little on the edge of the chair also indicates you are ready for the action. However, be careful that it does not look too much like you want to run out of the room.

You also need to keep the diaphragm as free to operate as possible. This good upright posture will give your body a chance to breathe fully.

Another point to make is that crossing your legs generally limits the space for your diaphragm to operate fully. Obviously, ladies wearing skirts (or men wearing kilts!) need to take this into account in how they sit down.

Smile

There are many DJs in radio who make a positive point of smiling before they push the microphone fader up (or pull it down in the BBC!). One presenter who I used to work with had a sign that was stuck to the mixing desk saying: ‘Smile – you’re on radio!’

This is important because you can easily hear the change in the voice when someone is smiling. This is partly because you feel better and partly because of the way the facial muscles work.

This also brings me to the point of doing some warm ups before an interview. Move the face around a little to exercise all those muscles packed into our faces. A good way to get you breathing well and get the blood flowing is to go on a short walk around the block beforehand.

Slow down

An interview can be a nerve-wracking situation – especially before a board of interviewees. Nerves can make many of us rush our answers by speaking fast. What does this mean for you, as a candidate? At a time when it is most important you appear confident and competent, if you're speed-talking, you're likely to be perceived as anxious instead.

Furthermore, rapid speech is difficult to follow – you might give the best responses to the interview questions, but your words will whizz past your interviewers like a speeding bullet. Your words will not be remembered; your anxiety will.

This is another reason to master some basic breathing techniques. Often, when we think we are speaking 'too slowly' – the speed is actually just right. So, avoid rushing. Silence can be a valuable tool when used appropriately in an interview.

Pause before you begin to answer each interview question. Pause again at the end of each sentence. (Your interviewer will be grateful of a few seconds to process the information you've just shared.)

Voice optimisation

Your voice is a powerful tool to influence people with. Luckily, your bad speech habits can be fixed:

- Develop awareness of your speech habits
- Practice effective communication techniques as outlined above



Steve Nicholls,
Managing Director

Of course, if you need a bit more help, personalised coaching for interviews and the entire job search process might be something to consider, so if you'd like to arrange an exploratory chat (which is complimentary), you can book a call here:

<https://www.executiveconnexions.com/complimentary-career-strategy-call/>



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