

**Ask the Right Questions; Get the Right Job**  
**Questions You Should Ask A Prospective Employer**  
*Before You Take That Job*

By  
Edward H. Barr  
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## Foreword

“This is advice that I wish I had had before I went blindly into my first interview--and the several after that as well! In the early years of a career, one's perspective simply isn't broad enough to know what questions to ask. At least new grads *\*/* have an excuse--I must say, that in my experience, many people well into their careers don't know what to ask either! So in either case, this book will be a very useful tool.

From a company's point of view, a candidate who asked these questions would be like a breath of fresh air. Skill fit is necessary but not sufficient; the rest of identifying the right candidate is all about the fit with the company. A bad hire (where the employee's values and needs don't match what the company has to offer) is a "lose-lose" situation for the company and the employee. Your questions give the candidate an opportunity to differentiate himself or herself from the other candidates, which is extremely helpful to the interviewer.”

**Ellen Johnston**  
**Senior Manager, Leadership Development Architecture**  
**Sun Microsystems, Inc.**

## Introduction

In my twenty-five years of management and education, I have interviewed many prospective employees and counseled many students preparing for job interviews. Almost universally I have found both groups, candidates and students, unprepared for their interviews. I don't mean to say that they weren't dressed well, or weren't eager and ready to answer the questions to be posed to them. Most were. They were, as young people can be, enthusiastic and effervescing with optimism and expectation. However, most of them also viewed the interview as a one-sided affair where the potential employer and the employer's representative have all the power – to interrogate, accept, or dismiss.

As Associate Teaching Professor at H. John Heinz III School of Public Policy and Management at Carnegie Mellon University, I have counseled scores of students from all over the world to view their interview and prospective employment differently, that is, as a partnership, a marriage in the truest sense, a commitment of their time, talent and energies – at a minimum a mutual exchange. And, as a former Vice President of Marketing at a large university health system's medical practice division (and Director of Corporate Communications at a successful for-profit television production company), I interviewed and hire staff and vendors.

I use my years of experience to try to convince my Carnegie Mellon student and others who come to me for advice to approach an interview on equal terms with their potential employers. After all, these prospective employees bring with them the skills, talents, and creativity to enrich (in the fullest meaning of the word) their employers. Why should they not view the interview as an equal exchange, a true dialogue?

With that predisposition, they enter the job interview ready to learn as much about the employer as the employer wishes to learn about them. They do this by preparing, if not in writing, at least in their minds, a set of questions the prospective employer must answer. These questions vary from the global (what is this organization's mission) to the specific (are employees encouraged to use personal time).

I am, of course, anxious to tell my student friends, and some of the others who find their way to me, others who have no job or wish to change jobs, that they must maintain perspective and decorum, that is, they must not be arrogant about this questioning. After all, the prospective employer does have the ultimate power.

Nonetheless, after having interviewed many people, I have found that dialogue in an interview helps to reveal the most about not only the candidate but also the prospective employer. This dialogue helps what can be a very deadly one-hour session become more interesting, enjoyable and productive. And, most importantly, it gives the job candidate more of the kind of useful information he or she definitely needs to make the right decision.

Does it guarantee a perfect match between candidate and employer? No, it does not. NO set of questions will. Does asking these questions replace other intelligence gathering activities? No, it does not. Candidates must use the Internet, published reports, contacts within the organization, competitors and any other source they can find to learn more about the company whose company they expect to keep.

Ask some of the questions in the following pages, though, and you will see how well the organization has prepared, or ingrained in, your interviewer the kind of information that should be there (and his or her interpretation of that information).

Add these questions to your repertoire, along with enthusiasm, a good resume and a genuine interest in the company and its representatives, to win yourself a great job!

## **THE RIGHT QUESTIONS**

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 3. What is the Corporate Culture?**
- 4. What is the Organization's Vision?**
- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 6. What are the Organization's Strengths?**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**
- 9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?**
- 10. Does the Company Have Rituals?**
- 11. What Communication Techniques Does the Organization Use with Employees?**
- 12. Does the Company Value Diversity?**
- 13. What is the Organization's Board Make-Up and Involvement?**
- 14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**
- 15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**
- 16. How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?**
- 17. Who are the Company's Main Competitors?**
- 18. Has the Organization Ever Faced a Crisis? What was the Crisis and How Did the Company Respond?**
- 19. How Do Problems Get Resolved in the Organization?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**
- 21. What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**
- 22. How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**
- 23. Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**
- 24. Who Are the Corporate Heroes/Heroines? What are the Corporate Myths?**
- 25. What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**
- 26. What Skills are Valued Most?**
- 27. How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?**
- 28. Does the Organization Have a "Recognition-Rich" Environment?**
- 29. What is the Organization's Retention Rate?**
- 30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**
- 31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**
- 32. How Are Customer Relations Handled?**
- 33. Does the Organization Support Any Cause?**
- 34. How Flexible is the Company?**
- 35. Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**
- 36. Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**
- 40. What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**
- 41. Have There Been Any Lay-Offs Recently?**
- 42. What Techniques Does the Company Use to Increase Morale?**
- 43. How long Have You Been With the Company?**
- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

## Prepare for the Interview

### Do Some Internet Research

Your hard work and patience have paid off! You're finally scheduled for an interview with WayOut.com. You've read fifteen books on "How To Prepare For the Interview." You've got the right clothes, conservative but not funereal; you've read all the "Questions You May Be Asked" and memorized the "right" answers; and, you've talked to everyone you know about how to survive this rite of passage. You might have even been interviewed before or had a "mock interview." Now it's time to think of the questions you're going to ask at the interview.

You are an ethical, honest human being who wants to work for a company committed to the same virtues. You have studied the "right questions" and want to know about mission, values and corporate responsibility.

You can learn the Mission, Values, and Strategic Direction of a company simply by visiting their website. Take a look at Dell.com, for instance. Click on "About Dell" and you will find "Press Releases," "Case Studies," and "Commitment." You'll also find a short history of the company and its founder, Michael Dell:

"Michael Dell started the company in 1984 with the revolutionary idea to sell custom built computers directly to the customer. With the power of direct and Dell's team of talented people, we are able to provide customers with superb value; high-quality, relevant technology; customized systems; superior service and support; and products and services that are easy to buy and use."

When you click on "Commitment," you'll find:

"Dell is building its technology, its business and its communities through direct relationships with our customers, our employees and our neighbors. Through this process, we are committed to bringing value to customers and adding value to our company, our neighborhoods, our communities and our world through diversity, environmental and global citizenship initiatives."

Sound like a mission statement? It does to me! It also expresses values, does it not? If you follow the list on the left side of the site, you'll find these columns:

- Diversity
- ▶ Supplier Diversity
- ▶ Soul of Dell
- ▶ Global Citizenship
- ▶ Corporate Governance

- ▶ [Environment](#)
- ▶ [Dell Foundation](#)
- ▶ [Code of Conduct](#)

Click on “Soul of Dell” and you’ll find the “corporate philosophy” of Dell, including their “passion for winning.” Click on “Corporate Governance,” “Global Citizenship” those and you’ll have a lot of answers to some very important questions about the company you’re interested in joining.

You need not ask the mission and values questions posed in the first chapter of this book, but you may want to see if the interviewer knows the mission and values of the company he/she represents. A mission statement must be a living, vital concept. Employees need to know it and they need to know that the CEO, executives and others value and act according to the mission and philosophy of the company.

### **Questions That You Can Find Answered On the Internet (or in available company publications, such as the annual report)**

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 8. What is the Organization’s Financial Situation?**
- 13. What is the Organization’s Board Make-Up and Involvement?**
- 15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**
- 16. How Do You Define the Organization’s Market and Share of Market?**
- 17. Who are the Company’s Main Competitors?**

## **Group Some Of the Questions**

In the pages that follow you will find a thorough discussion of the fifty questions you can ask at any interview. You will find that I have grouped many of them at the end of the discussion of each. But, let's talk about them a little right now.

Obviously, mission and values questions (1-2) can be asked together. You may add the "Organizational Culture" and "Vision" questions to this, as well. I have grouped them as:

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 3. What is the Corporate Culture?**
- 4. What is the Organization's Vision?**

What other questions lend themselves to grouping? You may ask "Strategic Direction," "Core Competencies," "Strengths," "Weaknesses" and "Financial Situation" questions as a package. I have grouped these as:

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 6. What are the Organization's Strengths?**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**
- 9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?**

Questions 10, and 11 fit well together. They ask about company rituals and communication techniques. You will find these grouped as:

- 10. Does the Company Have Rituals?**
- 11. What Communication Techniques Does the Organization Use with Employees?**
- 12. Does the Company Value Diversity?**
- 13. What is the Organization's Board Make-Up and Involvement?**
- 14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**

Several business questions group well together. They include questions about market position, market share, and competition. You will find these grouped as:

- 15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**
- 16. How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?**
- 17. Who are the Company's Main Competitors?**

Work place relations and management are featured in the questions about crisis management, problem resolution, unions, dress codes, model employees, dress codes, recognition, retention, training and staff development, and profit sharing.

- 18. Has the Organization Ever Faced a Crisis? What was the Crisis and How Did the Company Respond?**
- 19. How Do Problems Get Resolved in the Organization?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**

21. **What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**
22. **How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**
23. **Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**
24. **Who Are the Corporate Heroes/Heroines? What are the Corporate Myths?**
25. **What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**
26. **What Skills are Valued Most?**
27. **How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?**
28. **Does the Organization Have a “Recognition-Rich” Environment?**
29. **What is the Organization’s Retention Rate?**
30. **What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**
31. **Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**

You must ask questions that relate to the company, in general, and your actual day-to-day functioning on the job, in particular. Several of the questions regarding your day-to-day work include questions about new employee orientation, goal writing, evaluation and job descriptions.

32. **How Are Customer Relations Handled?**
33. **Does the Organization Support Any Cause?**
34. **How Flexible is the Company?**
35. **Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**
36. **Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
37. **Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
38. **How Are Employees Evaluated?**
39. **Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**
40. **What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**
41. **Have There Been Any Lay-Offs Recently?**
42. **What Techniques Does the Company Use to Increase Morale?**
43. **How long Have You Been With the Company?**

Lastly, You need to end the interview with a group of questions about the interview/selection process itself. Ask the number of people being interviewed, the selection process, the salary range, benefit package and ask how you performed in the interview.

44. **How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
45. **What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
49. **How Did I Do In This Interview?**
50. **When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

And, above all, compliment the interviewer, if it is deserved. When I interviewed prospective employees, I took pains to make it a thorough and enjoyable process, where neither party felt it was wasting its time. I always asked candidates if they felt the time spent was valuable and if they had any suggestions for how we might improve the process. Employers who spend hours interviewing people crave information about making the process more efficient and worthwhile, whether they know it or not.

## **Fit the Questions Smoothly Into the Interview.**

I suggest you approach this in a number of ways. For one, I would be very impressed if a candidate said to me, “Do you mind if I take notes during the interview?” This tells me I will have an active interview, one from which both the candidate and I can learn something.

If this candidate wants to take notes, I will not be surprised, or at all dismayed, if she or he also says, “I have a few questions I’d like to ask.” This shows me seriousness of purpose and preparation. It may be my personality, but I want an active interview. I like to be challenged, within reason, and asked to defend things, especially my admiration for the company and department I represent.

Certainly any of the questions can be fit in the context of the interview. For example, if someone asks, “What has been your experience managing a budget?” (and I would hope an interviewer would ask a potential manager that questions), then you can cite your experience and in the process insert your question about the financial status of the company.

NOTE: You should act professionally at the interview. You should act interested, confident, mature, and serious. You are not at the interview to establish an antagonistic relationship. You do that and you have better than average chances of being passed over for the job. No one likes a smart ass.

Suppose you are asked the ways you handle conflict (and I would hope as a potential manager you would be asked that question). If you are asked, you have a perfect, and legitimate, opportunity to ask questions about how the company communicates with its various constituencies, handles crises and recognizes people.

I suggest you be subtle or straightforward (whatever your personality). This means you should be yourself. Don’t interview and pretend to be someone you’re not. If you get the job on that basis, you will eventually revert to your “real” self and either you and/or your new employer may become very unhappy.

If a potential employer is intimidated that you want to ask some legitimate questions, you should seriously consider whether or not you want to work there. Remember, don’t take a job simply to have a job. It’s the worst thing you can do. You will find the right job. Persevere. Even in the Great Depression, 70% of the work force had jobs.

## **If Necessary, Ask Only the Most Important Question.**

What happens if you don't have time or chance to ask several questions? What should you consider the most important question?

The answer to this question certainly depends on your interview context and the personality of the interviewer. That said, I believe the most important questions have to do with your actual job duties and the evaluation of your performance. Therefore, if you can ask only one question (or one group of questions), I advise you to ask, "Does a job description exist for this position? Does the organization require employees to write goals? How are employees evaluated?"

Never accept a job without a clear definition of your duties (a job description). Never stay in a job where you have no specific, measurable and negotiated goals to perform and with which to be measured by.

Too many employers and their supervisors still fail to use specific measurable goals and work plans and fall victim to the "I like him/her. Let's give her/him a raise. She/he's doing a nice job."

## **The Most Important Questions**

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 25. What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**
- 26. What Skills are Valued Most?**
- 29. What is the Organization's Retention Rate?**
- 30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**
- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**
- 40. What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**
- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

## **If Interviewed By an HR Representative, Ask These Questions.**

If you are being interviewed in the HR department, I feel for you. HR people know a lot about everything and not much about anything. They have formulas for interviewing. They've taken courses that purport to tell them how to identify good and bad characteristics. They can stereotype you right out of a good job.

You must be very careful interviewing with HR people. You can't show up on either end of the scale, either too aggressive or too passive. You must perform in the middle for them. By all means ask them questions. They like engaged people. And, they like the big, broad questions: "Does the company value diversity?" They like that question because they are charged to a large extent for creating and maintaining diversity. They'll give you long-winded answers; they'll pontificate; they'll be thrilled to answer!

You might ask the HR people about union activity. I say "might" because they are typically anti-union, charged with dealing with grievances and negotiating salaries and benefits. Tread cautiously with this one.

You can ask HR people about retention rates, profit sharing, training and development, even recognition programs. They'll love it! And, speaking of salaries and benefits, HR people are consumed with salary and benefit knowledge. Ask about the 501 c (3). They'll love you! You'll be passed to the next interview, guaranteed!

Here is a list of questions from which you can choose if your are interviewed in the company HR department.

- 12. Does the Company Value Diversity?**
- 14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**
- 21. What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**
- 22. How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**
- 23. Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**
- 28. Does the Organization Have a "Recognition-Rich" Environment?**
- 29. What is the Organization's Retention Rate?**
- 30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**
- 31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**
- 35. Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**
- 36. Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**
- 40. What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**
- 41. Have There Been Any Lay-Offs Recently?**
- 42. What Techniques Does the Company Use to Increase Morale?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**

## **If You Are a Woman, Ask These Questions.**

In most respects the questions women should ask differ very little from the questions men should ask. Women want to know about values, vision, strategic direction, financial strength and so on. However, because of the very real existence of discrimination in today's workplace, women should ask very forthright questions about such things as the "glass ceiling."

I have had the pleasure of working for many women executives. In fact, I worked for an organization founded by women, executed by women (as in female executives) and controlled by a majority board of women. I have also worked in some testosterone rich environments. (I worked in one place where they actually had an all male golf outing in South Carolina and they playfully called it the "Testosterone Open.")

Sex discrimination is uneven in today's workplace but it does exist, along with many other forms of discrimination. Sexual harassment exists and certainly women should ask, at the job interview, about diversity, glass ceilings, heroes and heroines and parent-friendliness, which can include benefits such as childcare. Below is a list of questions most women (and some men) will want answered.

**14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**

**35. Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**

**47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**

## **Use The Answers You Receive For The Best Results**

I recommend that you should NEVER accept a job just to have a job. Never! I don't care how poor you are, how many student loans or car payments are due, or how bad the economy is. Don't take any old job because someone is willing to hire you! Identify the work you've always wanted to do. Narrow your search of companies that you've always wanted to work for. Learn as much as you can about those companies. Go for a job in one of those companies.

In the process, however, if you learn some things in your research or in the interview that make you suspect of the company, back away, fast!

Suppose you learn that the company uses the Jack Welch "rank and yank" system of employee retention and promotion. You may not feel good about working in an environment that "ranks and yanks." If so, save yourself some wasted time, heartache and heartburn and walk away from the job offer.

In fact, you would be wise to ask if any specific management philosophy is used in the organization. Is it a "Six Sigma" company? Are we talking Peter Drucker style? Stanley Bing, or Scott Adams?

Suppose you're a woman or member of a minority and you can't find information, either from research or interviews, which suggest an equal opportunity environment. Walk!

If you'd like to spend time away on Family Leave and your interviewer pooh poohs it, you should walk away from that company. If you're community-minded and the organization with whom you're interviewing could care less about the community, walk! If the interviewer can't give a valid reason for the departure of the person who had the job before you, do some searching to find the reason for that person's departure.

If the company is on shaky financial ground, walk away from it. I've done the opposite and lived to regret it.

So, you've prepared to go to the interview. You have a smart suit and polished shoes, you've used mouthwash and you've studied all the questions you believe you may be asked. Let's take a close look at all the questions you might ask.

## **Ask About the Company**

### **Question 1**

#### **What is the Corporate Mission?**

Yes, mission and values come and go, into and out of favor. But, really, what is more important about an organization than what it stands for and what it values? You will want to ask about the organization's profitability. You will want to ask about its many operating procedures; but, if you don't know what makes it tick, what drives it onward, what it strives to become, you will not know the company.

I worked in the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, parent of the first Mercy Hospital in the world, Mercy Hospital of Pittsburgh. For over 150 years the hospital was led by a nun, a Sister of Mercy. The Sister CEO I worked for made the mission and values living things. I might have had them branded on my arm; I knew them so well, from iteration and practice. I, and most of my colleagues, knew well what Mercy stood for. It stood for creating a healthy community – creating wellness, eliminating any disease, physical, mental, systemic.

You should be able to find a company's mission statement on its website, if it has one. Or, you should be able to find it in its published documents – the annual report, the quarterly reports, the sales literature, or the recruiting materials.

Look at these documents. If you can't find the mission or mission language, ask the question in the interview. You may have to ask obliquely, that is, you may have to ask the question indirectly. Regardless of how you ask, however, find the answer.

And speaking of knowing the company, asking about the mission and values will present a good opportunity for you to find out what your interviewer knows about the company he or she represents. (It will show you how the organization's leaders keep the mission alive and apparent in their employees).

Make this one your first question! Search the internet and the company's published documents for the words of the mission.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 3. What is the Corporate Culture?**
- 4. What is the Organization's Vision?**

## **Question 2**

### **What are the Corporate Values?**

When I worked at the Pittsburgh Mercy Health System, the six corporate values were easy to find. They were published on almost all of our internal communications. I knew them well and still remember them – compassion, collaboration, community, stewardship, excellence and human dignity. We joked that the first letters of each value spelled “SHE C’s,” a reference, of course, to the top Sister of Mercy.

And, she did see, as well she should have! Each of these values was defined and each employee of Mercy, including the CEO, was expected to live the value at work. Many times, I used our value of collaboration to keep others, less imbued with the value, from bullying.

And, make no mistake, not all employees will live each value. Nonetheless, because the value is in place, we all at least strived to live by it. And, so should those in the company where you may be offered employment.

Will your interviewers know the corporate values as I knew Mercy’s? It’s hard to say. Maybe the “hard core” people will. You know, they’re the ones who have the company logo tattooed somewhere on their person, the “gung-go” types.

As with the corporate mission, you may be able to find the corporate values listed on the website. For instance, check the Dell site. You will find the mission and values stated therein. Is Dell an enlightened company? I’d say, “Yes!” Dell is willing to put their purpose and beliefs out front. Do they live them? You judge! If you’re interviewing there, ask the person who interviews you. Remember, you’re hiring Dell, just as they are hiring you!

### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 3. What is the Corporate Culture?**
- 4. What is the Organization’s Vision?**

### **Question 3**

#### **What is the Corporate Culture?**

Every organization has a culture, or a personality, if you prefer.

I once worked as Director of Corporate Communications at a television production company. We created television commercials, corporate video, sports programming, and duplication and distribution of television programming. We interacted with advertising agencies, network producers, and PR people, among others.

Our CEO and Executive VP, who founded the firm, came from what was then called “The Big Eight” accounting firms. They wore conservative suits and ties every day (and so did I). And, they were very conservative in all aspects of their lives. Nonetheless, even though they were Gordon Gecko types, they knew that to succeed in the television production business, the firm needed not only solid fiscal grounding but lots of creativity, as well. Hence, they encouraged and fostered creativity.

The culture of that firm was what I would call “Adolescent.” It had the personality of Adam Sandler. The directors, camera operators, lighting and sound experts all dressed in the latest and most outlandish tee shirts and jeans. Anyone who walked onto a set in a suit was automatically suspect and shunned. This was a firm not only in its teenage years in actual years of operation but also in its culture. They produced fine work and were valued by the ad agencies; and, it was, in part, because of the freewheeling energy of the creative types.

On the other extreme, the culture at Mercy was very maternal and spiritual, as befitting a health care organization founded and presided over by a religious order of women, most of whom wore drab, ordinary clothing and no makeup. (Interestingly, after I became Director of Corporate Communications at Mercy and we needed to produce television commercials, we used two men from the other firm, and they produced award-winning communications for us.)

You can learn a little about the culture by looking at the organization’s website and publications. Does it use lively graphics? Does it use informal language? Does it use pinstripes or gothic type? You can certainly learn the culture by visiting the company, looking around, and asking employees. Yes, visit the company and interview some of the workers. Why not? Hey, “It’s a free country!”

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 4. What is the Organization’s Vision?**

## **Question 4**

### **What is the Organization's Vision?**

Heraclitus said, "Everything changes." This certainly applies to organizations. Every organization must change or die. No organization can remain the same in the midst of continuously changing world and marketplace. So as to direct this change as much as possible, an organization must have a vision of itself for the future.

Health care is a perfect example of change in this country. From the 1940's to the early 1980's the administration of health care organizations changed little. However, in the last twenty years, hospitals, particularly, have changed their administration drastically, mostly as a result of exterior changes in funding.

Mergers and acquisitions have resulted from these changes. In Pittsburgh, a city that once had over a dozen strongly competing hospitals, one health care system now monopolizes the city. Whether this is a good or bad monopoly remains to be seen, but its vision of itself was clearly to rule the Pittsburgh health care market.

What is the vision of Bill Gates and Microsoft? If you look at the Microsoft website, you should easily be able to find the vision. Check GE and WalMart and any of the other powerhouse organizations.

Do these companies succeed because they have a vision? Do their employees know the vision? Ask the person who interviews you, from whatever company. If that person cannot articulate (or at least paraphrase) the company vision, perhaps one does not exist.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 1. What is the Corporate Mission?**
- 2. What are the Corporate Values?**
- 3. What is the Corporate Mission?**

## **Question 5**

### **Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**

Enough has been written about the importance of planning that we need not revisit it here. Needless to say, any organization can benefit from planning. The plan itself is of lesser value than the process, and plans constantly change (see Heraclitus). But, well-run organizations use the planning process to invest their employees in the company's future.

When you are interviewing, ask if the organization has a planning process; and, if the company does have a process, ask how it is implemented. This implementation should become obvious to you depending upon your interviewer's response. If he or she is part of a good planning process, he or she will respond quickly and enthusiastically. If the company has no strategic planning or approaches it in a tedious or perfunctory way, the respondent will stumble.

For you to know the answer to this question can help you make your decision, if you are offered one, about joining the firm. Then, if you join, you must in your first week ask for a copy of the strategic plan. Hey, you will be asked to do your part to achieve the plan's objectives. You need to know what they are!

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 6. What are the Organization's Strengths?**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**
- 9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?**

## **Question 6**

### **What are the Organization's Strengths?**

If your interviewer hasn't already done so (and I would hope the interviewer had), he or she should enthusiastically reveal the organization's strengths. This shows pride in the organization, if nothing else. And, if you are treated well at the interview, you will walk away as a salesperson for them, knowing what makes them a great company and telling your friends. Hey, they should want everyone to know their strengths.

Any firm that has done strategic planning or market planning has confronted the SWOT Analysis. They asked themselves to honestly list their strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. So, an institutional list of these characteristics exists somewhere.

However, what you don't want at the interview is the institutional list. You want the list of strengths as perceived by the interviewer. If this person cannot generate, out of hand, a long list, you may want to re-think your potential relationship with them.

You want to hear them say, "Our people are our strength." Or, "We are financially sound." Or, and perhaps better yet, "Our customers are our greatest strength." Be it as it may, you will want to hear something. You will, of course, be asked that most famous of interview questions, "Tell me your strengths." Every book on interviewing on the market prepares you to be able to respond to this most basic interview question. Why not turn the tables and ask your interviewer that question?

### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**
- 9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?**

## **Question 7**

### **What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**

Most candidates know they will be asked if they have any weaknesses. Most, by now, also know how to answer, “I work too hard. I just don’t know when to stop. I give my all to my employer.”

On the other hand, not many interviewers expect to be asked the question. Because they are unprepared, they will likely answer honestly. They will be less likely to have the pat answer such as the one you’ve memorized for your interviews.

Wouldn’t it be good to ask some of the company’s current employees what the company’s weaknesses are? You might hear, “The benefits suck,” or “This place expects your soul.”

Every organization has strengths and weaknesses. It is no cause for shame. In fact, most companies, when they do strategic planning, list many more weaknesses than strengths. It’s human nature for us to perceive our weaknesses more than our strengths.

Being able to address its weaknesses makes a company that much stronger. Sharing the good and the bad with its employees makes a company stronger. Comparing the company view with the employee view of this makes a company nearly invincible.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 6. What are the Organization’s Strengths?**
- 8. What is the Organization’s Financial Situation?**
- 9. What are the Company’s Core Competencies?**

## **Question 8**

### **What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**

I once joined a company and learned three months later that the organization had lost \$30 million the previous year!

Why did I not ask before I took the job? I wanted the job too badly. Would the answer have changed my mind? No way! It was my first executive position and I wanted it. Did it alter the course of my career? It most certainly did. Would I take the job now knowing what I know now? You bet I would! I wanted that VP title!

Obviously we take jobs for many different reasons. I took that job to become an executive and to make twice as much money as I had been making, two very powerful motivators. I once changed jobs for the exact same salary I had been making, but by taking the job I moved into a larger market and increased my visibility a hundredfold. That employer had a sound financial position when I joined them but I left after only two years because of non-financial reasons. (See Question 27)

So, whatever motivates you, it pays to know the financial position of an organization you are considering joining. You will at least understand the some of hurdles you face. Therefore, you should ask about net revenue, surpluses after investment income, return on investment. I make no claims to financial wizardry; I simply encourage you to gain some understanding of the financial strength of the firm you wish to cast your lot with.

You can, of course, learn this information about publicly held companies. They must file their quarterly and annual financial reports with the SEC and with the people who own their stock. Non-profits must also file IRS reports of their financial wherewithal. With non-profits you may legally walk in their doors at any time and ask for a copy of their IRS report. (You may have to pay for the copies and wait a day or two for the report.)

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 6. What are the Organization's Strengths**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?**

## **Question 9**

### **What are the Company's Core Competencies?**

If you believe in the Pareto Principle, and I do, you will agree that 20% of a company's output reflects 80% of its successes. No company can do everything for everyone.

How many failures can be attributed to the company that "does everything for everyone?" In Pittsburgh, in the 1980's and 90's the hospital competition was fierce. However, Children's Hospital cornered pediatric care (and rightfully so), Presbyterian Hospital cornered transplant surgery (they did, after all, retain the world famous transplant surgeon Dr. Thomas Starzl), Magee Women's placed in the top ten in the USA for women's health matters, Mercy was known as the Catholic hospital, and Allegheny General had the best heart surgery and trauma. They had core competencies in their respective fields. They did other things well, too, but they were best at a few. (See Question 15)

If you don't already know from your own investigation, ask your interviewer what he or she perceives to be the company's competencies. You may be surprised at the answer.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?**
- 6. What are the Organization's Strengths?**
- 7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?**
- 8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?**

## **Question 10**

### **Does the Company Have Rituals?**

Ritualistic behavior is healthy for any organization. At Mercy we had many rituals, most of them related to spiritual events, like Christmas, Easter, Passover, but others related to Black History Month, Martin Luther King, Jr.'s birthday, and so forth.

At Christmas, the CEO led the decorating of the lobby Christmas tree as well as the singing of carols, all of this in the company of nurses, doctors, technicians, staff and children from our day care center. Many employees stood in that lobby year after year with their children and celebrated a moment away from their very important work. They celebrated in the presence, and as equals with, the CEO, VP's and management team.

Other companies have other events. I worked at an organization that took top management to South Carolina each winter for a golf outing. The vast majority of these individuals were men and the event quickly became known as the "Testosterone Open." Even so, I understand that the bonding was significant and many work issues were discussed, debated and resolved.

Ask your interviewer about corporate rituals. Some may be fun, some serious. Nonetheless, they exist, in every organization, even if it's just celebrating birthdays. If you don't want to use the word "rituals," ask the interviewer what the staff do for fun, or what they do other than work. Ask what holidays are celebrated. Find a way to get at this information. It will tell you about the character of the people and company.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

**11. What Communication Techniques Does the Organization Use with Employees?**

## **Question 11**

### **What Communication Techniques Does the Organization Use with Employees?**

As “Cool Hand Luke” in the movie of the same name, Paul Newman mocked the warden of his prison by mimicking his statement, “What we have here is a failure to communicate.” We all know what happened to Luke at the end of this great movie; he was shot!

As a person who has worked in communication all of my life, I know the value of the practice of communication. I also know that it is used as a convenient scapegoat for many corporate problems. For instance, in the small town hospital where I worked, the Chief of Staff of the physicians drank to excess, to put it mildly. A skilled surgeon and one of the town’s leading citizens, he was not immune, however, to blinding drunkenness. In fact, one evening as he returned from a popular nearby ski resort, he crashed his car into several others and made the town newspaper (although his friend, the editor, tried to protect him by conveniently leaving off his “Dr” title). That same doctor, later that month, stood at a board meeting and complained that the hospital never got good press! I was ready to shoot him for impugning my PR skills when he brought on such bad press himself.

Be that as it may, although companies can’t control all of the actions of their employees, they can control much of the communication. The CEO can have weekly breakfasts with employees; the executives can have similar meetings and can practice “Management By Walking Around.” The organization can provide daily bulletins and bi-weekly or monthly newsletters. Certainly, the firm can use more sophisticated means, such as broadcast E-Mail and streaming video, as well as video conferencing.

To be effective, however, corporate communications must contain useful, relevant and honest content, and these communications must be available to all. For this to happen, the executive leadership must have a predisposition to open, honest and timely communication. Such communication won’t guarantee a good workplace but it will lead to that end.

Ask the person who interviews you to answer this important question. Or, if you have time and you’re at the firm, look around for some of the communication tools. It’s not unlikely that you’ll be given some of the company stuff in your interview packet, anyway. Regardless of how you come upon these materials, look them over carefully.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

**10. Does the Company Have Rituals?**

## **Question 12**

### **Does the Company Value Diversity?**

We live in a global society. This is indisputable. Some large American companies are doing more business outside America than inside. Over 3500 multinationals are based in the US. 40,000 US firms do business with overseas companies and most of the world's great banks lie outside the US.

We live in a diverse society. In the 1970's only 12% of the workforce in America was black, Hispanic, or Asian-American. By 1990 the workforce consisted of over 25% of those groups. By the middle of this century one half of the workforce will be comprised of those groups. Will you work in Miami? If you do, you know that almost 70% of the workforce is Hispanic. The same hold true for Washington, D.C.

New technologies, not the least of which is the Internet, have opened the world to people from all cultures. The person or company that is not willing to learn about and respect new cultures will not succeed. And, consequently, you would be ill-advised to accept an offer from an organization that cannot offer obvious evidence of its appreciation and nurturing of diverse groups.

Ask for specific information about programs, services, and opportunities related to diverse groups of people. Don't let the pictures on the website or the company newsletter fool you. Good PR with good casting does not equal a diverse workplace.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 13. What is the Organization's Board Make-Up and Involvement?**
- 14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**

### **Question 13**

#### **What is the Organization's Board Make-Up and Involvement?**

You can expect different answers to this question, depending upon whether you are interviewing with a for-profit or a not-for-profit. With the for-profit, you will be interested to know the kinds of talent and influence represented by the board of directors. General Dynamics had both Colin Powell and Charlotte Beers as board members. These two famous and influential people undoubtedly attended few meetings and voted on only a few issues, probably profit sharing. But their presence on the board lent no small weight to the firm's prestige.

If you are considering working at a non-profit, the questions of board make-up and involvement are as critical. Ask: What kind of talent and influence exists on the board and what roles do these board members play?

All too often, board members, especially with non-profits, believe they have operational authority. For instance, I once worked at a hospital in a small town where the board of trustees was comprised of the most powerful and wealthy people in the community. They caused more than one CEO to leave town because of their almost daily interference in the operations (and I don't necessarily mean surgical operations) at the hospital. But this was a small town and those board members owned the car dealerships, the real estate, and the McDonald's, Wendy's and Burger King franchises. They were big fish in a small pond.

You may, of course, find this information before you go on your interview. As with financial information, this stuff is a matter of record. Use the Internet, annual reports, the business media, among other sources, and find out who's on the board of the company for which you might someday work.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 12. Does the Company Value Diversity?**
- 14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**

**Question 14**  
**Is there a “Glass Ceiling” within the Company?**

Undoubtedly you’ll receive an answer in the negative. “We have no glass ceiling! Women have every opportunity here at XYZ Corporation. We would have it no other way!”

Right. Nevertheless, ask the question. Put the potential employer on notice that, whether you are a woman or not, such things matter to you. Ask for examples of which management and executive staff are women (and while you are at it, why not ask the same question about minorities).

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 12. Does the Company Value Diversity?**
- 13. What is the Organization’s Board Make-Up and Involvement?**
- 20. Is There a Union at the Organization?**

## **Ask Appropriate Business Questions**

### **Questions 15**

#### **How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**

Most cities have a Children's Hospital, a woman's hospital, a Jewish hospital, a Catholic hospital. They began their lives positioned according to the customers they served. Hospitals in Pittsburgh, the city where I work and live, began the same way. In the 1980's Pittsburgh had Mercy Hospital, Presbyterian Hospital, Allegheny General, Magee Women', and Children's Hospital, and others, all positioned by faith or customer served or capability. Eventually they became more known for capability, such as transplant surgery (Presby), heart surgery and trauma (Allegheny General) or burn care (Mercy). They may have wanted to be known differently but the laws of positioning said otherwise (see "Positioning" by Trout and Ries).

When you are being interviewed, ask the company representative how the company is positioned. How is Microsoft positioned? Microsoft is the largest and most trusted and successful maker of computer operating systems in the world. How is the Syracuse Housing Authority positioned? How is the Cleveland Museum positioned? How is Oracle positioned? If you are going to accept a position in one of these organizations, ask the Positioning question!

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

**16. How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?**

**17. Who are the Company's Main Competitors?**

## **Question 16**

### **How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?**

Before you join, find out what market the company is in and what its share of that market is. Ask if the organization is in a new, growing, stable, declining or dying market.

So, why should you, a programmer or policy analyst, want to know about the market and market share? Knowledge truly is power. You will want to join the company and move through the ranks. You need to ask important business questions. Market share, and other such questions, is important to know.

You can learn the answer to this question by looking at business publications such as Forbes, Fortune, Business Week, Advertising Age and many others. Or, surf the internet. You should have no trouble finding the answer.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**
- 17. Who are the Company's Main Competitors?**

**Question 17**  
**Who are the Company's Main Competitors?**

Vito Corleone told his son, Michael, in the popular movie, "The Godfather," "Keep your friends close but your enemies closer." Better business advice was never uttered!

You could call your competition "The Enemy!" They want what you have and make no secret of it. If you went out of business, they would not be sad. They develop new products and services to attract the same customers you're after. It makes sense, therefore, to know as much as possible about them.

Ask the person who interviews you about the company's competition. Anyone in the company should know this quickly and accurately. They should also pride themselves in their competition. As a former football and wrestling coach, I know that we all compete better when our competition is stronger. Even Bill Gates has to be comforted to know that Larry Ellison wants to eat his lunch. It keeps Bill moving faster!

Certainly you can learn this information by researching the company on your own time. Read the business publications mentioned previously, Forbes, Fortune, Business Week, and so forth.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?**

**16. How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?**

## **Ask What Really Goes On Inside the Company**

### **Question 18**

#### **Has the Organization Ever Faced a Crisis? What was the Crisis and How Did the Company Respond?**

Any employee of Johnson & Johnson would be happy to be asked this question. The J&J response to the Tylenol crisis of the 1980's is considered the model for crisis management. In brief, someone (who has never been identified) poisoned Tylenol with cyanide resulting in the deaths of seven people and a nationwide recall of Tylenol. Because of its mission and values, J&J recalled millions of dollars worth of the product and suffered millions of dollars of loss. However, J&J leaders were concerned, first, about the public (see mission and values). They addressed the matter of the poisonings quickly and openly. They cooperated with the authorities from Day One. And, they have benefited ever since.

Crises can say a lot about any organization and its leadership. How do the top people act under pressure? Ask New Yorkers about Rudy Giuliani during the 9-11 attacks on the World Trade Center in 2001. He is considered one of the heroes for his fast and decisive actions. Almost anyone would want to work for him. Then there's Exxon and the Valdez.

Get the picture?

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

**19. How Do Problems Get Resolved in the Organization?**

**Question 19**  
**How Do Problems Get Resolved in the Organization?**

Not every organization faces poisonings and terror attacks, but all organizations have more problems than they know what to do with, even the very best companies. Yes, even Ben and Jerry have to wrestle once in a while to straighten things out.

So, ask the interviewer about company processes for problem resolution. Ask him or her to identify a particular problem and its resolution. Don't worry about being out of place. Ask these questions. You are about to make a very important decision in your life. You will spend most of your waking hours either at, or thinking about, this place. You have right to know how you and the company will confront the issues that invariably bother the best companies.

Is there a suggestion box? Does HR make available an on-line chat? Does a formal grievance procedure exist? How are problems resolved?

**Companion Questions to This One**

**18. Has the Organization Ever Faced a Crisis? What was the Crisis and How Did the Company**

**Question 20**  
**Is There a Union at the Organization?**

Union does not mean bad. It just means more complex. If a union exists, will you be required to join? If not, will you interact with the union? If so, how?

In my first job, I taught English in a junior high school. At the end of my first year of teaching, the teachers formed an “association,” which looked a lot like a union (and eventually became one). I needed two years of successful teaching to gain tenure and told my dad that I would likely cross any picket line. Union man that he was (having been elected president of the local boilermakers union) he flew into a tirade, telling me that I was stupid and that I would forever be labeled “scab.” As it turned out, I never had to make the choice because the teachers didn’t walk.

Most of my career I spent as “management” and was required to walk across lines. My father would have rolled over in his grave had he known. I understood that I was doing exactly as I was expected to do. I was comfortable with it.

You will need to understand your relationship with a union, should one exist at your place of work.

**Question 21**  
**What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**

I have my own office, always have. I have never known public display. That's exactly the way I like it. I ask my students to schedule appointments if they wish to speak with me, no walking in the door. Likewise, I respect people's spaces. I know, I know, it sounds New Age, but it's not new at all; it's been around a long time in the USA. Americans like space and privacy.

By all means, ask your interviewer what your workspace will be, if you are to be hired. Ask, too, if you receive an answer you don't like, if that space is negotiable. Hey, why not? Everything is negotiable (but I'm the kind of person who bargains in every store and at every stall of the flea market).

Where you reside for a minimum of eight hours a day is a very serious matter, just ask people who have worked in cramped, dingy settings. Ask anyone who has ever worked in a "sick building," for that matter. Ask not the CEO, who enjoys space and privacy, but the OCE, office cubicle employee! Cubicle equals no privacy; I don't care how much it levels the organization and creates integration. Forget it. Give me an office.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**22. How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**

**23. Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**

## **Question 22**

### **How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**

My father worked for the railroad all his life. He was a boilermaker/welder for the PRR, which became the Penn Central, which became Conrail. He worked in both the Juniata Shops in Altoona, PA (home of the world famous “Horseshoe Curve”), and in the Samuel Rea Shops in Hollidaysburg, PA.

My father didn't say much but one thing he said to me was, “You'll never work for the railroad.” To say he didn't like his work would be an understatement; he complained that the railroad shops where he welded eight hours a day were “too hot in the summer and too cold in the winter.” A union man, he also complained mightily about management, whose environments, he felt, were insulated from the extremes of weather.

He also complained about the noise and dirt. He should have complained louder, for as it turned out he succumbed to cancer that had probably been exacerbated by his having worked in asbestos.

Before you take employment, learn as much as you can about the physical environment of the buildings in which you will spend your days (or nights, or both). Will you not accept a job if you don't like the workspace? I doubt it. But, find out, anyway! Visit the company, if you can. Ask the people who work there about the work environment.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

**21. What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**

**23. Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**

### **Question 23**

#### **Is There a Corporate Dress Code?**

I once worked at a for-profit that had issued a public stock offering over NASDAQ. The CEO knew that the stock would move if brokers understood the company and the value of its stock. So, the CEO put into place an aggressive plan to familiarize a select group of brokers with our company, a television production firm.

Our product was a creative service, and therefore somewhat suspect in the eyes of the financial people of Pittsburgh, who thought more in terms of slabs of steel, so we hosted a group of area stock brokers at the city's old and revered Duquesne Club to introduce them to our "product."

In this august setting, we drank cocktails, shook hands, made small talk and showed a fast-paced, creative capabilities video. After the brokers had left with copies of the video and company t-shirts and ball caps, we huddled to debrief. The CEO was satisfied but scolded the Chief Financial Officer for having worn a sports coat with no tie, and not a suit, to the event. Many brokers have no fashion sense and both the CEO and CFO knew that, but the CEO wanted to make an impression. He said, "You can always remove your tie if you want to loosen up but not if you haven't worn one."

As I said earlier, at the television production company, the creative types were expected to dress in the latest funky attire. The people on the business side were expected to dress in business attire. The rules were not written down anywhere but were as inviolable as any of the strictest regulations.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 21. What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?**
- 22. How Would You Describe the Company Environment?**

**Question 24**  
**Who Are the Corporate Heroes/Heroines?**  
**What are the Corporate Myths?**

Every organization has memorable people. Usually it's the founders. Often it's the rebels. These are people who have left their mark on the organization and are spoken about reverentially, often in whispers, mostly after they have gone, of their own choosing or through martyrdom. Many have passed into myth.

I knew a teacher once, let's call him Mr. Young, who, in the late 1960's, inspired his students with his energy, youth, daring and disdain for authority. He wore his hair long and dressed casually. He openly represented every impulse young people were made to repress. His young students related to him enthusiastically, particularly when the authorities of the school sought to bridle him, unwittingly feeding his popularity. His colleagues admired him but watched and quietly awaited his demise. He finally left, of his own accord, and in his leaving became the stuff of faculty room conversations and student memories. The rebel with a cause!

Mr. Young carried the standard for a new thinking, a new way of acting. In his small way in his small town with his important but minor position he showed a small group of people a new way of thinking and acting. He became their hero.

Every organization, regardless of size, has such characters. Ask about them.

## **Ask Them How the Place Is Managed**

### **Question 25**

#### **What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**

If the person who interviews you has responsibility for recruitment, he or she has undoubtedly seen many people come and go and could, therefore, summarize the profile of the typical hire. If the person who interviews you will make the hiring decision, he or she should certainly be able to provide that profile.

You need to listen carefully to the description. Is this someone who will be asked to conform rigidly, take no risks, and work collaboratively? Is this someone who is expected to be mature, self-motivated, self-directed, and responsive? What exactly are the characteristics that make a person successful in this company?

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

**26. What Skills are Valued Most?**

**27. How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?**

## **Question 26**

### **What Skills are Valued Most?**

If you're after a programmer's position, then obviously programming skills will be highly valued. If you're after a policy analyst's position, you must have some skill in analytical thinking. If you expect to go in at a place higher on the food chain, the skills will be quite different.

I worked in a health care system where strategic thinking and planning were the most valued skills, although no one ever said so. Financial management was right up there with the strategic thinking and planning, however, finances were left pretty much to the bean counters. Too much understanding of finance actually pigeonholed a person as a finance wonk. Critical thinking, however, was prized, as was the ability to construct a tight planning document.

Fortunately for me, writing and speaking were also valued. I succeeded because of these strengths and my quick understanding that I had to bolster my strategic thinking and planning skills. I mastered the questions: What is our objective? How will we measure our success at achieving that objective? What will this cost? How will we measure our return on investment? Add to those questions another few and they will serve you well: Who are the target audiences? How do we describe them? What are their needs? What is our timeframe for this project?

In summary, you may think you know the skills required for the position that interest you, but you're better off if you can have them articulated.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 25. What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**
- 27. How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?**

**Question 27**  
**How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?**

You will want to know as much as possible about the management styles of the people for whom you are likely to work. Forget theory X-Y-Z. Get an honest and practical profile. “Our managers expect results but are willing to listen and to help. They mentor. They care. They provide resources for individual growth.”

Wouldn't that be nice to hear!

**Companion Questions to This One**

**25. What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?**

**26. What Skills are Valued Most?**

**Question 28**  
**Does the Organization Have a “Recognition-Rich” Environment?**

We all like to be told we’re doing something well. Actually, we like the public acknowledgement more than we like the financial rewards (although they’re not hard to take, either). Who has been named “Employee of the Month” and not enjoyed seeing his or her picture hanging in the lobby? Who has been cited for outstanding work and not enjoyed a privileged parking place for a month at the front of the building? Who has completed a tough project on time and not enjoyed lunch with the CEO?

I have often said that money is a negative motivator. That is, when people come forward and say that they want to quit their jobs because they don’t make enough, they are usually disguising some other complaint (not enough challenge, not enough growth opportunity, not enough recognition).

If people love their jobs and receive recognition for their good work, they will work for free. When I worked for a television production company, we produced television commercials, rock concerts, NFL football, NHL hockey. We had celebrities in and out of our studios. We enjoyed a relaxed and creative atmosphere. People wanted to work at our company. And, they were willing to work for little or nothing!

One young man, an English major from the University of Pittsburgh, who had graduated and was bartending at a nearby tavern where he met many of the company staff, worked at our video production firm for free on his off time so as to be involved with the work we were doing. Eventually we hired him and he went on to produce Pittsburgh Pirate for broadcast where his name was regularly featured on the broadcast credits.

Money is a negative motivator. Recognition has real value!

**Companion Questions to This One**

**29. What is the Organization’s Retention Rate?**

**30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**

**31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**

**Question 29**  
**What is the Organization's Retention Rate?**

Remember: The Pareto Principle is the "80-20" Rule. 80 percent of the company services or products are purchased by 20% of its customers. 80% of all the work is done by 20% of the staff, that sort of thing.

My guess is that a 20% turnover is not unusual, following the dictates of the Pareto Principle. However, you don't want it to be. You're much better off joining a company with a low turnover, say less than 10%.

Satisfied employees stay. Sure, women get pregnant, husbands and wives transfer, people move on to greener pastures. And, a low turnover rate doesn't automatically suggest a great place to work. My dad worked for the railroad for 35 years and I venture to say that he hated all thirty-five. I guess he thought he couldn't do anything else.

But, satisfied, challenged and engaged employees do not leave the company. They hardly ever think about it, in fact. They are too busy being challenged and enjoying their work.

Ask about the turnover (or retention). The good companies volunteer this information!

**Companion Questions to This One**

**28. Does the Organization Have a "Recognition-Rich" Environment?**

**30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**

**31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**

### **Question 30**

#### **What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**

It is the dumb organization that doesn't budget, and budget well, for training and staff development.

Job skills change all the time. People want to progress. Change is natural. If this didn't happen, the "Shoe Factory Mentality would set in."

What is the "Shoe Factory Mentality?" It can be described as mindless repetition and boredom. I saw it first hand when I worked a summer in a shoe factory in Altoona, PA. I watched people sit at machines and perform the same tasks over and over, punching out the soles of shoes, running sewing machines around leather, rewarded by piece work to greater speeds. They were an unhappy lot. They faced the prospect of doing the same routine over and over and over.

The smart organizations invest heavily in training and education for their employees. Most have educational reimbursements. If they don't, they should. Make sure you check this out with a prospective employer.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 28. Does the Organization Have a "Recognition-Rich" Environment?**
- 29. What is the Organization's Retention Rate?**
- 31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**

**Question 31**  
**Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?**

I worked in a not-for-profit where we had “Gain Sharing.” We couldn’t, of course, call it “Profit Sharing,” so what we made on the bottom line and shared we called by another name.

It was nice. I remember getting a pretty nice check at the end of the year. Some executives got really nice checks. I’m talking about checks worth several thousand dollars. As I recall, the CEO was a little embarrassed about the million or so dollars this not-for-profit shared with its management and hoped it would not be made public through the media. It wasn’t.

Most for-profits have profit sharing, and rightly so. Or, they have generous ESOP’s, employee stock option plans. Those are nice as long as the stock has any value. Ask the people who may have worked at ENRON and had its stock. It was bad enough that its 401K invested in ENRON. You may want to ask your employer, as well, where it invested its employees’ 401K funds.

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 28. Does the Organization Have a “Recognition-Rich” Environment?**
- 29. What is the Organization’s Retention Rate?**
- 30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?**

**Question 32**  
**How Are Customer Relations Handled?**

Why would you ask a question like this? Isn't this the responsibility of the marketing department? What does customer relations have to do with employee relations?

For one thing, a company will typically treat everyone the same way. If they are good to their customers, they are likely to be equally good to their employees. If they have systems for treating their customers well, they are likely to have systems for treating their employees well.

So and so said, "Something about everyone being a member of the marketing department."

**Companion Questions to This One**

**33. Does the Organization Support Any Cause?**

**Question 33**  
**Does the Organization Support Any Cause?**

These days the enlightened for profit organizations are partnering with not-for-profits so as to be socially accountable. Since the Statue of Liberty Fund and American Express partnered to raise money for restoration of the statue, many corporations have collaborated to do the right thing.

Ben & Jerry's represents a good case-in-point. Ben & Jerry's and its employees contribute to many social causes, including the environment, nuclear waste, mental health, children's issues, and wild lands, among many others.

Usually companies with a conscience, companies that are interested in more than themselves and their profit, also have more interest in their employees. Try to choose a company to work for that works for others.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**32. How Are Customer Relations Handled?**

**Question 34**  
**How Flexible is the Company?**

Let's hope the era of sweatshops has ended, all over the world. Let's hope employer still exist that allow employees to job share, telecommute, and re-design their jobs. Let's hope you can find an organization that will allow flexible scheduling, compressed work weeks, and any other adjustments that are appropriate and necessary for you to perform your work well.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**35. Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**

**Question 35**  
**Is the Organization Parent-Friendly?**

These days employers must provide Family Leave. But that doesn't make them parent-friendly.

Ask your potential employer if it has a day care facility or can help make arrangements for day care. Ask if it has facilities for breast pumping. Ask if employees may leave in mid-day if they receive a call that a child has become ill. Ask for specific examples of employees, even executives, who have families and who may have had family issues that involved work.

Depending on your age and marital status, this question may or may not be critical to you. Nonetheless, the answers to the question can be equally revealing for unmarried or unattached persons.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**34. How Flexible is the Company?**

**Question 36**  
**Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**

Does the company provide a new employee orientation and, if so, how is it structured?

I have worked in organizations where the orientation lasted all day. It was awful, boring and tedious. These orientations shared almost nothing important about the employer. First we saw the company video. Then, we sat through a series of boring speakers from a series of boring departments. If you weren't asleep after a human resources representative showed you an overhead projected rendition of your pay stub, you were surely asleep as the infection control nurse explained the various infections you would be subject to, complete with their Latin and scientific names. Near lunchtime, most were awakened by the security department's demonstration of the fire extinguishers. When we sent someone off to the corporate employee orientation, we always sent them with pagers and promised to page them after the pay stub presentation.

My experiences notwithstanding, employee orientations can be very important if they are created so as to share the history, traditions and culture of the company, if the executives participate and welcome the new hires, if useful information is provided and processes explained. Ask your interviewer about this.

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**

## **Ask Your Interviewer How They Will Evaluate You After You Have Begun Work There!**

### **Question 37**

#### **Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**

I worked in a system where the executives wrote a strategic plan that included goals to be achieved by each executive. The executives, in turn, shared that plan, and their goals, with their managers who were required to write goals that would support the larger effort while being related to every-day job duties. These managers shared their goals with their subordinates who, in turn, wrote goals designed to accomplish their specific duties while relating to management's goals. It was a beautiful system feeding the growth and success of the company.

The goal writing system required specific, measurable language and it was negotiable, in large part. That meant employees were able to create a performance plan that they had helped create while seeing their relationship to the whole. And, again, it was specific and measurable. The process also called for regular review of the goals and periodic adjustment. In a sense it delivered self-fulfilling success.

You should look for an employer that measures performance through such a system. In any event, you need to know how your performance will be measured.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 36. Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**

### **Question 38**

#### **How Are Employees Evaluated?**

The last thing you want is to have your performance, and hence your financial success, measured by your popularity. You want your measurement system to be as objective as possible. You want none of this – “Susie did a great job this year; everyone likes her.” You’re asking for trouble if you accept such a subjective and flawed evaluation system.

Of course, any measurement system has flaws and biases, just ask the people at GE who suffered with “Rank and Yank.” No system is completely objective and able to weed out the truly poor performers. Nonetheless, many companies strive to reduce biases by creating quantitative performance measurement.

I said earlier that I worked at a not-for-profit, religious-based health care system. This system flouted its mission to the public and to employees and asked that each employee goal-writer write specific, measurable goals that included a “mission goal.” You might ask: How can mission be measured? Let me give you an example from my performance plan as an employee of that organization.

Mercy’s mission was, in general, “to create a healthy community.” Again, mission statements are global. For an organization to “create a healthy community” it would have to eliminate not only physical illness but societal illnesses as well. That means it would have to attack the problems of drug and alcohol abuse, child abuse, poverty, joblessness, and a host of other problems, such as illiteracy. Also, you’ll remember that a Mercy values included “community” and “collaboration,” among four others.

Having once been an English teacher and having continued to maintain a great interest in reading, I volunteered to teach tutors of the illiterate. My mission goal, therefore, was written, “I will train twenty-five tutors of the illiterate within the year.” I am happy to say that I wrote that goal for several years and, in fact, worked with Goodwill in Pittsburgh to train many tutors who went on to work one-on-one with illiterate people.

Before you accept a job, be certain that you understand the evaluation system. Make certain it is based on objective criteria and that you have some part in the performance plan’s development and writing. After all, you will be measured against this plan.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 36. Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 39. Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**

**Question 39**  
**Does a Job Description Exist for this Position?**

Almost every organization uses job descriptions. And almost every job description contains the line “And other similar related duties.” It is that line that allows the organization to have you perform the duties not specifically listed in the job description. Be that as it may, the job description tells an employee most of what the company expects. It may not be a perfect and complete description but it explains things reasonably well.

I tell my students and friends not to accept a job that has no job description (and not to accept a job without a commitment from management to develop a written and negotiated performance plan, that is, set of goals). I recommend that an person being considered for a job ask to see the job description at an early interview, either the first or second. I suggest that any person who wants to accept a position with a company that does not have a written job description volunteer to write one, immediately after accepting the job.

Hey, you are going to be evaluated. Your success in the company, and your earning power therein, will depend, to a large extent, on these evaluations. Shouldn't they be based, as much as possible, on some objective criteria? Shouldn't a job description be used in your evaluations?

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 36. Does the Company Provide a New Employee Orientation?**
- 37. Does the Organization Require Employees to Write Goals?**
- 38. How Are Employees Evaluated?**

## **Question 40**

### **What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**

If this is not a new position, you need to ask this question. You need as much information as the interviewer is able to give you, within the limits of confidentiality, good taste and the law about the person who left the job you're seeking.

What you'd like to hear, of course, is, "He/She was promoted to vice president (or some other lofty title)." You'd like to know that the organization mentors, coaches, and advances its people. It can be this way! Organizations can, in fact, coach their employees to greatness (or very good-ness). Most don't, but that's another story.

What you don't want to hear is, "We had to let him/her go." Or, "She/He took a job with the competition." If your predecessor took another job as a result of re-location or promotion, or left to have a baby, it's OK. Most people marry and have families. Few people any more work their whole lives for one company. And, just about everyone is flattered to have another company seek his/her services.

All too often, however, people are being displaced, that is, they are being fired, laid off or moved out in some other way. When this happens, the fault lies almost exclusively with the employer because of bad management, bad planning, bad employee selection. Selecting a new employee is one of the most important decisions a company can make. Unfortunately, many make the decision too lightly. And potential employees make the decision equally lightly, especially the young and inexperienced.

### **Companion Questions to This One**

**41. Have There Been Any Lay-Offs Recently?**

**Question 41**  
**Have There Been Any Lay-Offs Recently?**

This speaks for itself. You need to know what job displacements have occurred, if so, how many staff were effected, what caused the displacements, what was, or is, being done to avoid further displacements.

Also, listen to the language and tone the interviewer uses to answer. Remember that this person represents the company. His or her language and tone will reveal sensitivity or insensitivity to the victims of the displacement and the attitude of the executives. The apple doesn't fall far from the tree. How this person reacts to any of your questions will likely reveal the actions, attitudes and opinions of the administration.

If there was a lay off, how was it handled? I've been through four, three of which I helped to implement and one of which I suffered through. I know the subject from both sides. I know that a lay off isn't the worst thing in the world but how it is executed can be. Even in organizations that espouse human dignity, lay offs can go very badly.

Very bad lay off processes make people feel valueless at a time when their self esteem is low, anyway. Only the most caring organization can make a lay off a less-than-catastrophic occurrence.

**Companion Questions to This One**

**40. What Happened to the Person Who Had the Job Before It Became Available?**

**Question 42**  
**What Techniques Does the Company Use to Increase Morale?**

The answer to this question suggests not only how valued the employees are but how creative the manager staff is.

I teach at Carnegie Mellon University. It provides full tuition for any of my children who choose to go there (and are admitted). For any child who chooses to attend another school, Carnegie Mellon pays 60% of the cost. Is that a great benefit, or what?! Talk about a morale booster!

Some companies have no dress code. Others provide an employee gym, some others provide a nap room. Some use no titles and no assigned parking places. Goldman Sacks in New York is reputed to give employees a limo ride home if they work late.

Whatever they are, these “perks” make employees believe they are important. Even if they are never used, the extras help build a strong morale. Ask your interviewer if his company has any such goodies!

**Question 43**  
**How Long Have You Been With the Company?**

You should qualify the person who is interviewing you. Has this person been at the company long enough to know the answers to your important questions? What is the interviewer's point of view? Is he/she happy? What is this happiness based on?

I am amazed at the timidity of most of the students who mock-interview with me or ask me questions about their pending interviews. They act as if they are powerless in the interview process. They would never dream of asking this question, let alone the other questions to which they are entitled answers.

Don't anyone tell me you can't ask this kind of question. Hey, this is your life we're talking about. These are your talents being recruited. These are your 8 (10-12-more) hours per day of labor. This is your second family. You need to know all you can about them.

## **Ask About the Salary and the Selection Process. You Deserve to Know!**

### **Question 44**

#### **How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**

Many companies have recruiters who make plans for their recruitment. They look at cover letters and resumes and then choose a dozen or so people to interview. They can answer this question. The answer will give you a sense of the competition and the timing of the process. You will want to know about both, the competition for the job and the timing, so do not be afraid to ask this and the questions that follow it, which are, in many respects, the most important questions you can ask.

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

**Question 45**  
**What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**

Your interviewer either will, or will not, have some kind of obvious process for selection (or will have a loose one floating around inside his/her cranium). I always had one that included interviewing 10 or 12 people, creating a “short list” of three or four and then having others from my staff interview these finalists. From start to finish the interview and selection process took 4-6 weeks. Added to the time it took to justify replacing the position, placing the order with HR, having them dilly-dally, placing the ad, collecting responses (usually 150-200), glancing at 175, reading 25, setting up the interviews, interviewing, choosing a candidate, checking references, and making an offer (to be followed by the new person’s two to four week notice), the whole process was agonizing.

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

**Question 46**  
**What is the Salary Range For This Position?**

Most employers have established a range of compensation for their positions. Let's say you're lucky and the range is \$60,000 to \$80,000. Many employers will also bring new people into the organization at the Mid-Point, in this case \$70,000 (you are really lucky). Many try to bring people in below mid-point, especially so that they have a chance to grow financially in the position. By the way, if you are asked, "What are your salary requirements?" You should ask, in return, what is the salary range and then ask to be brought in at mid point. I tease my students and tell them to answer the question about salary requirements, "I have no upward limit!" Hey, even interviewers like a little humor to break the tension of an interview!

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

**Question 47**  
**What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**

Many enlightened employers will use the benefits package to recruit, as it is much more flexible than the salary schedule. You might negotiate more vacation, in lieu of the smaller salary. You might ask that your student loan be paid off. You might ask that your expected MBA studies be financed. You might ask that you be allowed to work for ten hour days. Use your imagination!

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

**Question 48**  
**Is This a Fun Place to Work?**

You will spend the rest of your life working (unless you hit the lottery or marry big). So, you should decide here and now that you want to enjoy it. Decide that you want to have fun. Why not?

Is any job all fun? No. Into every life a little rain must fall. But, did you ever see anyone who was having fun at their work? Didn't seem like work, did it?

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

**Question 49**  
**How Did I Do In This Interview?**

I always encourage students to ask, after the interview, “How did I do?” You are entitled to an answer, even though most will be unprepared to give you one. They will likely hmm and haw before finally saying something non-committal. So, why bother? You may find someone who gives you an honest answer. And, as always, you want to leave the session knowing the interviewer will remember you. Ask a difficult question and this might happen.

**Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
- 47. What Is the Benefit Package and Is It Negotiable?**
- 48. Is This a Fun Place to Work?**
- 50. When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

## **Question 50**

### **When Will I Find Out That I Have Been Chosen?**

Notice that I didn't say, "If I have been chosen." You need to target the two or three places where you want to work and then do whatever is necessary to get a job there. Find out who interviews. Find out where that person's car is parked. Lie in front of it and refuse to move until you are granted an interview. Go to the interview and be confident. Ask a lot of questions. Help the interviewer with the interview. Be enthusiastic. Be interesting. Be hard, no, be impossible to reject. See yourself in the job.

It may sound New Age, but I believe in positive visualization. I once asked for my interviewer's business card and when I got home scratched out his name and printed mine in its place. I stared at that think and repeated a mantra, "Ed Barr, Director of Corporate Communications." I got the job!

#### **Companion Questions to This One**

- 44. How Many People Are You Interviewing for this Position?**
- 45. What is the Process for Selection of the Final Candidate?**
- 46. What is the Salary Range For This Position?**
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- 49. How Did I Do In This Interview?**

## **Some Miscellaneous and Useful Questions To Ask About Temps and Interns**

Every year my students ask me a million questions about getting a job, getting an interview, dressing for an interview, and any other topic that has to do with finding, and changing, employment.

They seem puzzled when I answer the ways I do. I tell them, for instance, that the best time to get a job is during an economic downturn or just after a company had had a layoff. I tell them to step up their search during the holiday seasons. I tell them to be creative, daring, drastic and ubiquitous.

I say, “Find the one or two places where you’d die to work, find out who does the hiring, lay down in front of their car and tell them you won’t move until you get an interview.” The students usually gasp and laugh at this notion.

I say, “Take a job doing anything. Be a janitor. Go to a temp agency and tell them that you’ll only accept temp work at the one or two places where you die to work.”

I remember using two temps and hiring both of them. These were talented people who had a chance to show their skills when someone was off on maternity, or other, leave. When the “left” employee chose not to return, we hired the temps whom we had grown to know and love.

In any event, the following pages expound on some of the job search.

## **Do You Use Temps?**

One of the best kept secrets for getting a great job is to temp! Determine where you want to work (XYZ Corporation) and then go to a temp agency and tell them you'll only take temporary work at XYZ. Once you get in the door at XYZ, you have a 100% better chance of getting full time work there than anyone else. And, you get to learn about the place, specifically whether or not you really want to work there.

I know this because I have used temps and I have ended up hiring them. Ask Rich in Sarasota or Kitt in Pittsburgh. They came to us as temps, worked well, stayed until the people they were replacing decided not to return and then came on board full time. They so impressed us that we would gladly have recommended them to our colleagues and/or other departments in our organization (with whom they worked and whom they impressed).

Most temp agencies pay reasonably pretty badly, taking most of the slice for themselves. But, they can serve your purposes extremely well. Hey, what can you lose? Go temp!

## **Do You Use Interns?**

If they answer this yes, the next questions is: How do you use them.

The word “intern” is derived from a Latin word that means “gofer.” Not really, but, unfortunately many employers have little idea how to use interns (with the possible exception of Bill Clinton).

Being an intern can result in a good experience. Usually it is a good experience because the intern has insisted that it be one. Anyone who wants to become an intern (and everyone should consider it because it is another good way to get a foot in the door) should create a work plan, a set of measurable goals, a guide for the lazy or incompetent supervisor.

All employers like free help; they just don't like having to work for it. Hence, many internships result in bad experiences. This won't happen if the intern (YOU) takes charge. Remember, you are bringing your talent (not experience necessarily) to the table. Even an intern should have the I-bring-value attitude to the negotiation.

## **Should I Send a “Thank You” Letter After the Interview?**

When I was interviewing people, someone started a national epidemic of Thank You letters. I can't tell you how many I received and how many I tossed in the trash. I tossed them because they served no purpose and they took filing space that I did not have.

Sure, a Thank You is a nice gesture, but it's totally useless. I tell my students not to bother with a Thank You Letter, unless they can do something useful with it, that is, unless they can send Super Bowl tickets. Just kidding! But, they might share with me an article, which they believe I have not read and which will interest me.

If they feel compelled to send a Thank You letter, they should send something beyond their regards and their hopes that I will hire them. If you feel compelled to send a letter after your interview, be creative. Be different. Be remembered!

## THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

1. What is the Corporate Mission?
2. What are the Corporate Values?
3. What is the Corporate Culture?
4. What is the Organization's Vision?
5. Does the Organization Have a Strategic Plan?
6. What are the Organization's Strengths?
7. What are the Areas Where the Organization Can Improve?
8. What is the Organization's Financial Situation?
9. What are the Company's Core Competencies?
10. Does the Company Have Rituals?
11. What Communication Techniques Does the Organization Use with Employees?
12. Does the Company Value Diversity?
13. What is the Organization's Board Make-Up and Involvement?
14. Is there a "Glass Ceiling" within the Company?
15. How is the Organization Positioned in the Market?
16. How Do You Define the Organization's Market and Share of Market?
17. Who are the Company's Main Competitors?
18. Has the Organization Ever Faced a Crisis? What was the Crisis and How Did the Company Respond?
19. How Do Problems Get Resolved in the Organization?
20. Is There a Union at the Organization?
21. What Do the Workspaces Look Like in the Company?
22. How Would You Describe the Company Environment?
23. Is There a Corporate Dress Code?
24. Who Are the Corporate Heroes/Heroines? What are the Corporate Myths?
25. What Characteristics Does the Model Employee of the Company Possess?
26. What Skills are Valued Most?
27. How Would You Describe the Successful Manager in the Company?
28. Does the Organization Have a "Recognition-Rich" Environment?
29. What is the Organization's Retention Rate?
30. What Opportunities Exist for Training and Staff Development?
31. Does the Organization Have Profit Sharing, Gain Sharing, an ESOP?
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