**Be an Expert Story-Teller… About YOU**

An interview with an employer is about telling stories. About YOU. The more positive, proactive, and relevant the stories are to the needs of the job, the better the chances of being hired.

**Your Key Story: The 30-Second Commercial**

The first story you need to create is a 30-second commercial that highlights your best strengths and relates them to the prospective job opportunity

What to put in a 30-Second Commercial (pick and choose):

1. **Your interest in the company/field – why you chose to apply**
2. **Knowledge about the company (do your research)**
3. **The skills you bring to the job**
4. **Education (both school and workshop) that demonstrates that you both qualify for the job and that you like to learn**
5. **An experience that best demonstrates your compatibility for the job**
6. **Career goals and aspirations, especially if they tie into the company mission or vision**
7. **Point out how your assets meet what the organization needs.**
8. **Something about you that says I am a thinker and/or creator and/or innovator (this one impresses quickly)**

You can’t choose all items in this list. Pick and choose the ones that best fit into your connectivity to the position. Practice your 30-Second Commercial so that it does not sound rehearsed. Your opening speech will set the tone for the entire interview. Be upbeat and positive. Lean forward in your chair. If you can’t get excited about yourself, why should the employer?

The following questions all ask for the same thing: YOUR 30-Second Commercial, a short story about why you showed up for the interview. Some studies show that your interview is won or lost in the first minute of the interview so your better prepare for that first minute. Use the 30-Second Commercial when you’re asked any of these questions:

1. **Tell me about yourself (the most common)**
2. **Why do you want to work for this organization?**
3. **Explain how you would be an asset to this organization.**
4. **Why should we hire you?**
5. **Why do you think you would do well at this job?**
6. **Why should we take you over other people applying for this job?**
7. **What kind of worker are you?**
8. **If you were hiring a person for this job, what would you look for?**

These are all basically the same question. Prepare to talk for at least 30 seconds about who you are, why you’re there, what skills you possess, and why you’ll be an asset to the team. Be brief. An effective 30-second commercial should lead your interviewer to begin a deeper exploration of your claims and set the tone for a great interview.

**Even more stories…**

1. **What do you know about this organization?** This question is often one of the opening questions during an interview. If you screw this one up, you’re pretty much done before you’ve begun. Research the organization before the interview. Find out where they have been and where they are going. What are the current issues and who are the major players? What kinds of not-for-profit organizations do they support? How eco are they? Do you have a positive idea for the organization based on your research?
2. **What have you done to improve your knowledge in the last year?** Demonstrate improvement experiences that relate to the job. A course, education, conference, training, workshop, reading, or travel may impact on your job prospects. Show that you are a growing learner and that learning new ideas and skills are very important to you.
3. **Are you a team player?**  Teamwork is a HUGE need in companies. Have examples ready that show how you put team needs ahead of your personal needs. What is your philosophy of teamwork? Sports, music, work and volunteer experiences are good evidence of your team attitude if you explain them in a team context. Remember, teams set goals, work together, problem-solve, implement ideas and measure results. Talk about a great teamwork experience that delivers on some of these pieces.
4. **Explain/describe a problem that you solved at a workplace.** One of the criticisms of youth is that they can’t solve problems and quit during tough situations. Demonstrate that you are a problem-solver who can come up with innovative solutions to obstacles, difficulties orimpediments at a workplace. If you can describe a process that you use to solve problems, you will impress your employer with your sequential, practical skills.
5. **Tell me about a suggestion you have made.** This question also points to your problem-solving abilities. Have a good one ready. Be sure and use a suggestion that was accepted and was then considered successful. One related to the type of work applied for is a real plus.
6. **Are you a creative person?** **Can you offer an experience that demonstrates your creativity in action?** Don’t pull the “I’m not really creative” card. We are all creative in different ways. Show off your powers of imagination. Look to workplaces, home life, community activities. There is nothing more boring that a person who thinks they can’t use his/her imagination.
7. **What is your greatest strength?** Numerous answers are good, just stay positive. A few good examples: your ability to prioritize, your problem-solving skills, your ability to work under pressure, your ability to focus on projects, your professional expertise, your leadership skills, your positive attitude. Always, always have a story to show off the strength.
8. **What have you learned from mistakes on the job?** Here you have to come up with something or you strain credibility. Make it small, well intentioned mistake with a positive lesson learned. An example would be working too far ahead of colleagues on a project and thus throwing coordination off.
9. **What experience do you have in this field?** Speak about specifics that relate to the position you are applying for. If you do not have specific experience, get as close as you can.
10. **Tell me about your ability to work under pressure.** You may say that you thrive under certain types of pressure. Give an example that relates to the type of position applied for.
11. **What would your previous supervisor say your strongest point is?** There are numerous good possibilities: Loyalty, Energy, Positive attitude, Leadership, Team player, Expertise, Initiative, Patience, Hard work, Creativity, Problem solver. An example is recommended.
12. **Tell me about the most fun you have had on the job.** Talk about having fun by accomplishing something for the organization
13. **Tell me about a time when you helped resolve a dispute between others.** Pick a specific incident. Concentrate on your problem-solving technique and not the dispute you settled.
14. **Explain how you handle stress.** Come up with a stressful situation and describe how you worked through the situation to a positive conclusion. We all experience stress at various points in our lives. Find a story that shows off your ability to strive through stress, whether it’s the insane drive-thru window at the local fast food joint or the pressure of many assignments due at the same time in an educational experience.

**Tricky Questions that may Sink You**

**What irritates you about co-workers?** This is a trap question. Think real hard but fail to come up with anything that irritates you. A short statement that you seem to get along with folks is great, or that you put workplace goals ahead of personalities at workplaces.

**Tell me about a problem you had with a supervisor?** Biggest trap of all. This is a test to see if you will speak ill of your boss. If you fall for it and tell about a problem with a former boss, you may well blow the interview right there. Stay positive and develop a poor memory about any trouble with a supervisor.

**What do co-workers say about you?** Be prepared with a quote or two from co-workers. Either a specific statement or a paraphrase will work. Jill Clark, a co-worker at Smith Company, always said I was the hardest workers she had ever known. It is as powerful as Jill having said it at the interview herself. Would a past teacher speak glowingly about you?

**Why did you leave your last job?** Stay positive regardless of the circumstances. Never refer to a major problem with management and never speak ill of supervisors, co-workers or the organization. If you do, you will be the one looking bad. Keep smiling and talk about leaving for a positive reason such as an opportunity, a chance to do something special or other forward-looking reasons.

**Do you consider yourself successful?** You should always answer yes and briefly explain why. A good explanation is that you have set goals, and you have met some and are on track to achieve the others.

**Are you applying for other jobs?** Be honest. Hey, a person’s gotta eat. It’s okay to be applying for another job. But do not spend a lot of time in this area. For this interview, keep the focus on this job and what you can do for this organization. Don’t allow yourself to be distracted from the task at hand.

**Do you know anyone who works for us?** Be aware of the policy on relatives working for the organization. This can affect your answer even though they asked about friends not relatives. Be careful to mention a friend only if they are well thought of.

**What kind of salary do you need?** A loaded question. A nasty little game that you will probably lose if you answer first. So, do not answer it. Instead, say something like, That’s a tough question. Can you tell me the range for this position? In most cases, the interviewer, taken off guard, will tell you. If not, say that it can depend on the details of the job. Then give a wide range.

**How long would you expect to work for us if hired?** How would you know? Be honest and say something like this: I’d like it to be a long time. Or As long as we both feel I’m doing a good job.

**Have you ever been asked to leave a position?** If you have not, say no. If you have, be honest, brief and avoid saying negative things about the people or organization involved.

**Tell me about your dream job.** Stay away from a specific job. You cannot win. If you say the job you are contending for is it, you sound like a kiss-up. If you say another job is it, you sound like you’re “settling” for the position if hired. The best is to stay genetic and say something like: A job where I love the work, like the people, can contribute and where I can‘t wait to jump out of bed and get to work.

**What kind of person would you refuse to work with?** Do not be trivial. It would take disloyalty to the organization, violence or lawbreaking to get you to object. Minor objections will label you as a whiner.

**What is more important to you: the money or the work?** Money is always important, but the work is the most important. There is no better answer.

**Why did you leave your last job?** or **Why is there a gap in your employment record?** If you were fired or dismissed, this is tough to answer.You may speak about philosophical differences at the job site with your boss or a co-worker, but try to slyly stickhandle around silly behaviours on your part such as being frequently sick or late, or offering poor productivity, and if you really exhibited those behaviours, you better change your tune quickly if you get hired again. Don’t be negative. Avoid reactive statements such as “I hated my job” or “The working environment sucked”. You can refer to poor work experiences in these ways: Not enough of a challenge; downsizing after losing a key contract; lack of responsibility and growth opportunities.

**What motivates you to do your best on the job?** This is a personal trait that only you can say, but good examples include Teamwork Projects, Challenge, Achievement, Recognition, Promotional Opportunities.

**Are you willing to work overtime? Nights? Weekends?** This is up to you. Be totally honest.

**Would you be willing to relocate if required?** You should be clear on this, especially if you have a family. Do not say yes just to get the job if the real answer is no. This can create a lot of problems later on in your career. Be honest at this point and save yourself future grief.

**Are you willing to put the interests of the organization ahead of your own?** This is a straight loyalty and dedication question. Do not worry about the deep ethical and philosophical implications. Just say yes.

**How do you propose to compensate for your lack of experience?** First, if you have experience that the interviewer does not know about, bring that up: Then, point out (if true) that you are a hard-working quick learner. Emphasize that you’ll be the first to arrive and the last to leave, that you’re up for the challenge, that you’ll be one of the hard-working employees in the company. Remember, if you have no real experience, all you have is your great attitude and work ethic; they better shine in the interview.

**What qualities do you look for in a boss?** Be generic and positive. Safe qualities are knowledgeable, a sense of humor, fair, loyal to subordinates and holder of high standards. If you are adventurous enough, mention that you look forward to great challenges and you enjoy solving problems – points that many employers say are lacking in young people.

**Describe your work ethic.** Emphasize benefits to the organization. Things like, determination to get the job done and work hard but enjoy your work are good.

**What has been your biggest professional disappointment?** Be sure that you refer to something that was beyond your control. Show acceptance and no negative feelings.

**Prepare to ask questions during YOUR interview**

**Do you have any questions for me?** Always, always have some questions prepared. Make sure your questions demonstrate your keen interest in the job.

1. Where will I be an asset to the organization?
2. How soon will I be able to be productive?
3. What type of projects will I be able to assist on?
4. Can you tell me ore about the day-to-day responsibilities of the job?
5. What are your expectations for this role during the first 30 days? For the year?
6. Where do you think the company is headed in the next 5 years?
7. Who do you consider our top competitor and why?
8. What are the biggest challenges facing the company/department right now?
9. What is a typical career path for someone in this role?
10. What types of professional growth opportunities exist in the company for an employee?
11. Does the company connect to non-profit organizations? How?

**AT THE VERY LEAST, YOU MUST ASK:**

1. What are the next steps in the interview process?
2. When you think you’ll make a decision for this role? (important for follow-up emails or communication)

**NB**: DO NOT ask Schmegley-type questions that demonstrate you have not researched the company: “So what do you do around here anyways?” will sink your ship quickly.