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Successful Interviews

a comprehensive business English study guide for job interviews in English



**Includes:
PDF eBook,
Audio Book,
& Online
Activities**

Successful Interviews

A comprehensive business English study guide to job interviews in English

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Successful Interviews

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BEP 301 – Job Interviews: Introduction

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Hello my name is Jennifer. Together with my colleague Clayton, we'll be your hosts of this e-book on the language and skills of job interviews.

People often ask me, "What is the secret to a successful job interview?" Well, I don't have any secrets, but I do have some general guidelines that we can follow during any interview to ensure the greatest chance of success. And, in addition, I know some common types of questions that you are likely to face, and how you can prepare for them.



This is the first part in our e-book series on job interviews. In this episode, we will introduce eight main themes – that is, the general guidelines or tips that we will be exploring over this series. Then, in subsequent episodes, we will zoom in on different language, interview formats, and question types.

The dialog we will hear in this episode is one where nearly everything that can go wrong does go wrong. Most of us, including me, have had interviews that didn't go as well as we'd have liked them to have gone. But none of us are likely to have been as unlucky as the main character, Alexander Novak, is in today's listening.

Alexander is a foreign student in London who has just finished his Master's degree in philosophy. Now he's looking for a job to start paying back his student debt. A job search agency has arranged an interview for him as a supervisor in an electronics retail store. When Alex was a child he used to help his uncle, who managed a similar store back in Alex's home of the Czech Republic. Michael, the store assistant manager, is interviewing him.

As it's quite a long dialog, we will listen to it in parts. After each part, we will discuss some of the major mistakes Alex makes.

During this lesson, we will mainly be focusing on skills instead of language. But be sure to check out the study notes for a list of vocabulary explanations and a full transcript of this episode.

Let's begin. As you listen to the first part, see if you can identify some of the major areas where Alex goes wrong.

Michael: So, Alexander, have a seat. How are you doing today?

Alexander: Well, to tell you the truth, it's been kind of a bad day.

Michael: Oh? Sorry to hear that.

Alexander: Yes. Well, it's raining. I don't really like rainy days.

Michael: I see. Right. So how about on a good day? What do you like to do in your spare time?

Alexander: I like reading and er, watching TV.

Michael: Really? What's your favorite TV show?

Alexander: Mr. Bean. He's so funny – like the one with the Christmas turkey – did you see that? He reminds me of a lot of the people I meet here. British people are so funny, you know?

Michael: Yes... they can be. Okay, so let's get down to business.

Right away, Alex starts off on the wrong foot. The question "How are you doing today?", is only meant as a polite greeting, but Alex responds seriously, as if he was talking to a good friend. He is guilty of being too informal. That is the first theme that we will look at in this series – ***Don't let your guard down*** – that is, be appropriately formal even when an interviewer appears very casual, and tries to set you at ease. In his discussion of his hobbies and his description of British people as "funny," like Mr. Bean, Alex continues to make this mistake. And, unfortunately, he carries on in a joking tone even when Michael, his interviewer, has started the first formal question of the interview, "Tell me about your previous experience."

Alexander: My uncle managed a state-owned electronics company, and I helped him a lot as a kid. I would be perfect for this job.

Michael: That was in the Czech Republic?

Alexander: That's right.

Michael: Okay. That sounds good.

Alexander: Except back then, it was not like "customer is king", know what I mean?

Michael: Er right. We always try to put the customer first.

Alexander: Yeah, I was just kidding. Me too, of course.

Some humor is okay, but Alex misses an important opportunity to talk seriously about his experience. Maintaining an appropriate level of formality is a key part of your professional image. Alex obviously has a problem with this point.

What is the next big mistake Alex makes in the interview?

Michael: Right. Got that. So, what do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Alexander: I think my greatest achievement is comprehending Klima's masterwork, *World as Consciousness and Nothing*.

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Michael: Okay.

Alexander: In this book he argues that everything exists only because we will it to exist. You see, he means that you, I, everyone – we are all God. Do you understand?

Along with the question about previous experience, you can almost count on getting some form of the question, “What is your greatest accomplishment?” **Provide good examples** is, therefore, the next theme, or key skill, that we will emphasize in this series.

Alex, however, misses this opportunity to give details about his strengths as an employee. If presented correctly, his academic experience could demonstrate maturity, the ability to carry a project through to the end, and good communication skills. Yet, Alex confuses the job interview for a philosophical discussion.

What happens next?

Michael: Uh, yes, got that. Uh, Alexander, do you think this is really the right job for you? Are you sure you can handle it?

Alexander: Are you kidding? No problem. You should try reading Klima. *That's hard work.*

In this context, Alex's confidence is misplaced, because it is not based on real-world experience that applies to his job. Again, he fails to emphasize the real skills he developed during his university education – communication, project management, and so on. Therefore, his tone sounds too confident – *overconfident* – which is another theme of this series – **Don't be overconfident.**

Let's look at a few more of the problems that he faces.

Another typical interview question that you are likely to get asked in some form is “What is your greatest weakness?” So, again, it's important to be prepared for this.

What does Alex say?

Michael: So, moving on now... What's your greatest weakness?

Alexander: Ah, Michael, for me... I like the simple things in life. Material things don't interest me much. My personal freedom is much more important than being rich.

Michael: I see.

Alexander: I guess that's why I'm working in an electronics store, and not on Wall Street!

Michael: Yeah, great. I guess that's why we're all working here....

Alexander's response to this question is another missed opportunity. It may truly be that he sees as one of his greatest weaknesses the fact that he doesn't care enough about money and material things. But he needs to put this in a positive light by thinking about it from the *employer's* point of view. Actually, from the employer's perspective, it's quite good to have an employee who is, for example, more focused on human relationships and on achieving results than on personal financial gains. But Alex fails to put his weakness in this positive light.

Thus, **Be positive** is another theme in this series. Putting things in a positive light by considering the interviewer's or the employer's point of view – this is a very important general guideline that we should follow in all parts of the interview.

What's Michael's next question?

Michael: So... now, here's a tough one. If you see an old lady stealing, what would you do?

Alexander: Hmm. That's a very interesting question. Well, I would think about it first. Because she could be a very poor old lady. On the other hand, it's probably not right that she's stealing. So the matter needs further consideration. I would probably go and discuss it with you!

Michael: Mh hmm. Well, that's one way of handling it.

This is a kind of moral dilemma, that is a question that requires us to decide between right and wrong. Such questions are an important type of query that interviewers make to explore the interviewee's [*sic* interviewer] character. Furthermore, a moral dilemma is part of a more general type of question, called a stress question, which can include problems or puzzles that put the interviewee [*sic* interviewer] on the spot, that is, require him or her to think quickly. It's quite important to keep cool and calm, give yourself some time to think, and respond to these types of questions in an organized, easy-to-understand way.

So, **Don't panic** is another important theme that we will explore in this series. Even if you cannot answer the question completely, you can describe the way in which you would approach the problem, and do so in a systematic way.

Alexander, of course, sounds a little panicked when he answers; he doesn't seem to be able to make up his mind about what to do. Also, as he has done with previous queries, he continues to make the mistake of turning the question into more of an intellectual issue rather than a business one.

In a way, Alex faces some of the same problems in the next question Michael asks:

Michael: Now, here's another hypothetical question. Say we have two lines of LCD's.

Alexander: Two lines of LCD's...

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Michael: That's right. One sells very well; the other one is a cheaper price, but it doesn't sell as well because the brand is not as well-known. What can we do to increase sales of the second brand?

Alexander: Ah! The problem is quite clear.

Michael: Good. What's your suggestion?

Alexander: So, in life, there are trustworthy things and untrustworthy things. And everything is so because we will it to be so. I'd say, just put them in the front of the shop, right in the window, or, just cut the price or something. In this case what is required is taking practical action, instead of speculation.

Michael: Uh huh. It sounds like you have some good ideas in there.

Michael is just being polite, isn't he? In fact, what Alex said didn't really make sense at all.

This time, Michael has given Alex a technical, problem-based question. But Alex responds in a disorganized fashion. It's very difficult to follow his main idea. He is failing to signpost, or link his ideas. There is little feeling of a main thought or a concluding point. Between one thought and another, Alex needs to **Connect the dots**; this is the next general guideline we will be talking about over the course of the series.

How does the interview finish? There's one final question that you can expect in almost any interview, that is, "Do you have any questions for me?" That's why it's a basic principle of interviewing skills to prepare at least two or three good questions that you can ask your potential employer. How does Alex do in this respect?

Michael: Great. Well, we're just about finished. Do you have any questions for me?

Alexander: No. Thank you. No questions.

Michael: Great! Well....

Alexander: Wait! Just one question. I forgot. My bus leaves here at 5:15. Can I leave 15 minutes early every day?

Michael: Uhuh... Why don't we just take one thing at a time...

Once more, Alexander misses a great opportunity to show that he is a serious candidate by asking thoughtful questions. Instead, he seems selfish because all he does is think about his own interests. In addition, he really sounds overconfident or arrogant because he almost acts as if he has already gotten the job. Obviously, Alexander failed to prepare adequately by getting questions ready for his interviewer or, for that matter, by getting ready for any part of the interview. As a final addition to our list of themes or general guidelines for this series on interviewing, **Prepare** is a very important tip to emphasize.

Finally, one type of question that Alex does not face during the interview (probably because Michael is already convinced that he is not the right candidate) is salary expectations, that is, how much money the candidate would expect to make. For questions of salary, there is, of course, an important tip to keep in mind: **Don't sell yourself short.** That is, don't take less than you are worth, and don't close off or restrict your options before you have enough information to make a good decision. This is the final theme we will be exploring during the series.

Again, it's important to point out that none of us have probably made all the mistakes that Alex did in this interview, nor have we made them quite to this large of a degree. But we have all probably been guilty, at one time or another, of not following at least some of the guidelines that we have just introduced.

Now, let's review the eight themes we have just looked at one by one. I will present them in the order that they will be covered during the rest of the episodes in this e-book:

1. Don't let your guard down.
2. Provide examples.
3. Be positive.
4. Don't panic.
5. Prepare.
6. Don't be overconfident.
7. Connect the dots. And
8. Don't sell yourself short.

In the episodes that follow, we will look at these themes one by one, and discuss how they apply to specific interview questions and formats. To get a wide picture of different interview situations, we'll be following Alex and two quite different job candidates – one at the entry-level, and one at the manager-level – as they go through different interview processes.

Be sure to check the website at www.businessenglishpod.com for the study notes and online exercises for this e-book series.

Thanks for listening.

BEP 302 – Previous Experience (Part 1)

This is the first in a two-part series on discussing your previous experience in a job interview. It is one of a longer sequence of podcasts that will focus on the complete interview process.

When you sit down to start a job interview, more than likely you will be a little nervous. Interviewers have a variety of techniques to get you to relax and to feel at ease. Usually, they will make some small talk and generally try to lighten the atmosphere. One of the biggest mistakes you can make, however, is to interpret this friendliness as an invitation to be informal.

Another reason interviewers try to get you to relax is to make you drop your defenses so they can see “the real you.” That’s why successful job hunters will tell you, ***Don’t let your guard down!*** – that is, don’t lower all your defenses. That’s the main message of this lesson – the first of eight themes we’ll be exploring during this and future episodes on the topic of job interviews.

In this episode, we’ll be examining a bad example of what *not* to do. Since previous experience usually comes up at the beginning of an interview, we’ll look at the casual discussion that takes place when an interview starts. Then, in the next episode, we’ll hear a good example, and we’ll focus more closely on further language for highlighting your experience.

Let’s turn to the listening. In this bad example, Alexander, who has recently graduated with a Master’s degree in philosophy, is being interviewed by Michael for a job as assistant manager at an electronics store.



Listening Questions

1) Is everything Alex says clear and to the point?

2) Does he seem overly friendly or informal at times?

3) How does Alex account for the gap in his résumé?

Vocabulary

"Don't let your guard down!": "Guard" means defense. To let one's guard down is to lower one's defense. For example, boxers use their hands to guard their face. If they lower their hands (let their guard down), they are easy to hurt. This idiom is used to warn people to be careful in many situations. "The new boss seems like a nice guy, but don't let your guard down around him."

"To tell you the truth...": This phrase is used to introduce a comment that you believe your listener will find surprising or unusual, similar to "actually." "I know I own a cigar store, but, to tell you the truth, I don't smoke."

Gap: A period of time when you weren't working or weren't doing something job related. A gap can also be a hole or a space between two things. "She's got a pretty big gap in her résumé – almost two years."

Spare time: Free time. "Since my job is so busy, I don't have a lot of spare time."

To get down to business: To get the business part of a discussion started. "Okay, enough small talk. Let's get down to business."

State-owned: Refers to a company that is owned by a state (the government).

The customer is king: This old saying refers to the sales and service mentality of treating the customer like an honored or special person. "In our line of business, the customer is king; unfortunately, this also helps create in customers some unrealistic expectations."

To put the customer first: To put something first means to make it the first priority. "We don't have much time before the deadline, so I suggest we put the most important things first; otherwise, we'll never finish."

Thesis: 1) A long research paper written at the end of a Master's or PhD degree. 2) A line of argument. "It took me nearly two years to write my thesis."

Novelist: Someone who writes novels. "Dostoevsky was a famous Russian novelist."

Short-term work: A job that does not last a long time. "It was years after I graduated before I was able to find a full-time **job**; before then, I was always doing short-term contract work."

To see the world through someone else's eyes: Refers to having empathy, that is, the ability to understand another person's perspective on life. "Before you judge him too harshly, try to look at the world through his eyes."

Avid: Enthusiastic, very interested. "He's an avid dancer – he takes dance classes three days a week and goes dancing every weekend."

To be a big fan of: To like or enjoy something very much. "I'm a big fan of cutting down use of email and meeting face-to-face more often."

To be enthusiastic about something: To be very interested in something and to enjoy it very much. "He's very enthusiastic about the new project – he can't stop talking about it."

To blow off steam: To perform activities to get rid of stress or anger and to relax. "To blow off steam, I like to play tennis – hitting those balls really hard is great for dealing with anger and stress."

Intramural: "Intramural" refers to activities, usually sports, between groups at a college or university. "When I was in college, I played intramural football."

Work ethic: Your attitude toward your work (good or bad). "He has a very good work ethic – he comes in every day on time and works late."

To get sidetracked: To get distracted from the main activity or to move off the main topic in a discussion. "We were doing a great job focusing on our core business until we got sidetracked last year with this new line of products."

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Dialog

Michael: So, Alexander, have a seat. How are you doing today?

Alexander: Well, to tell you the truth, it's been kind of a bad day.

Michael: Oh? Sorry to hear that.

Alexander: Yes. Well, it's raining. I don't really like rainy days.

Michael: I see. Right. So how about on a good day? What do you like to do in your spare time?

Alexander: I like reading and er... watching TV.

Michael: What's your favorite TV show?

Alexander: Mr. Bean. He's so funny – like the one with the Christmas Turkey – did you see that? He reminds me of a lot of the people I meet here. British people are so funny, you know?

Michael: Yes... they can be. Okay, well, let's get down to business. Can you tell me a little about your previous experience?

Alexander: My uncle managed a state-owned electronics company, and I helped him a lot as a kid. I would be perfect for this job.

Michael: That was in the Czech Republic?

Alexander: That's right.

Michael: Okay. That sounds good.

Alexander: Except back then in the Czech Republic, it was not like "customer is king" - you know what I mean?

Michael: Right... We do try to put the customer first.

Alexander: Yeah, I was just kidding. Me too, of course.

Michael: Okay. I just saw a little gap here in your résumé... eighteen months... what were you doing?

Alexander: I was finishing my Master's thesis on Ladislav Klíma, the Czech novelist and philosopher. It was the most important thing in the world for me, so I had to take some time out.

Michael: That's interesting.

Alexander: Yes, you know, and Ladislav Klíma is my hero. He only ever took on short-term work, so I wanted to see the world through his eyes.

Michael: Right. Got that.

Debrief

Thus far Alex has done little to help his chances of getting his job and much to hurt them. Of course, none of us are likely to make *all* the mistakes Alexander has made, at least not all in the same interview, but we all have probably made at least *some* of these mistakes. So his experience is quite useful to us in analyzing what can go wrong and how to avoid it.

Now, let's go over the interview in detail and discuss how Alex could improve. How does the dialog begin?

Michael: So, Alexander, have a seat. How are you doing today?

Alexander: Well, to tell you the truth, it's been kind of a bad day.

Michael: Oh? Sorry to hear that.

Why don't we stop there for a second. Alex replies too honestly – too informally – to Michael's attempt at friendly small talk. "How are you doing today?" is meant simply as a greeting; therefore, Michael's reply that it's been "a bad day" is not really relevant; if anything, it will leave a bad impression on the interviewer.

What are standard ways to respond to polite small talk at the beginning of the interview?

Interview small talk

A: How are you doing today, Sam?

B: Fine, thank you. And you?

C: Please have a seat.

D: Thank you.

A: Thanks for coming.

B: The pleasure's all mine. I'm really looking forward to this opportunity to talk with you.

C: Did you have any trouble finding us?

D: No trouble at all, thank you. Your directions were very helpful.

A: What can I get you? Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?

B: Thank you. Actually, just a cup of water would be great, if it's not any trouble.

Of course, it's okay to show some style and humor; however, using standard responses – especially at the beginning of the interview – can help ensure everything gets off to a good start.

Now, let's turn back to the dialog.

Michael: So how about on a good day? What do you like to do in your spare time?

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Alexander: I like reading and er... watching TV.

Michael: What's your favorite TV show?

Alexander: Mr. Bean. He's so funny – like the one with the Christmas Turkey – did you see that? He reminds me of a lot of the people I meet here. British people are so funny, you know?

Michael: Yes... they can be.

Alex is very talkative, and seems to be saying anything that comes to mind.

Again, although Alexander may be expressing his true opinion, he seems to be forgetting that he is in a job interview. By asking small talk questions, Michael is just trying to get Alexander to relax, but Alex seems to be going to the other extreme by *letting his guard down* too much.

Though hobbies and personal background don't always come up at the beginning of the interview like in this one, they will probably become a topic of discussion at some point because your interviewer usually wants to get a picture of you as a *whole person*. Therefore, it's good to be prepared to discuss your leisure activities in a way that reflects positively on your overall character and professionalism.

Let's listen to a few examples of suitable answers to such questions.

A: How about when you're not interviewing? What do you usually do on a Saturday?

B: Actually I'm an avid golfer. It's a great way to get some fresh air and meet people.

A: Surely you're not working *all* of the time.

B: Of course not. I do enjoy blowing off some steam in the gym, and I participate in intramural sports on the weekends.

A: What kind of leisure activities do you prefer?

B: Well, like most people, I enjoy movies and music, but I'm also a big fan of books.

Words like "avid," "big fan of," "enjoy," and "enthusiastic about," can help give interviewers a positive impression of a well-rounded, passionate individual. "Blow off steam" means to relieve tension and stress. "Intramural" refers to activities, usually sports, between groups at a college or university.

So far Michael, the interviewer, has attempted to create a good atmosphere with some casual discussion. Now he asks the first actual question about Alex's work history.

Michael: Okay, well, let's get down to business. Can you tell me a little about your previous experience?

Alexander: My uncle managed a state-owned electronics company, and I helped him a lot as a kid. I would be perfect for this job.

Michael: That was in the Czech Republic?

Alexander: That's right.

Michael: Okay. That sounds good.

Alexander: Except back then in the Czech Republic, it was not like "customer is king" - you know what I mean?

Michael: Right... We do try to put the customer first.

Alexander: Yeah, I was just kidding. Me too, of course.

Because it casts doubt on Alexander's attitude toward basic principles of professional behavior, this attempt at humor is likely to work against him. It's okay to make jokes; but instead of drawing attention to your weaknesses, they should reflect well on your personality and highlight your strengths.

We should focus on the positive aspects of our experience, and attempt to portray it in a way that emphasizes the benefit to the employer. This is a good tip for anyone, but it's especially important for someone with little actual work experience, like Alex. What would have been a better way for him to respond?

- I have a good understanding of this type of business gained through years of experience.
- I've got a lot of hands-on experience in retail management.
- I've always been interested in electronics.
- I have a strong willingness and drive to learn.

Michael: Okay. I just saw a little gap here in your résumé... eighteen months... what were you doing?

Alexander: I was finishing my Master's thesis on Ladislav Klíma, the Czech novelist and philosopher. It was the most important thing in the world for me, so I had to take some time out.

Michael: That's interesting.

Alexander: Yes, you know, and Ladislav Klíma is my hero. He only ever took on short-term work, so I wanted to see the world through his eyes.

Michael: Right. Got that.

Having completed a Master's thesis is no small accomplishment. With a little thought, it would have been easy for Alexander to use this success to emphasize positive aspects of his character and work ethic. Instead, Alex gets sidetracked by mistaking the interview for an academic discussion.

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In Part 2 of Previous Experience we will look in more detail at dealing with gaps in your résumé by emphasizing the positive. Now, we'll just focus briefly on portraying academic experience to employers. How can you highlight useful skills that you have gained during your studies?

- Beside the theoretical knowledge I've gained, I've also learned a lot of practical skills.
- Through writing my thesis I've learned about how to be rigorous, how to work in a team, and how to operate under tight deadline pressures.
- Working part-time while going to university has taught me a lot about time management and balancing priorities.

Okay let's practice some of the things we've learned today.

First, we'll focus on two common small talk exchanges that can occur at the beginning of an interview. In a series of two short dialogs, you'll be asked questions by your interviewer. Respond after the beeps. Remember to keep your responses brief and to the point. Don't let your guard down!

Dialog A

Interviewer: How're you doing today?

Learner: _____

Interviewer: Great, thanks. Did you have any trouble finding us?

Learner: _____

Dialog B

Interviewer: Please have a seat. Would you like a glass of water?

Learner: _____

Interviewer: So, what do you think of our office?

Learner: _____

How did that go – were you able to come up with some brief but polite responses? Let's hear example answers. Keep in mind, of course, that there are many possible variations. The important thing is to respond appropriately.

Example Answer 1

Interviewer: How're you doing today?

Learner: Fine, thank you and you?

Interviewer: Great, thanks. Did you have any trouble finding us?

Learner: No, no trouble at all, thank you.

Example Answer 2

Interviewer: Please have a seat. Would you like a glass of water?

Learner: Yes, thank you, that's very kind.

Interviewer: So, what do you think of our office?

Learner: From what I've seen so far, I like it a lot.

Another great way to practice is to write out dialogs, or role play them with friends.

Now, in the second practice, let's review some of the collocations, or word partnerships, we learned today with a technique called "gap reading." You'll hear a series of sentences. One word in each sentence is blanked out with a beep. Repeat the sentence, but say the missing word. For example, if you hear, "I've always been **<beep>** in electronics," you'll say, "I've always been interested in electronics," Let's begin.

Cue 1: Working part-time while going to university has taught me a lot about **<beep>** management and balancing priorities.

Learner: _____

Cue 2: Beside the theoretical knowledge I've gained I've also learned a lot of **<beep>** skills.

Learner: _____

Cue 3: I have a strong willingness and **<beep>** to learn.

Learner: _____

Cue 4: I've got a lot of **<beep>** experience in retail management.

Learner: _____

Answer 1: Working part-time while going to university has taught me a lot about **time management** and **balancing priorities**.

Answer 2: Beside the theoretical knowledge I've gained I've also learned a lot of **practical** skills.

Answer 3: I have a strong willingness and **drive** to learn.

Answer 4: I have a lot of **hands-on** experience in retail management.

To build your memory, it's good to go back and try the practice again. After a couple of times, I'm sure you'll be able to use all this great, vivid language for discussing your interests and work history with fluency and confidence.

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In this lesson, we've examined the do's and don'ts for the beginning of a job interview under the theme, ***Don't let your guard down.*** And we've learned that thinking about how to portray your previous experience is an important part of the preparation work that we should do before an interview begins. Along with weaknesses, strengths, and accomplishments – which we'll be dealing with in later episodes – your past work life is almost certain to be a topic of discussion. As we've seen, even if you are a student, you can use your university experience to draw attention to your advantages as an employee.

In Part 2 of Previous Experience, we will hear a good example of a successful response, and we will focus on specific language and strategies for highlighting experience and for turning weaknesses into strengths.

Thank you for listening!

Study Strategy

What useful skills have you gained through your studies or on-the-job training that will be of benefit to a potential future employer? Divide a piece of paper into two columns. In the right column, make a list of at least five such beneficial skills. In the left column, list the benefits. Make sure the benefits you are listing are not *to you* but rather *to the employer* – try to see things from the employer's eyes. This exercise helps to develop your awareness and remind you of your strongest *selling points*.

Next, use some of the language we learned today as well as your own ideas to make sentences describing your skills. Another great way to practice is to record yourself and play back the recording. How do you sound? Confident? Excited? Nervous? Get feedback from a friend.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Quiz](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Gap-fill](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Small Talk & Talking About Hobbies](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) – Highlighting Skills & Emphasizing Benefits](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Starting the Interview](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Vocabulary Review](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 1\) - Vocabulary Flashcards](#)

Language Review**A. Interview small talk**

Review interview small talk by matching the sentences on the left with the replies on the right. After you've finished and checked your answers, you may want to try this idea for further practice: Using these mini-dialogs as starters, write a complete dialog for the beginning of an interview.

1) How are you doing today, Sam?	A) Thank you.
2) What can I get you? Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?	B) Of course not. I do enjoy blowing off some steam in the gym.
3) What kind of leisure activities do you prefer?	C) No trouble at all, thank you. Your directions were very helpful.
4) Did you have any trouble finding us?	D) Fine, thank you. And you?
5) Thanks for coming.	E) The pleasure's all mine. I'm really looking forward to this opportunity to talk with you.
6) How about when you're not interviewing? What do you usually do on a Saturday?	F) Thank you. Actually, just a cup of water would be great, if it's not any trouble.
7) Please have a seat.	G) Well, like most people, I enjoy movies and music, but I'm also a big fan of books.
8) Surely you're not working <i>all</i> of the time.	H) On the weekends I like to play golf. It's a great way to get some fresh air and meet people.

B. Useful Language Review

Fill in the blanks in the following sentences with words from the box.

priorities	thesis	hands-on	deadline	willingness
part-time	understanding	interested	theoretical	gained

Emphasizing the benefit to the potential employer

- I have a good _____ of this type of business _____ through years of experience.
- I've got a lot of _____ experience in retail management.
- I've always been _____ in electronics.
- I have a strong _____ and drive to learn.

Highlighting useful skills gained during studies

- Beside the _____ knowledge I've gained, I've also learned a lot of practical skills.
- Through writing my _____ I've learned about how to work in a team, and how to operate under tight _____ pressures.
- Working _____ while going to university has taught me a lot about time management and balancing _____.

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) No, it isn't. He responds inappropriately to Michael's greeting "How are you doing?" with a serious response we might only expect from a good friend. He also seems to mistake the interview for an academic discussion by discussing his Master's thesis in too much detail.
- 2) As already indicated, Michael seems to be overly informal, or at least overly talkative. The jokes he makes do not present his skills or personality in the best light. He seems to say anything that comes into his head, which detracts from his professional image.
- 3) He maintains that his Master's thesis was the most important thing in the world to him, which may raise his potential employer's doubts about his dedication to any future job.

Language Review

A. Interview small talk

- 1) D. 2) F. 3) G. 4) C. 5) E. 6) H. 7) A. 8) B.

Completed dialogs

A: How are you doing today, Sam?

B: Fine, thank you. And you?

A: Please have a seat.

B: Thank you.

A: Thanks for coming.

B: The pleasure's all mine. I'm really looking forward to this opportunity to talk with you.

A: Did you have any trouble finding us?

B: No trouble at all, thank you. Your directions were very helpful.

A: What can I get you? Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?

B: Thank you. Actually, just a cup of water would be great, if it's not any trouble.

B. Useful Language Review

Emphasizing the benefit to the potential employer

1. I have a good **understanding** of this type of business **gained** through years of experience.
2. I've got a lot of **hands-on** experience in retail management.
3. I've always been **interested** in electronics.
4. I have a strong **willingness** and drive to learn.

Highlighting useful skills gained during studies

1. Beside the **theoretical** knowledge I've gained, I've also learned a lot of practical skills.
2. Through writing my **thesis** I've learned about how to work in a team, and how to operate under tight **deadline** pressures.
3. Working **part-time** while going to university has taught me a lot about time management and balancing **priorities**.

BEP 303 - Previous Experience (Part 2)

This is the second in a two-part series on discussing previous experience in job interviews. It is one of an ongoing sequence of podcasts that covers the whole interview process.

In the first part of this series, we examined a bad example of everything that can go wrong when we talk about our previous experience. We used the theme ***Don't let your guard down!*** to highlight the importance of maintaining an appropriate level of formality and professionalism, even when the interviewer is attempting to strike a casual tone.

In Part 2 today, we listen to a better interview performance by someone who has prepared to talk about their previous experience more effectively. In this good example, Sherry Shen, from Hong Kong, is interviewing with a multinational accounting company for her first job after graduating with a Master's in finance.

It's her first round of interviews, and she is being asked all the standard questions by an HR officer. Although Sherry is an all-around good candidate, her résumé has some problems. Her grades aren't great, and there is a gap with no employment between her college and graduate school careers.

As you listen, focus on the following questions.



Listening Questions

- 1) Does Sherry let her guard down, or does she answer briefly and to-the-point with an appropriate level of formality?

- 2) Does Sherry seem well-prepared to talk about her experience?

- 3) How does Sherry account for the gap in her résumé?

Successful Interviews

Vocabulary

To start on the wrong foot: To make a bad start. "You need to prepare thoroughly to avoid starting off on the wrong foot."

Spot on (to be): (Informal). To be very accurate or correct. "We were spot on with our projections last year, the final results were almost identical to those we projected."

Extensive experience with/in sth: Common collocation, or word partnership. "She has extensive experience programming and managing large databases."

To excel in sth: To do very, very well in sth. "She excels in getting people to actively participate in the discussion; everyone has something to say when she chairs the meeting."

Software packages: Sometimes called a software suite. A collection of software with complementary functions that work together seamlessly. "Adobe Creative suite is the leading software package for graphic and web design."

Hands-on courses: "Hands-on" means practical. A hands-on course in university is a course that teaches you something that can be applied in the real world. "In addition to theoretical courses, I also took a series of hands-on laboratory courses."

Audit: (Noun or verb). The practice of examining the financial records of a company or individual. "Last year we got audited by head office, and they spent weeks looking through all our records."

Internship: Unpaid temporary employment for a university student or recent graduate; the goal of the employee is to acquire work experience. "She had internships at some top companies, but she still found it difficult to get a full time job."

Team effort: (Common collocation, or word partnership). "Getting this job done is too much for one person; it's going to require a team effort."

To face clients: Also, to face customers. This refers to work or a position that requires employees to interact directly with clients. "Client-facing" is the adjective. "It's very important for all of our customer-facing staff to have good levels of English."

To take time out: This refers to taking a break during your study or work career, or between university and your first job. "After graduation, I took some time out to decide what I really wanted to do."

Time management: The practice or skill of using time efficiently. "Time management is an extremely important skill for successful managers to have; without it, they will never get all their work done and burn out quickly."

Every cloud has a silver lining: (Idiom). Means that even bad events have a good side. "Well, I had to work overtime last night, so I didn't get to watch the big game. But every cloud has a silver lining – at least I avoided drinking any alcohol last night."

Mature: (Verb or adjective). Become older and wiser. "Because she had to take care of her two younger brothers, she matured quickly."

Dialog

Interviewer (HR Officer): So, Sherry, how're you doing today?

Sherry: Fine, thank you. And you?

Interviewer: Not bad, thanks. Did you find us okay?

Sherry: Yes, no problem – your directions were spot on.

Interviewer: Great, because it can be a little tricky getting here by MTR. All right. Well, let's get started. Perhaps you can begin by telling me a little about your previous experience?

Sherry: Of course. In my course work and internships, I've had extensive experience with both the theoretical and practical aspects of accounting, and I excel in both areas.

Interviewer: Really? Can you give me some examples?

Sherry: Well, I've taken two advanced applied mathematics courses on risk analysis. They were very challenging, but I managed to get in the top 10% of both classes.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Sherry: But at the same time, in our more hands-on courses, I've also become familiar with many of the leading software packages – particularly the @RISK suite for Excel and ACL for audit analysis.

Interviewer: That's good. We use @RISK for analysis here too.

Sherry: And in my internship last year at the Armstrong Associates, I got to apply these analytical skills. I worked on an audit of a Fortune 500 company.

Interviewer: Yes, I saw that on your résumé. So in what ways did you benefit from this experience?

Sherry: Well, though as an intern my responsibilities were limited, this was a great opportunity to participate in a team effort and to learn practical knowledge about how to face clients.

Interviewer: Great... Now, can you tell me about this gap in your résumé? It looks like you took two years out between college and graduate school.

Sherry: Yes, actually, I had a baby in 2003, a little girl. It was very important to me that she had a good start in life, so I took two years out after she was born. My family helps me to take care of her, but it's taught me a lot about time management.

Interviewer: I bet – children can be a handful!

Sherry: Indeed, but it certainly made me mature faster than most of my classmates. And despite these extra challenges – or perhaps even because of them – I have had quite a successful grad school career. I am always working hard to do my best, so I am confident I will continue to succeed in the future.

Successful Interviews

Debrief

Sherry is off to a good start in the interview. She maintains a proper level of formality in her replies, even when the interviewer tries to set her at ease with some chit-chat at the beginning. Also, Sherry is prepared to discuss her experience; even though she has no real work record, she can talk convincingly about how achieving university successes and overcoming life challenges make her a strong candidate.

First, let's review how Sherry handles the small talk at the beginning of the dialog.

Interviewer (HR Officer): So, Sherry, how're you doing today?

Sherry: Fine, thank you. And you?

Interviewer: Not bad, thanks. Did you find us okay?

Sherry: Yes, no problem – your directions were spot on.

Interviewer: Great, because it can be a little tricky getting here by MTR. All right. Well, let's get started.

Sherry keeps her responses polite, brief and to the point. In your interview, there may well be more small talk than there was in this one, which is fine. Just be sure to remember that it's an interview, and, aside from a few polite questions, let the interviewer lead the exchange.

We've already discussed small talk in Part 1, so let's move on. What happens next?

Interviewer: Perhaps you can begin by telling me a little about your previous experience?

Sherry: Of course. In my course work and internships, I've had extensive experience with both the theoretical and practical aspects of accounting, and I excel in both areas.

Interviewer: Really? Can you give me some examples?

Sherry has obviously prepared well for this interview. She does a great job of summing up her university experience, and more importantly, of talking about how it translates into benefits to her future employer. She uses the present perfect tense – "have done" – to highlight that her experience is relevant *now*. She employs positive, active language, such as "excel," and she makes good use of word partnerships, such as "extensive experience." Critically, she backs up what she says with examples. Let's listen to more:

Sherry: Well, I've taken two advanced applied mathematics courses on risk analysis. They were very challenging, but I managed to get in the top 10% of both classes.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Sherry: But at the same time, in our more hands-on courses, I've also become familiar with many of the leading software packages – particularly the @RISK suite for Excel and ACL for audit analysis.

Interviewer: That's good. We use @RISK for analysis here too.

Notice how Sherry quantifies – that is, uses numbers – where possible by, for instance, saying she scored in the “top 10%” of her class. And how she uses strong, vivid, words in her description: “advanced,” “challenging” and “hands-on” – to describe her experience. Here's a few more examples of some key words you can use to highlight your experience:

- I was mainly **responsible** for **implementing** new accounting procedures, which **succeeded** in reducing our tax burden by 15%.
- I see my role as a manager as a **facilitator** for **change** – to be supportive of my staff's needs and to make sure they have the **tools** to **adapt** to the changing marketplace...
- By **participating** in the university debate team, I've been able to **develop** both my **communication** and **leadership** skills.
- Over the past year, I have **succeeded** in **rolling out** an **innovative** new system for measuring productivity. It was a challenge, but it really **paid off** with an 18% increase in customer satisfaction.

Now, let's go back to the dialog. Listen to how Sherry talks about a specific case in which she applied her university experience in the real world.

Sherry: And in my internship last year at the Armstrong Associates, I got to apply these analytical skills. I worked on an audit of a Fortune 500 company.

Interviewer: Yes, I saw that on your résumé. So in what ways did you benefit from this experience?

Sherry: Well, though as an intern my responsibilities were limited, this was a great opportunity to participate in a team effort and to learn practical knowledge about how to face clients.

Sherry puts the negative information – the fact that as an intern her responsibilities were limited – inside a subordinate clause: “Though my responsibilities were limited, this was a great opportunity to participate...” Thus, the emphasis of this statement is on what she learned, and on what a great opportunity it was for her. Also, she is careful to underline how her previous work has demonstrated the positive personal qualities of team work and cooperation. When we're asked about our previous experience, in addition to talking about our qualifications, it's important to mention positive personal characteristics. Listen to another example from someone interviewing for a management position:

- Although this industry is different, I think my experience as a team leader demonstrates a lot of management skills that fit well with this job; specifically, my ability to listen, to be flexible and innovative in my approach.

We'll be studying many more positive personal characteristics that you can mention in the next series on job interviews, “Talking about Your Accomplishments.”

Successful Interviews

Finally, let's have a look at how Sherry deals with a question about the gap in her résumé.

Interviewer: Great... Now, can you tell me about this gap in your résumé? It looks like you took two years out between college and graduate school.

Sherry: Yes, actually, I had a baby in 2003, a little girl. It was very important to me that she had a good start in life, so I took two years out after she was born. My family helps me to take care of her, but it's taught me a lot about time management.

Interviewer: I bet – children can be a handful!

Sherry: Indeed, but it certainly made me mature faster than most of my classmates. And despite these extra challenges – or perhaps even because of them – I have had quite a successful grad school career. I am always working hard to do my best, so I am confident I will continue to succeed in the future.

Although the gap in her career record is a weakness, Sherry does her best to turn it into a strength. Instead of focusing on her personal challenge, she attempts to look at it from the point of view of the employer. How does her history – even when it doesn't fit a traditional career pattern – translate into benefits to the employer? Sherry focuses on how her experience as a mother has taught her time management and maturity.

Before your job interview, examine every gap in your work history and every weakness on your résumé. Nobody's perfect, but usually every coin has two sides. What are the lessons, strengths, or positive experience that you have drawn from your frustrations?

Let's look at more examples of turning weaknesses into strengths.

- One good thing that has come out of my time out is catching up on a lot of training and reading for my work.
- Taking care of my mother during her illness reinforced my commitment to help people.
- I had to take time out for health reasons, but it gave me a chance to re-evaluate my goals.
- I emerged from the experience with a new sense of direction.
- I volunteered to help small local businesses with their taxes, which has given me a deeper perspective on dealing with SME's.

Now, let's finish off today with a little practice on the two key skills we looked at: highlighting your experience and portraying weaknesses in a positive light.

First, we'll practice talking about your experience. Let's use "gap reading" to review key collocations – word partnerships – that can help make your discussion fluent, vivid and strong. In the cues for this practice, you'll hear a series of sentences. One word in each sentence is blanked out with a beep. Repeat the sentence, but say the missing word.

For example, if you hear, "I was mainly responsible for **<beep>** new accounting procedures," you'll say, "I was mainly responsible for *implementing* new

accounting procedures". Note that in some cases, more than one correct answer is possible.

Let's begin.

Cue 1: As a manager, I see my role as a **<beep>** for change.

Learner: _____

Cue 2: I work hard to make sure my staff have the **<beep>** to adapt to the changing marketplace.

Learner: _____

Cue 3: By participating in the university debate team, I've been able to **<beep>** both my communication and leadership skills.

Learner: _____

Cue 4: Over the past year, I have succeeded in **<beep>** out an innovative new system for measuring productivity.

Learner: _____

Cue 5: It was a challenge, but it really **<beep>** off with an 18% increase in customer satisfaction.

Learner: _____

Answer 1: As a manager, I see my role as a **facilitator** for change.

Answer 2: I work hard to make sure my staff have the **tools** to adapt to the changing marketplace.

Answer 3: By participating in the university debate team, I've been able to **develop** both my communication and leadership skills.

Answer 4: Over the past year, I have succeeded in **rolling** out an innovative new system for measuring productivity.

Answer 5: It was a challenge, but it really **paid** off with an 18% increase in customer satisfaction.

Next it's time to practice turning weaknesses into strengths. Imagine you are discussing gaps in your résumé with an interviewer. In the cues, you will hear the reason for your gap, followed by a benefit to you and your potential

Successful Interviews

employer. Form a sentence in which you link the gap to the benefit. You can use language we have studied today, such as, "Every cloud has a silver lining," or "I emerged from the experience with..." or "One good thing that has come out of it is...". Are you ready?

Cue 1: Unemployed / Took classes in new software.

Learner: _____

Cue 2: Took time out for health reasons / Enabled me to re-evaluate my goals.

Learner: _____

Listen now to some example phrases. Bear in mind that your answers may be different.

Answer 1: One good thing that has come out of being unemployed is that I've had an opportunity to take classes in new software.

Answer 2: I had to take time out for health reasons, but every cloud has a silver lining. It really enabled me to re-evaluate my goals.

That's all for this series on previous experience. We've looked at how to deal with the small talk that accompanies the beginning of almost every job interview and we've examined how to prepare yourself to respond to typical questions about your previous experience. We've particularly emphasized strong, vivid language and turning weaknesses into strengths.

In this series, we've looked at the theme ***Don't let your guard down***. This is the first of eight themes that we will be exploring on the topic of interviews.

Be sure to use the study notes, which are available for all episodes. In the study notes you'll find vocabulary explanations and full transcripts. In addition, there is a wide range of additional language and listening development exercises available at www.businessenglishpod.com.

Language Review**A) Key Language**

To review common collocations, fill in the blanks with words from the box.

measuring	utilizing	system	increase	expand
big	innovative	satisfaction	resources	succeeded

Over the past year, I have _____ in rolling out an _____ new _____ for _____ productivity. This has helped achieve _____ gains for the company, including an 18% _____ in customer _____ as we've been able to _____ our services by _____ underused _____.

B) Prepositions Review

In the following passages from this episode, insert the correct preposition in each blank to review the correct usage of key language:

Although the industry is different, I think my experience _____ a team demonstrates a lot of management skills that transfer well _____ this job; specifically, my ability to listen, to be flexible and innovative _____ my approach, and to facilitate communication _____ people with diverse working styles and personalities.

One good thing that has come out of my time out is catching up _____ a lot of training and reading _____ my work. I took a class _____ the Sarbanes Oxley Act, and got certified _____ new software. Also, I volunteered to help small local businesses _____ their taxes, which has given me a deeper perspective _____ customer service.

Study Strategy

Have a look at your résumé. Are there any gaps? Any weaknesses? Were you asked any embarrassing questions about your experience at your last job interview? Make a list of all the parts of your work record that you feel might come up in an interview. Now, for every one, think of a positive way to address the issue. Using some of the language and phrases we practiced in this episode or using your own words, craft short responses to each question. Next, record yourself speaking naturally about each point. Get a friend to listen to the recording and tell you how you sound.

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) Sherry always answers briefly and to-the-point. For example, she doesn't take the opening small talk as an invitation to be informal; nor does she seem unfriendly.
- 2) Yes, obviously Sherry has carefully prepared for the interview, not just by being able to talk about her successes but also about her potential weaknesses.
- 3) She turns a weakness into a strength by talking about how mothering a child has taught her time management and how to deal with life responsibly.

Language Review

A) Key Language

Over the past year, I have **succeeded** in rolling out an **innovative** new system for **measuring** productivity. This has helped achieve **big** gains to the company, including an 18% **increase** in customer **satisfaction** as we've been able to **expand** our services by **utilizing** underused **resources**.

B) Prepositions review

Although the industry is different, I think my experience **as? in** a team demonstrates a lot of management skills that transfer well **to** this job; specifically, my ability to listen, to be flexible and innovative **in** my approach, and to facilitate communication **between/amongst/among** people with diverse working styles and personalities.

One good thing that has come out of my time out is catching up **on** a lot of training and reading **for** my work. I took a class **on/in** the Sarbanes Oxley Act, and got certified **in** new software. Also, I volunteered helping small local businesses **with** their taxes, which has given me a deeper perspective **on** customer service.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Quiz](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Gap-fill](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Highlighting Experience & Giving Examples](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) – Prepositions for Talking about Abilities](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Turning Weakness into Strengths](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Key Language for Describing Experience](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Vocabulary Review](#)

[Previous Experience \(Part 2\) - Vocabulary Flashcards](#)

BEP 304 – Talking about Accomplishments (Part 1)

This is the first in a two-part series on talking about your accomplishments. It is one of an ongoing sequence of podcasts that focus on the job interview process.

Along with your previous experience, your greatest accomplishment is one of the topics that is sure to come up in almost any interview. This question appears in a variety of forms: What was your proudest achievement? What was your most significant accomplishment? What do you consider to be your greatest success?

No matter how it's asked, you should be ready with a reply. Interviewers want to hear about something important that you handled. Pick an achievement that is significant to you and that is rich in detail. These two qualities will make it easy to **provide examples**, which is the main theme of this series.

In this episode, we'll be listening to a bad and good version of a recent graduate discussing his greatest accomplishment. We'll focus on language for providing examples of the positive personal characteristics that our previous success demonstrates. Then, in Part 2 of this series, we'll hear another good example of someone with more job experience, and we'll examine a four-part structure for telling our success stories.



First, let's quickly review the bad example. We'll go back to Alexander's interview with Michael in the electronics store. As you listen, consider the following questions. Then we'll examine the answers in the debrief.

Listening Questions – Bad Example

- 1) Does Alex put his success into an organized, articulate story?

- 2) Does he present his accomplishment in a way that provides examples of skills and qualities that will be useful at his new job?

Successful Interviews

Vocabulary

Goal-oriented: To be very focused on achieving goals. "Goal-oriented people have a lot of direction in their lives and don't give up easily."

To (be able to) work independently: To (be able to) work on your own, without a lot of guidance. "One of John's greatest assets is his ability to work independently without a lot of management oversight."

To hold one's hand: To guide someone through every step of the way. "Our managers are not here to hold our hands, but rather just to give us general guidance."

To stick with it: To persist in doing something. "Learning any foreign language is really tough; you just have to stick with it."

Self-starter: A person who takes the initiative to begin things on their own. "Mitch doesn't need to be asked to do work – he is a self-starter."

Strong interpersonal skills: A strong (good) ability to communicate interpersonally, i.e., with others. "Strong interpersonal skills enable you to communicate effectively with many different types of people."

Constructive criticism: Criticism which is targeted at improving behavior, and which often includes positive feedback. "It's important to keep your criticism constructive – don't just criticize people for criticism's sake."

To get a lot out of something: To learn a lot from something. "I got a lot out of working at that company."

To be a growing experience: An experience in which someone achieves a large degree of personal development. "Living overseas for several years as a child was an important growing experience for him."

Risk taker: Someone who takes risk. "A lot of companies want risk takers – people who are not afraid to make a decision."

Self-disciplined: The quality of being strict with oneself. "In the long run, it is self-disciplined people who succeed because they keep a consistent, steady effort."

Conscientious: Considerate of other people or things. "We're looking for people who will take their co-workers' interests to heart – We need conscientious employees for this type of position."

Enterprising: The quality of taking the initiative. "Fred is very enterprising – he has already started three businesses, and is working on a fourth."

Energetic: Full of energy. "Sheila is the energetic sort – she gets up at 5 A.M. every morning and goes for a run. Then, she often works overtime and doesn't get home until 9 or 10 pm. I don't know how she does it."

Detail-oriented: Focused on details. "Software programmers must be detail-oriented; otherwise, they will be constantly looking for bugs."(?)

Determined problem solver: Determined means dedicated, resolved. A determined problem solver does not give up. "This kind of tough challenge requires someone who is not faint of heart – we need determined problem solvers on this one."

Dialog - Bad Example

Michael: Right. Got that. So, what do you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Alexander: I think my greatest achievement is comprehending Klima's masterwork, *World as Consciousness and Nothing*.

Michael: Okay.

Alexander: In this book he argues that everything exists only because we will it to exist. You see, he means that you, I, everyone – we are all God. Do you understand?

Michael: Uh, yeah, got that. Uh, Alexander, do you think this is really the right job for you? Are you sure you can handle it?

Alexander: Are you kidding? No problem. You should try reading Klima. *That's* hard work.

Debrief – Bad Example

I think we'll all agree that Alexander has not presented his experience in the most favorable light. First, it doesn't seem as though he has chosen the best story to tell. We recall from previous episodes that he has recently graduated with a Master's degree – a great accomplishment – yet in his story he focuses on reading just one book. Though this book may be of great personal significance to Alex, from the employer's perspective, it doesn't reflect as favorably on him, as, for example, the completion of his thesis. He hasn't chosen a good example to provide.

In addition to his poor choice of story to tell, there are some problems with the way Alex tells the story. He focuses on details that are irrelevant to his interviewer rather than on those that draw attention to his positive personal attributes. Again, he has done a poor job of *providing examples* of how his experience demonstrates relevant skills and characteristics.

Finally, Alex is not likely to win friends by placing his academic accomplishments in a higher position than the job he is interviewing to do: he implies that working in an electronics store is easy compared to his university experience. Instead of taking this approach, he should be discussing how his academic excellence has prepared him for success in the workplace.

Obviously, none of us are likely to make all the mistakes that Alex has made. But still, his poor performance provides us with a useful example because it highlights several key issues that we should pay attention to when we present our accomplishments.

After his original bad interview experience, Alex went back and got some advice at the job search agency. He attended a couple of workshops, and in his second attempt to find a job he is much more successful.

Successful Interviews

Dialog - Good Example

Bookstore Interviewer: Okay. So that gives me a pretty good idea of your experience. Now, I was wondering if you could tell me something about what you consider to be your greatest accomplishment?

Alexander: That would definitely be my Master's thesis, which I just finished. It took me 18 months to write and I'm very proud of it.

Bookstore Interviewer: For example? What exactly are you proud of?

Alexander: Well, for one thing, working on a project like that really requires you to be very goal-oriented, and to work independently, because your advisors are not there to hold your hand.

Bookstore Interviewer: I see.

Alexander: And, at one point, like many people, I thought I was going to give up, but I stuck with it. You have to be a self-starter, and highly motivated. I definitely matured a lot working on this project.

Bookstore Interviewer: Yes, I bet you did.

Alexander: At the same time, you know, it's important to have very strong interpersonal skills, because you have to work with your advisor and, in my case, a committee. You need to have the ability to work and communicate with different types of people, and to integrate constructive criticism into your approach.

Bookstore Interviewer: Sounds like you got a lot out of it.

Alexander: Yes, it was a huge growing experience, and I learned a lot, both about being independent and about working with people.

Debrief

In this example, Alex does a much better job of taking a relevant accomplishment – writing his Master's thesis – and telling a convincing story about it that demonstrates to his interviewer useful skills and attractive characteristics. Let's look at some of the language he uses:

After setting the context and giving some background – things we'll focus on more in Part 2 of this series – Alex describes how he overcame a challenge:

Alexander: Well, for one thing, working on a project like that really requires you to be very goal-oriented, and to work independently, because your advisors are not there to hold your hand.

Bookstore Interviewer: I see.

Alexander: And, at one point, like many people, I thought I was going to give up, but I stuck with it. You have to be a self-starter, and highly motivated. I definitely grew a lot working on this project.

What is the challenge Alex overcame? At one point he was going to give up on writing his thesis, but he "stuck with it," that is, he continued through to the end, even though it was difficult. Accompanying this story, he uses a number of very vivid, effective expressions for describing the positive personal attributes

and skills that his success demonstrates: he is "goal-oriented," "able to work independently," a "self-starter," and "highly motivated." These are all phrases that describe characteristics of individual or personal excellence that are very attractive to a potential employer. You will find full definitions and examples in the study notes.

It is important to recognize that the question about significant accomplishments is a *behavioral question*. This type of question seeks to understand habits in your past behavior because these habits can predict future successes. You can help control the impression your interviewer has of your past behavior by using strong, vivid language to describe the skills and personal characteristics that your experience demonstrates. In a sense, you are doing the interviewers' work for him by giving them words they can use to describe your strengths.

Let's listen to a few more strong, vivid examples of language that describes independence and individual excellence.

- My work on this project shows that I am **self-disciplined** and **resourceful**.
- I consider myself to be an **enterprising, energetic** person, and that really comes out in this situation.
- As you can see, I am both **detail-oriented**, and a **determined problem solver**.
- One of my biggest advantages is my ability **to adapt well to** new situations.
- This shows my willingness **to be an assertive communicator**, when necessary.
- Being in charge of this team taught me the importance of being a **decisive leader**.
- It was a wonderful experience for me because I really **thrive on challenge**.

In the study notes for this episode you will find full definitions and further example sentences for all the expressions in the dialog and example phrases.

Let's return to Alex's interview. You may have noticed how his story essentially has two parts. First, he talks about how finishing his thesis required him to be independent. Second, he focuses on the more *cooperative* and *teamwork* aspect of the project.

Alexander: At the same time, you know, it's important to have very strong interpersonal skills, because you have to work with your advisor and, in my case, a committee. You need to have the ability to work and communicate with different types of people, and to integrate constructive criticism into your approach.

In this section, he uses more key phrases, such as "ability to work and communicate with different types of people," and "integrate constructive criticism into your approach." Integrate means to "take in" or "use." Constructive criticism is feedback that is meant to be useful and positive rather than negative. In addition to traits of personal excellence, cooperative and teamwork skills are highly valued by employers. What other phrases and language can we use to describe teamwork-oriented qualities?

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- I've got a sincere interest in **good teamwork**, and I'm **sensitive** to the needs of other people.
- My success in this project demonstrates a quality of which I am very proud – my **broad-minded** and **flexible** perspective in dealing with people.
- Through the whole process, I have remained a **committed team player**.
- The reason I love this work is that I am truly a **conscientious** person at heart.
- I pride myself on being a very **cooperative** individual.
- Part of what makes me such an **effective team member** is that I am a very **eager learner**.

As with the earlier language we studied, you'll find all of these phrases in the study notes with full definitions and further example sentences.

From the HR perspective, notice how the interviewer listens actively to keep Alex talking: he gives him continuous signals and prompts, such as "Uh huh," "For example?" and "I can see what you mean" to lend him confidence and to let him know that he is listening carefully. Sometimes *interviewees* can use these kinds of phrases to encourage potential employers to share more information with us.

- That's very interesting.
- Please go on.
- Please continue.
- I can see what you're saying.
- Would you mind expanding on that a little?
- Could you give me an example?

There's one more type of language that we will study in this episode. At the end of the first section, did you hear the phrases Alex uses to *sum up* how writing his Master's thesis contributed to his growth in the key skills he mentioned?

Alexander: ...I definitely matured working on this project.

Also, at the very end of the dialog, Alexander uses another statement to summarize his personal development:

Alexander: Yes, it was a huge growing experience, and I learned a lot, both about being independent and about working with people.

These type of statements help give your speech a sense of closure – the feeling that you have said something whole and complete – and they help summarize your main point. What are some other phrases we can use to do this?

- These are definitely areas where I developed a lot during this time.
- Through this experience I made great strides in these key skills.
- I would say that this was one of the most important factors in my personal growth.

Now, let's practice some of the language we've learned today. First we'll focus on giving examples of skills and personal characteristics. Then we'll look at prompting people to talk.

Let's start with skills and personal characteristics. You'll hear a series of cues. Each cue will consist of the beginning of a sentence – for example, "My work on this project" – followed by one or two key words – such as "good teamwork and cooperation." After the beep, construct a sentence by adding words to put the two parts together. For example, you might say, "I believe my work on this project demonstrates both good teamwork and cooperation." Let's give it a try.

Practice 1

Cue1: My success in this project / committed team player

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I consider myself / assertive communicator and a cooperative individual

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: I pride myself on / adapt well to new situations

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: My success is integrally connected with / highly self-motivated and goal-oriented

Learner 4: _____

Now, let's listen to some example answers. Of course, your answers may differ from these.

Cue1: My success in this project / committed team player

Answer 1: My success in this project is certainly due in large part to my being a committed team player.

Cue 2: I consider myself / assertive communicator and a cooperative individual

Answer 2: I consider myself to be both an assertive communicator *and* a very cooperative individual.

Cue 3: I pride myself on / adapt well to new situations

Answer 3: I pride myself on my ability to adapt well to new situations.

Cue 4: My success is integrally connected with / highly self-motivated and goal-oriented

Answer 4: My success is integrally connected with the fact that I am both very self-motivated and goal-oriented.

For the second practice, let's review encouraging people to talk. In this practice, each cue will consist of a statement made by a candidate or an interviewer. After the beep, use some of the language we have studied today to encourage him or her to talk. For example, if the person says, "I've been working in finance for 10

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years," you could say, "That's very interesting," or "Please go on...." Respond appropriately according to the situation. Let's begin.

Cue 1: Basically, banking just wasn't for me... I don't know if this is interesting to you...

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: It was just not the right time to look for a job. Do you know what I mean?

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: Basically, our benefits improve a lot after you have been with the company for one year.

Learner 3: _____

Now, let's listen to some example answers. Of course, there are many possible correct responses.

Cue 1: Basically, banking just wasn't for me... I don't know if this is interesting to you...

Answer 1: It's very interesting. Please go on.

Cue 2: It was just not the right time to look for a job. Do you know what I mean?

Answer 2: I can see what you mean.

Cue 3: Basically, our benefits improve a lot after you have been with the company for one year.

Answer 3: Do you mind expanding on that a little?

That concludes this episode, which was the first in a two-part series on talking about your accomplishments in job interviews. Under the theme **Provide examples**, we have examined how to use your accomplishments to demonstrate skills and characteristics that will be attractive to your employer.

In the second part, we will look at a four-part structure for telling a success story, including providing context, recounting your role, discussing what you did, and revealing the outcome.

This series is apart of an ongoing series of job interviews. Be sure to read the study notes for this episode. There you'll find all of the useful phrases and language we practiced today with full definitions and extra examples. You'll also find a transcript of the show. All that's at www.businessenglishpod.com. Thank you for listening!

Study Strategy

Are you more of a cooperative/teamwork person or an individual/independent person? Or are you a bit of both? Which adjectives describe you best? Write a short self-description and justify your choice of words with examples. (Using the vocabulary will help you remember it, and also help you perform better on your next interview.)

Language Review**I. Independent / Individual Personal Characteristics**

Review useful language for describing independent / individual personal characteristics by filling in the blanks with words from the box.

thrive	challenge	solver	leader
assertive	disciplined	adapt	oriented

1. My work on this project shows that I am **self-**_____ and **resourceful**.
2. As you can see, I am both **detail-**_____, and a **determined problem** _____.
3. One of my biggest advantages is my ability **to** _____ **well to** new situations.
4. This shows my willingness **to be an** _____ **communicator**, when necessary.
5. Being in charge of this team taught me the importance of being a **decisive** _____.
6. It was a wonderful experience for me because I really _____ **on** _____.

II. Cooperative- / Teamwork-oriented Personal Characteristics

Put the following jumbled sentences in order to review language for describing cooperative / teamwork-oriented personal characteristics.

1. got a have interest in team good work sincere I

2. I sensitive am people to the other needs of

3. my in demonstrates project this my flexible broad-minded and with perspective/approach in dealing success people

4. the process whole through have team remained a committed I player

5. heart the I love reason this that person work is I conscientious am a truly at

6. I pride a being on individual very cooperative myself

7. of what learner me such team an member effective makes am that I a very eager is part

Answers

Listening Questions – Bad Example

1. *Not really*. He focuses on details that are irrelevant to his interviewer rather than on those that draw attention to his positive personal attributes.
2. He has done a poor job of providing examples of how his experience demonstrates relevant skills and characteristics. For instance, he has not discussed how completing his Master's thesis demonstrates qualities or personal characteristics that would be useful to his employer.

I. Independent / Individual Personal Characteristics

1. My work on this project shows that I am **self-disciplined** and **resourceful**.
2. As you can see, I am both **detail oriented**, and a **determined problem solver**.
3. One of my biggest advantages is my ability **to adapt well to** new situations.
4. This shows my willingness **to be an assertive communicator**, when necessary.
5. Being in charge of this team taught me the importance of being a **decisive leader**.
6. It was a wonderful experience for me because I really **thrive on challenge**.

II. Cooperative- / Teamwork-oriented Personal Characteristics

1. I have got a sincere interest in good team work.
2. I am sensitive to the needs of other people.
3. My success in this project demonstrates my broad-minded and flexible perspective/approach in dealing with people.
4. Through the whole process, I have remained a committed team player.
5. The reason I love this work is that I am truly a conscientious person at heart.
6. I pride myself on being a very cooperative individual.
7. Part of what makes me such an effective team member is that I am a very eager learner.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Accomplishments 1 – Listening Quiz](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Individual Personal Characteristics](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Teamwork-Oriented Characteristics](#)

[Accomplishments 1 – Useful Language](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Vocabulary Review](#)

[Accomplishments 1 - Flashcards](#)

BEP 305 – Talking about Accomplishments (Part 2)



You're listening to the second in a two-part series on talking about accomplishments. This is one of an ongoing sequence of podcasts on job interviews.

The theme for this episode and the last is: **provide examples**. In the first part, we looked at a bad and good version of a recent university graduate talking about his academic successes. We studied how to use our accomplishments to demonstrate skills and characteristics that will be attractive to our potential employer.

In this episode, we examine another good response to the question about previous experience. We'll be looking at someone with a little more job experience: Yala Santos is an HR specialist who is working in a manufacturing company. She now has an opportunity to interview for an HR manager position in a business unit of a fast moving consumer goods company, Fun Beverages International. Let's listen to how Yala deals with talking about her greatest achievement.

Ordinarily, when responding to the question about your most significant accomplishment, it's very important that you prepare to tell a story that is organized and articulate. That means, the story should be well-structured and flow smoothly. Though there are many ways to make your presentation, Yala uses the same general format that I like to follow.

1. You will probably need to set up the story by providing some *context*. Where were you? What was the situation? What was at stake, that is, what did you stand to lose or gain?
2. Recount your *role* in the situation. How were you involved?
3. Discuss *what you did*, including any analysis or problem solving, any process you set up, and any obstacles you had to overcome.
4. Reveal the *outcome* and what made you proud.

Whereas Alex gave us a good example of how someone with limited job experience might deal with the greatest achievement question, Yala shows us how someone with a more traditional employment record might address this query.

Listening Questions

1. What was the project Yala was working on?

2. What was her role in it?

3. What did she do?

4. What was the outcome?

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Vocabulary

To harmonize: To bring two things into harmony or agreement with each other. "We need to harmonize the efforts of both departments to ensure success."

Integrated system: A system that integrates or includes different parts into a single process. "We need to have an integrated system to facilitate information sharing."

Interlinked database: Interlinked means linked or joined with something else. In the dialog, an interlinked database describes a system of information storage and sharing that is connected between different sites worldwide. "An interlinked database would enable us to locate human resources anywhere in the world."

To get something off the ground: To start a project. "We really need to get this new project off the ground – it's been in the planning stage too long."

Localization: The practice of translating materials into a local language and, importantly, ensuring that they fit local culture. "Localization is an important challenge faced by any business moving into East Asia."

Documentation: Instructions in handbooks or guides that tell us how to use or maintain something, such as a machine, or hardware, or software. "Providing good documentation is an important part of customer relations in the high-tech manufacturing business."

Performance indicators: Measurements of performance (criteria) used in annual reviews, promotions, the award of bonuses, etc. "What kind of performance indicators are most important in considering someone for promotion?"

Seamless transition: A seam is where two pieces of cloth are sewn together to form one garment. Seamless refers to having no seams, so a seamless transition is one that is very smooth. "During the merger, it is important that we have a seamless transition in key finance functions."

Functions: In a department, these refer to basic jobs or tasks that need to be done. We refer, for example, to "sales functions," which are different roles performed in a sales department. "Sales is a critical function of any business."

Hitch: A minor problem. "We had a few hitches in the implementation of the system at first, but now everything is up and running well."

Poised under deadline pressure: The quality of being calm when a deadline is close. "In this frantic business, only people who are poised under deadline pressure will last a long time."

Proactive: The opposite of *reactive*, proactive means to find and fix problems *before* they occur. "It's very important to take a proactive approach to business administration – it's much more costly to fix problems after they happen."

Long-range vision: The ability to see a long way into the future. "What we need in this company is leadership with long-range vision."

Practicing a flexible approach: Being flexible, that is, innovative and adaptable. "One of the main reasons this company is successful is that we practice a flexible approach to sales promotions – we can turn quickly when we need to: decision-making is innovative and fast."

To mediate: To perform a go-between function; to discuss differences between two parties to help them reach an agreement. "I helped mediate a dispute between upper management and my employees, solving things to everyone's satisfaction."

Dialog

Interviewer: Great, Yala, that covers previous experience. Now could you tell me a little about what you consider to be your most significant achievement?

Yala: <1. Setting the context> Hmm... let's see. At the beginning of last year, global headquarters decided to harmonize the assessment and evaluation process for all business units worldwide into one global Performance Management System.

Interviewer: Uh huh. So like a single integrated system?

Yala: Exactly. It's part of a global effort to provide a single interlinked database for human resources.

Interviewer: Sounds like a challenging project.

Yala: Yes, indeed. Especially because we only had 10 months to get it off the ground...

Interviewer: Really!

Yala: <2. Recounting the situation and your role in it> Yeah...ten months from planning to launch. My manager called a meeting, and we immediately formed a taskforce. I was placed in charge of localization and documentation, and I played a key role by analyzing and solving a number of problems.

Interviewer: Uh huh. What type of problems?

Yala: <3. Discussing what you did> Well, for example, I anticipated that Sales and Marketing would need to know all the key performance indicators in advance because training on the new system wouldn't begin until after they had already completed their planning process for 2008.

Interviewer: Sounds like a pretty major issue.

Yala: Yes, and obviously a seamless transition with Sales was very important for our BU's bottom line.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Yala: So I collaborated with the Sales Division to develop sample evaluations for all sales and marketing functions. Then I coordinated with them to develop a series of pre-launch trainings to get everyone up to speed.

Interviewer: Did it work?

Yala: <4. Revaling the outcome and what made you proud> Yes, I'm proud to say it did. We boosted productivity by at least 10% because of our actions. It was hard work, but we got extremely positive feedback throughout the whole process, and despite a few hitches, things went pretty smoothly.

Interviewer: Great. Sounds like a success.

Yala: Yes, I think my role in this project demonstrates a number of important personal qualities... being poised under deadline pressure, being proactive and having long-range vision, practicing a flexible approach... and... definitely being a good team player because so much of it required coordinating and mediating between different departments.

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Debrief

Yala has done a good job of telling an articulate, organized story. Let's look at it piece by piece. How does she begin? First she sets the context.

Yala: Hmm...let's see. At the beginning of last year, global headquarters decided to harmonize the assessment and evaluation process for all business units worldwide into one global Performance Management System.

Interviewer: Uh huh. So like a single integrated system?

Yala: Exactly. It's part of a global effort to provide a single interlinked database for human resources.

Yala's company has harmonized the employee assessment and evaluation process all across the world. Here *harmonize* means that they have made sure all business units – that is all parts of the company – are using the same system.

From the HR perspective, notice how the interviewer uses the clarifying technique of *echoing* Yala – “So like a single integrated system?” Such echoing both confirms that the interviewer has understood Yala *and* encourages her to keep talking.

Let's look at some more phrases for setting the context of your accomplishment:

- Our company had been undergoing restructuring, so employees needed to adapt to new ways of doing things.
- Towards the end of 2007, we got a big new customer and started receiving huge orders.
- All through 2006, a series of budget cuts really put our department under financial pressure.

Setting the context generally involves giving a time frame and introducing the background to a problem. In the first example phrase we listened to, notice the use of the past perfect continuous tense (“had been undergoing restructuring”) to *set the background*, coupled with the past tense (“needed to adapt”) to *pose the problem*.

Getting back to Yala's story, how does it continue? After having given the background, she now recounts the situation and her role in it:

Yala: My manager called a meeting, and we immediately formed a taskforce. I was placed in charge of localization and documentation, and I played a key role by analyzing and solving a number of problems.

Interviewer: Uh huh. What type of problems?

In this part of his story, Yala focuses specifically on her role in the project. She was in charge of *localization*, that is, of adapting the global system to local circumstances. This generally involves translation and dealing with cultural issues. In addition, she took care of *documentation*, that is, she oversaw the writing of training and user manuals.

Now, listen to some further phrases that we can use for discussing our role in a project:

- Upper management decided that corporate culture was a key to surviving the changes, so a committee was set up to create a training plan. I was put in charge of getting employee feedback on company values.
- Our existing supply chain couldn't really handle the size of the orders, so the key challenge was to strengthen our logistics system, and fast.
- Employee morale really went downhill, so my role was to devise innovative ways to increase team spirit.

In this part of our success story, we will often use such constructions as "I was put in charge of," or "the key challenge was to...," or "my role was to...." Make sure to answer the questions, "*What was the situation?*" and "*How did you fit in?*"

Getting back to the dialog, after recounting her role in the situation, Yala's next step is to discuss what she did. This includes any obstacles she overcame, problems she analyzed and solved, and processes she set up. Listen:

Yala: Well, for example, I anticipated that Sales and Marketing would need to know all the key performance indicators in advance because training on the new system wouldn't begin until after they had already completed their planning process for 2008.

In this section, Yala uses a strong verb for describing foresight, that is, analyzing and predicting problems. She *anticipated* a problem with the launch of the new system, namely, that Sales and Marketing would not have time to set targets for the new year. HR would not start giving trainings in using the new harmonized key performance indicators until *after* the sales force had already prepared their goals for the next year.

Interviewer: Sounds like a pretty major issue.

Yala: Yes, and obviously a seamless transition with sales was very important for our BU's bottom line.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Yala: So I collaborated with the Sales Division to develop sample evaluations for all sales and marketing functions. Then I coordinated with them to develop a series of pre-launch trainings to get everyone up to speed.

To solve this problem, Yala performed several key management communication functions: she *collaborated* with the sales division and *coordinated* with them to develop pre-launch trainings. Thus, she avoided the problem and insured a *seamless transition*, that is a smooth passage, into using the new performance management system. Making sure that Sales had no problems with the new system, was, of course, important to the *bottom line*, or profit, of the company.

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Anticipate, *collaborate*, and *coordinate* are all great, vivid verbs for describing job success. Let's hear a few more phrases that contain excellent verbs for showing analytical, management and communication skills:

- I **headed up** a team of six to tackle the problem.
- First, we spent three months carefully **evaluating** the issue.
- I **improved** the process **consolidating** several steps.
- We **prioritized** company teambuilding through a series of internal promotions and activities.
- I **organized** a committee and **delegated** key tasks.

In the study notes for this episode, you will find a complete list of over 200 active, vivid verbs for describing work skills.

After discussing how she solved the problem, Yala moves on to the fourth and final step of her story. She reveals the outcome, and what made her proud.

Interviewer: Did it work?

Yala: Yes, I'm proud to say it did. We boosted productivity by at least 10% because of our actions. It was hard work, but we got extremely positive feedback throughout the whole process, and despite a few hitches, things went pretty smoothly.

Interviewer: Great. Sounds like a success.

Yala's efforts were successful. Despite a few hitches – that is, minor problems – things went pretty smoothly. Notice how she *quantifies* her success – her role in the project helped boost productivity by 10%. Using numbers makes your accomplishment vivid and strong.

Let's now listen to a few more examples of positive outcomes:

- As a result of my efforts, we measured a productivity increase of 5% in my department, which translated into savings to the company of \$56,000.
- The new system was successful, and I'm happy to say that our hard work really paid off.
- Not only have surveys shown a great increase in employee satisfaction, but we can all feel the difference.
- It was a very rewarding experience – both professionally and personally.

How does the dialog finish? In the final section of her response, Yala uses the type of language that we studied in Part 1 of this series to discuss how her work reflects positively on her character. She names several positive professional qualities that her performance in this project demonstrate:

Yala: So I think my role in this project demonstrates a number of important personal qualities... being poised under deadline pressure, being proactive and having long-range vision, practicing a flexible approach... and... definitely being a good team player because so much of it required coordinating and mediating between different departments.

She says she is "poised under deadline pressure," and "proactive"; she has "long-range vision" and "practices a flexible approach." Finally, she is definitely a "good team player" and able to "coordinate" and "mediate" communication. Refer to the study notes for full definitions of these phrases and examples of their usage.

Before we finish, let's review what we learned in this episode and the last. We'll practice joining the strong, vivid verbs we studied for describing job successes in this episode with the great phrases we learned for demonstrating personal qualities in Part 1.

You will hear a series of cues that consist of a job accomplishment and one or two professional attributes and skills. Use each cue to construct a sentence relating the accomplishment with the attribute. For example, if you hear, "Coordinate task force meetings... Sensitive to the needs of other people." you can say, "My coordination of task force meetings really demonstrates my sensitivity to the needs of other people."

Let's begin.

Cue 1: Innovate a new database solution / enterprising and energetic

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: Coordinate a team effort to increase sales / determined problem solver

Learner 1: _____

Cue 3: Collaborated with IT to solve the problem / long-range vision, good team player

Learner 1: _____

How did you do? Let's listen to example answers, bearing in mind that there are many possible correct responses:

Successful Interviews

Cue 1: Innovate a new database solution / enterprising and energetic

Answer 1: The **innovative approach** I took to designing the database **demonstrates** my **enterprising** and **energetic** spirit.

Cue 2: Coordinate a team effort to increase sales / determined problem solver

Answer 2: **Coordinating** this team effort to **increase** sales shows that I am a **determined problem solver**.

Cue 3: Collaborated with IT to solve the problem / long-range vision, good team player

Answer 3: I **collaborated** with IT to solve the problem. I think this demonstrates that I have **long-range vision** and am **a good team player**.

That concludes this two-part series on talking about your accomplishments with the theme: **provide examples**. In Part 1, we studied giving examples of desirable personal characteristics. In this episode, we've looked at a variety of useful language for describing management and communication skills. Also, we learned a four-step process for telling an organized, articulate story that effectively demonstrates a significant achievement. Let's review that structure:

- 1) Set up the story by providing some context.
- 2) Recount your role in the situation.
- 3) Discuss what you did, including any analysis or problem solving, any process you set up and obstacles you had to overcome. And...
- 4) Reveal the outcome and what made you proud.

Refer to the study notes for vocabulary explanations and complete transcripts of this and the other episodes. Also, remember to check out the additional online extension exercises for listening and language available online at www.businessenglishpod.com.

Thanks for listening!

Study Strategy

What is your greatest accomplishment? If you are a student, think about a big project, or perhaps a large challenge you had in your studies. If you have work experience, try to find something that demonstrates strong personal qualities and that is significant to you. In either case, it should be rich in detail. Now, review the four-part structure that we practiced in this episode for constructing a story about your success, and plan out a story using, whenever possible, the vivid verbs and key language we have learned. You may choose to write down your story word for word or simply take notes. In any case, after you have prepared, you should practice without your notes, because you won't be able to take them with you into an interview. Record your story, then listen to it to see how you sound.

Language Review**A) Personal Characteristics**

To review useful language for positive personal characteristics, match columns one and two to form a word partnership (choose the best one); then, match each word partnership with its definition on the right. One has been done for you as an example.

Word Partnership		Definition
1. Risk	a. under deadline pressure	I. Never giving up when figuring out how to address the challenge.
2. Self	b. disciplined	II. Someone who takes chances.
3. Poised	c. problem solver	III. The quality of being calm when a deadline is close.
4. Practicing	d. interpersonal skills	IV. Good communication ability.
5. Determined	e. taker	V. Being innovative and adaptable.
6. Strong	f. a flexible approach	VI. The quality of being strict with oneself.

B) Cloze Practice of Key Language and Phrases

Review the suggested structure for talking about accomplishments by filling in the blanks in the functions and phrases below with words from the box. **Note:** You may need to alter the words to put them into the proper part of speech:

consolidate	head	improve	charge
undergo	evaluate	result	role

- Setting the context
 - Our company had been _____ a series of restructurings, so employees needed to adapt to new ways of doing things.
- Recounting the situation and your role in it.
 - I was put in _____ of getting employee feedback on company values.
 - Employee morale really went downhill, so my _____ was to devise innovative ways to increase team spirit.
- Discussing what you did, including any analysis or problem solving, any process you set up and obstacles you had to overcome.
 - I _____ up a team of six to tackle the problem.
 - First, we spent three months carefully _____ the issue.
 - I _____ the process _____ several steps.
- Revealing the outcome and what made you proud.
 - As a _____ of my efforts, we measured a productivity increase of 5% in my department, which translated into savings to the company of \$56,000.

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) Yala was working on the launch of a global, harmonized performance management system that would provide a single, interlinked database on employee performance for human resources worldwide.
- 2) Yala worked on localization and documentation for her business unit.
- 3) Yala describes how she anticipated the need to provide the sales team with the new performance metrics in advance so that they could set their goals for the new/next year. She coordinated with the sales team to provide them with pre-training on the system and to ensure that they could set all their targets.
- 4) The launch was successful. Yala's efforts helped ensure that the launch of the new system had no negative effect on the bottom line (profit) of the company because of the seamless (smooth) transition into using the harmonized database.

Language Review

A) Personal Characteristics

1. e, II; 2. b, VI; 3. a, III.; 4. f, V; 5. c, I.; 6. d, IV.

Characteristic	Definition
Risk taker	Someone who takes chances.
Self disciplined	The quality of being strict with oneself.
Poised under deadline pressure	The quality of being calm when a deadline is close.
Practicing a flexible approach	Being flexible, that is, innovative and adaptable.
Determined problem solver	Never giving up when figuring out how to address the challenge.
Strong interpersonal skills	Good communication ability.

B) Cloze Practice of Key Language and Phrases

1. Setting the context
 - Our company had been **undergoing** a series of restructurings, so employees needed to adapt to new ways of doing things.
2. Recounting the situation and your role in it.
 - I was put in **charge** of getting employee feedback on company values.
 - Employee morale really went downhill, so my **role** was to devise innovative ways to increase team spirit.
3. Discussing what you did.
 - I **headed up** a team of six to tackle the problem.
 - First, we spent three months carefully **evaluating** the issue.
 - I **improved** the process **consolidating** several steps.
4. Revealing the outcome and what made you proud.
 - As a **result** of my efforts, we measured a productivity increase of 5% in my department, which translated into savings to the company of \$56,000.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Accomplishments 2 – Listening Quiz](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Positive Personal Characteristics](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Setting the Context](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Describing your Accomplishment](#)

[Accomplishments 2 - Structuring your Example](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – 4 Step Guide to a Good Answer](#)

[Accomplishments 2 – Vocabulary Review](#)

[Accomplishments 2 - Flashcards](#)

BEP 306 – Discussing your Weaknesses

Hello my name is Jennifer and I'll be hosting the next couple of podcasts as we continue to look at the language and skills of interviewing for jobs in English.

So far in this series, we've examined two common questions that you will likely be asked in almost any interview. They were, "*Tell me about your previous experience*", and "*What is your most significant accomplishment?*"

In this episode, we will likewise deal with another extremely common question. Unfortunately, it's almost as challenging to answer as it is popular to ask. It requires you to think about possible problems with your working style and personality, and to give an answer that demonstrates professionalism and the ability to present your weakness as a strength. That's right, you guessed it the question is: *What's your greatest weakness?*



Talking about your weaknesses tests a unique skill. It investigates your ability to present a drawback as an advantage. Thus, the theme of this episode is **be positive**, and that's the main point that we'll be focusing on.

We'll be listening to two examples – one good and one bad. Let's listen briefly first to the bad example. You may recall that Alexander is interviewing with Michael for a supervisor job in an electronics store.

Dialog - Bad Example

Michael: Right. So moving on now... What's your greatest weakness?

Alexander: Ah, Michael, for me... I like the simple things in life. Material things don't interest me much. My personal freedom is much more important than being rich.

Michael: I see.

Alexander: I guess that's why I'm working in an electronics store, and not on Wall Street!

Michael: Er, yeah. I guess that's why we're all working here.

Debrief – Bad Example

Alexander has not helped himself with his reply to this question. In fact, he has probably hurt his chances of getting the job. But, surprisingly, the problem with Alex's response is not so much in the weakness or flaw he chose, but more in how he presents that flaw.

What was Alexander's weakness?

Michael: Right. So, moving on now... What's your greatest weakness?

Alexander: Ah, Michael, for me... I like the simple things in life. Material things don't interest me much. My personal freedom is much more important than being rich.

Alex says, "Material things don't interest me much." Material means real, physical things – the things that can be bought with money, like cars and TV's. Alex is saying he is not interested in financial gain, in being rich.

Alex's weakness is certainly sincere, which is much better than making something up. But let's consider it from the employer's perspective, something Alexander fails to do. What do companies want? They are on the lookout for staff who will help them to make money, but who also value human relations and the satisfaction of a job well done. In other words, Alex's weakness is also a strength. But does Alex present it this way?

Alexander: I guess that's why I'm working in an electronics store, and not on Wall Street!

Michael: Yeah, great. I guess that's why we're all working here.

Alex's response falls far short of a good reply. When talking about a weakness, there are generally two things we want to do:

- 1) Present it in a positive light, that is, look on the bright side. And...
- 2) Talk about what steps we have taken or are taking to overcome our weakness.

But Alexander does neither one of these things. Instead, he makes probably the worst move possible: he cracks a joke about people who work in electronics stores, implying that the job is actually beneath him.

Now that we have an idea of what we *shouldn't* do, let's listen to a good example of what we *should* do. We'll rejoin Sherry from Hong Kong, another recent graduate, as she is interviewing with a big accounting firm.

Whilst we listen, see if you can answer the following questions.

Listening Questions – Good Example

- 1) What is Sherry's weakness?
- 2) Did this weakness affect her GPA (exam scores)? How?
- 3) Does Sherry explain the positive aspects of the weakness she describes?

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Vocabulary

Non-traditional background: For job applicants or applicants to university, this describes having a personal history that is different from normal, for example by being older than other applicants, by having children when most others don't, or being handicapped (disabled), etc. "Actually our company encourages applicants from non-traditional backgrounds."

To make sacrifices: To give up something, usually in order to achieve a larger goal. "I've had to make a lot of sacrifices to be so successful in my career."

To work part-time: In contrast with working full-time, which usually means working 40 hours a week or more, working "part-time" means only working a limited number of hours, usually without the benefits of a regular job. "I work part-time in the evenings in addition to my regular job in order to make a little extra money."

(To go to) night school: Night school usually describes a special program of a college or professional school that targets adult learners who have to work during the day. "I got certified as a software engineer by going to night school every day after work."

To have an impact on s/o or sth.: This means to have a big influence on someone or something. Impact can refer to a positive influence, but it usually refers to a negative one. "My injury had a huge impact on my performance."

To give one an edge over s/o: To give someone a competitive advantage over someone. "My foreign language skills give me an edge over many applicants."

Sense of responsibility: A feeling of being responsible for someone or something that includes a desire to do one's duty. "One of the reasons she does such excellent work is her enormous sense of responsibility."

Time management skills: The ability to deal with a very busy schedule by planning carefully to get everything done. "Gene's excellent time management skills are the key to his success."

Mature: Literally, grown-up. When describing adults, it means experienced and emotionally balanced. The noun form is "maturity." "Even though he's fairly young, Charles is a very mature guy."

Strong contributor: To contribute to something means to give to something, and usually has a strong positive sense. A contributor is a person who contributes. In a workplace, a strong contributor is someone who contributes a lot to the success of the company. "When you look at sales performance, Stephanie is definitely one of our strongest contributors."

Work environment: This refers to the general atmosphere or "feeling" in an office, i.e., is it tense? Relaxed? Quiet? Noisy? "An excellent work environment is essential to good productivity."

Dialog - Good Example

Interviewer: Great, Sherry. All right, let's move on to another question. What do you think your greatest weakness is?

Sherry: Well, seeing as I am a single mother, I'm coming from a non-traditional background, and you might say that's a weakness.

Interviewer: In what ways?

Sherry: I've had to make a lot of sacrifices. For example, while doing my Master's, I had to work part-time, which meant that I'd done part of my degree during night school. Being so busy has also had some impact on my GPA.

Interviewer: Mh hmm.

Sherry: But, you know, I think my non-traditional background gives me an edge in many ways over many of my peers.

Interviewer: How so?

Sherry: I've learned a sense of responsibility, good time management skills, and I've become more mature very quickly. I'm confident that I'm ready to be a strong contributor in a challenging work environment.

Debrief – Good Example

Sherry's response does both of the things we talked about earlier – 1) She presents her weakness in a positive light, and 2) She talks about how she overcame it.

Let's go through her response piece by piece.

How does she first identify her weakness?

Sherry: Well, seeing as I am a single mother, I'm coming from a non-traditional background, and you might say that's a weakness.

Sherry's weakness is to come from a "non-traditional background." In academic or professional terms, "non-traditional" refers to anyone who does not follow the conventional, or standard, career path. Older applicants, people with resume gaps, handicapped employees, etc., all fit into the category "non-traditional." In Sherry's case, she believes being a single mother makes her "non-traditional."

Successful Interviews

Notice, however, how she uses tentative or careful language to identify her weakness – “You might say that’s a weakness,” she says. It’s good to be tentative about your weakness. Doing so makes your statement less final or conclusive, thus preparing your listener for considering the other side of the coin, your weakness as a strength.

What are some other ways to identify your weakness tentatively?

- I tend to be a bit of a perfectionist, so sometimes I get kind of hung up on the details of things.
- Well, I have a tendency to overwork, so for me, maintaining a work-life balance is a challenge and a priority – both for my personal sake and for my long-term performance.

There are several types of tentative language in these examples: Modal verbs like “might,” and “could”; qualifiers like “bit of,” and “kind of”; and phrases such as “I tend to” or “I have a tendency to....” Also, it’s often better to describe a problem as a “challenge” because this demonstrates a positive attitude.

When Sherry says being non-traditional is a weakness, how does the interviewer respond?

Interviewer: In what ways?

Sherry: I’ve had to make a lot of sacrifices. For example, while doing my Master’s, I had to work part-time, which meant that I’d done part of my degree during night school. Being so busy has also had some impact on my GPA.

The interviewer is careful to clarify Sherry’s statement. She gets specific examples from Sherry by asking, “In what ways?”. Getting specific examples is an important skill for the interviewer. Let’s look at a few more phrases for doing this.

- Could you be more specific?
- Could you give me some examples?
- What do you mean by that?

Sherry is quite clever in choosing her examples: Working part time, completing a degree in night school, and having a lower GPA – these are all things that will seem like flaws or problems in Sherry’s record. But by strategically including them as part of her answer to the weakness question, she is able to re-present these problems in a positive light. Another way to say this is that she “puts a positive spin” on her problem. The turn or transition to describing weakness as strength is the key moment in Sherry’s response. Let’s listen to how she does this:

Sherry: But, you know, I think my non-traditional background gives me an edge in many ways over many of my peers.

To put a positive spin on her non-traditional background, Sherry uses an idiom: she says her background gives her “an edge over” many of her peers. This means it gives her an advantage over her competitors.

Let's practice some more language that can be used to put our weaknesses in a positive light. As you listen, keep in mind that these are just suggestions. Each individual case will be a little different.

- But, actually, this also works to my advantage in many situations, because I often spot problems that other people don't see.
- Of course, it's a double-edged sword, because I'm a highly effective and productive person.

In these examples, we hear a couple more phrases for making the transition from weakness to strength: We can say something "actually works to our advantage," or that it's "a double-edged sword," that is, it has a bad side *and* a good side.

After putting a positive spin on her disadvantage, the last thing that Sherry needs to do, if possible, is discuss ways in which she is overcoming or has already overcome this weakness.

Sherry: I've learned a sense of responsibility, good time management skills, and I've become more mature very quickly.

Sherry *has learned* "a sense of responsibility," "good time management skills," and she *has become* "more mature." You can refer back to the earlier episodes on "Talking about Accomplishments" for more ways to describe positive characteristics.

How else can we describe overcoming a weakness? Let's listen to some more examples.

- As I've matured as a person and an employee, I'm become much better at knowing when it's time to analyze something carefully and when it's time to let it go. I think this has made me both more effective and more productive – the best of both worlds.
- I'm finding that by paying attention to my tendency to overextend myself, I'm able to maintain a higher level of consistent effort, and that's having a positive impact on my job performance.

Phrases like "by paying attention to my tendency to," and "it's the best of both worlds," can help you construct an effective response.

Returning to the listening, the last thing Sherry does is finish off her response with a positive final comment.

Sherry: I'm confident that I'm ready to be a strong contributor in a challenging work environment.

This type of comment, which reflects a positive attitude, fits into the theme of today's show, but it would be useful in many different parts of your interview. Here's a few more examples of phrases we could use to demonstrate a positive attitude.

Successful Interviews

- In a nutshell, I strive to bring to my work a flexible combination of methodical analysis and strong forward momentum.
- Overall, it's consistent high performance that wins the day, and I work hard to embody that long-term commitment in everything I do.

Now, we're going to practice two of the key skills we learned in today's shows, identifying your weakness tentatively and putting a positive spin on it.

First, let's work on identifying your weakness. You'll hear a series of cues stating a problem or flaw. After the beep, restate the problem using tentative language we've practiced, such as "sometimes," "might" or "could"; "kind of" or "a bit of a"; and "I have a tendency to...." Are you ready? Let's give it a try.

Practice 1

Cue 1: I am a perfectionist / I take things too seriously

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I work too quickly / I am careless

Learner 2: _____

How did you do? Now, listen to some example answers. Of course, your responses may differ.

Cue 1: I am a perfectionist – I take things too seriously.

Answer 1: I can be a bit of a perfectionist, you might say. Sometimes I might take things a little too seriously.

Cue 2: I work too quickly. I am careless.

Answer 2: Well, I have a tendency to work a little bit too quickly, and sometimes this makes me a little bit careless.

Now, let's practice putting a positive spin on the problem. As before, you'll hear two cues stating a weakness. Use the language and approaches that we've studied today to put the problem in a positive light. You might consider employing some of the idioms we learned, such as, "It actually works to my advantage," or, "it can actually give me an edge over my competitors." Let's begin.

Practice 2

Cue 1: I have a tendency to overwork.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: Sometimes I pay too much attention to details.

Learner 2: _____

Now listen to some example answers.

Cue 1: I have a tendency to overwork.

Answer 1: Of course, at the same time, it's a double-edged sword, because I am a highly effective and productive person.

Cue 2: Sometimes I pay too much attention to details.

Answer 2: But this also gives me an edge over my competitors, because I often spot problems that other people don't see.

After you've tried these practices a couple of times, you should be able to craft a good answer for the next time you are asked "*What is your greatest weakness?*".

This concludes this episode on answering questions about your greatest weakness. We talked about how it's better to be honest in selecting your weakness because this demonstrates sincere self-knowledge. And under the theme **be positive**, we've studied two key skills for responding to this type of query:

- 1) Present your disadvantage in a positive light, that is, look on the bright side.
- 2) Talk about what steps you have taken or are taking to overcome your weakness.

Finally, we looked at a four-part structure for responding to the question:

- 1) Identify your weakness tentatively.
- 2) Put a positive spin on it – that is present your weakness in a positive way
- 3) Talk about ways that you are overcoming your problem. And
- 4) Demonstrate a positive attitude to finish.

A complete transcript and vocabulary explanations for this episode can be found in the study notes available online at: www.businessenglishpod.com.

Thanks for listening.

Discussion

Yala's response differs slightly from the schema we studied.

- 1) Identify your weakness tentatively. (Yala actually starts by stating a strength, and the interviewer deduces the weakness; starting with a strength that is obviously also a weakness may be another approach to answering this question – just be careful that you sound honest and sincere.)
- 2) Present your weakness in a positive way. (As mentioned above, Yala starts off with the positive spin, and develops the weakness afterwards.)
- 3) Talk about ways that you are overcoming your problem. (Yala says that "her goal is to continue to improve herself.")
- 4) Demonstrate a positive attitude to finish. (The last statement she makes is very positive.)

Overall, was it a good answer to the question? There are some areas we might want to improve. Though Yala has shown how her weakness is also a strength, she may also have raised some questions about her patience and long-term loyalty, and her ability to do hard work without immediate gratification.

Successful Interviews

Language Review

Comprehensive Review

Examine a response to the greatest weakness question by filling in the blanks with the language from the box, putting the dialog in order, and then answering the following questions: Does the interviewee, Yala, directly identify the weakness, or does the interviewer do it? Can you clearly identify the four steps we studied in this episode, or does Yala present her weakness a little differently? Is it a good response to the question? What are the good parts and bad parts?

weakness	set	advance	thrive
bored	complacent	change	contributor

A.	Yala: Well, I have set goals for myself in my career. I _____ on intellectual stimulation, and big challenges.	1. H
B.	Interviewer: So you are ready for a _____?	2.
C.	Yala: Well, some people might say I get bored easily, and they'd be partly right, but I've worked for my previous employer for four very good years, and I think it's also fair to say that I am just not very _____.	3.
D.	Interviewer: Hmmm...	4.
E.	Interviewer: So you get _____ easily?	5.
F.	Yala: Yes, I'd say so – my goal is to continue to improve myself so that I can be a stronger and stronger _____.	6.
G.	Yala: Unfortunately, there was just no room for me to _____ in my current position.	7.
H.	Interviewer: Okay, Yala, here's one you've probably heard before. What is your greatest _____?	8.

Study Strategy

After doing the above exercise and reading the answer in the answer key, what are your thoughts about how to improve the response to make it even better? Rewrite the dialog with your own ideas. You may wish to record or role play it with a friend.

Answers

Listening Questions – Good Example

1. What is Sherry's weakness? Sherry is a "non-traditional" applicant because she is a single mother.
2. Yes. For example, while doing my Master's, I had to work part-time, which meant that I'd done part of my degree during night school. Being so busy has also had some impact on my GPA.
3. How is this weakness simultaneously a strength? Being a single mother has taught her maturity and how to manage her time.

Language Review

Exercise I.

(H.) **Interviewer:** Okay, Yala, here's one you've probably heard before. What is your greatest **weakness**?

(A.) **Yala:** Well, I have **set** goals for myself in my career. I **thrive** on intellectual stimulation, and big challenges.

(E.) **Interviewer:** So you get **bored** easily?

(C.) **Yala:** Well, some people might say I get bored easily, and they'd be partly right, but I've worked for my previous employer for four very good years, and I think it's also fair to say that I am just not very **complacent**.

(D.) **Interviewer:** Hmmm...

(G.) **Yala:** Unfortunately, there was just no room for me to **advance** in my current position.

(B.) **Interviewer:** So you are ready for a **change**.

(F.) **Yala:** Yes, I'd say so – my goal is to continue to improve myself so that I can be a stronger and stronger **contributor**.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Listening Quiz](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Job Interviews – Putting a Positive Spin on Your Weakness](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Demonstrating a Positive Attitude](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Jumbled Dialog](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Vocabulary Review](#)

[Job Interviews – Greatest Weakness – Flashcards](#)

BEP 307 - Asking the Interviewer Questions

There is one question that you will definitely be asked in any interview, a question for which you should always prepare a response. That is: "Do you have any questions for me?"

In this episode, we will focus on how to deal with this question. We'll talk about what interviewers expect from you and we'll emphasize the importance of preparation. We'll also study how you can use this opportunity to "interview the interviewer" – that is, to find out whether the company is a good fit for *you*. Meanwhile, we'll talk about how, for the interviewer, this is a chance to put your company in the best possible light.

In the listening, we will return to Yala Santos' interview. Remember, she is an HR specialist at a manufacturing company who is interviewing for an HR manager position in a business unit of a fast moving consumer goods company, Fun Beverages International.



Listening Questions

1) What is Yala's first question for the interviewer?

2) How does the interviewer respond?

3) Yala's second question is a little tougher – what does she ask?

Vocabulary

Cultural differences: These are different ways of doing or seeing things between cultures. "A lot of misunderstandings in international business come from cultural differences rather than real differences of interest."

Genuine commitment: Genuine means real or sincere. A commitment is a promise. "A lot of people talk about 'mutual benefits,' but Frank is not faking it – he has a genuine commitment to win-win solutions in his negotiations."

Long-term development: This describes not just short range but also long range (long time) growth. "In the long run, successful companies tend to be those that recruit and keep excellent people over a long time by paying attention to their long-term development."

To reach one's full potential: Potential describes one's not-yet-realized ability – the ability one has that has not yet been developed. To reach one's full potential, then, is to develop one's full hidden ability. "It's important to us that every employee has opportunities to reach their full potential."

Long-term contribution: Contribution means what you give to an organization or a person, either in terms of money or talent or accomplishments, etc. "Throughout his career, Franz made a huge contribution to the company."

Budgetary and leadership support: Budgetary means having to do with money and leadership has to do with management. So budgetary and leadership support is both fiscal (money) and management support. "Budgetary and leadership support are necessary to create any real change in an organization."

Merger: The combining of two organizations as, for example, when one buys another. "Mergers often create a variety of challenges, including cultural differences, that must be overcome."

Matrix-style management: This describes an organizational structure which is flat; instead of a top-down command and control structure, every employee has several functional managers and they all cooperate flexibly in teams based on the project. "Matrix-style management creates a situation in which people cooperate with loose teams that may be separated geographically by large distances."

Successful Interviews

Dialog

Interviewer: [Fade in, laughing] Yes, I can see what you mean about cultural differences. It sounds pretty challenging...

Yala: Definitely, but you know, it was a really good experience. I feel that I'm much stronger because of it.

Interviewer: Great, well, I think that's just about everything I'd like to get through today. Do you have any question for me?

Yala: Yes, actually, I do have a couple.

Interviewer: Great!

Yala: Okay. First, I was wondering.... What would you say is the best thing about working for this company?

Interviewer: Hmm... Let me think about that... That's an excellent question. I think what truly sets us apart is a genuine commitment to long-term development.

Yala: Uh huh.

Interviewer: There's a strong dedication here to helping people reach their full potential.

Yala: Well, as I said, I'm definitely looking for a place where I can grow and make a long-term contribution.

Interviewer: Those are qualities we obviously really value in employees.

Yala: Okay... Well, another question I might have is about how the human resources department is viewed in the company....

Interviewer: You mean in terms of...?

Yala: Well, would you say you get adequate budgetary and leadership support from upper management?

Interviewer: I see. Yes, well, especially since we went to a more matrix-style management system after the merger, we've seen the executive team take a keen interest in setting up strong HR systems [fade out...] in individual business units...

Debrief

As the dialog begins, Yala and the interviewer have just finished talking about another topic. Then the interviewer asks what typically is the last question in any interview – “Do you have any questions for me?” Let’s look from the HR perspective at a couple more ways to ask this.

- I think that just about covers everything I wanted to get to. How about you? Do you have anything you’d like to ask before we finish the interview?
- We’d like to turn it over to you before we finish – do you have any questions you’d like to ask us about the company?

As an interviewee, how should you respond to this question? This is about interviewing the interviewer – finding a good match. In fact, in some cases the interviewer is listening to what you ask or don’t ask. They want to see, for example, that you are genuinely interested in the position. The best way you can do this is to do your research beforehand and prepare a few questions to ask. Also, you want to be listening carefully to the questions you are asked during the interview, and prepare a few of your own in response.

How does Yala respond?

Yala: Yes, actually, I do have a couple.

Interviewer: Great!

Yala doesn’t hesitate – she is expecting this. We should all follow Yala’s example. Avoid saying, “No, I don’t have any questions,” as this would show you have not prepared adequately for the interview.

What’s Yala’s first question?

Yala: Okay. First, I was wondering.... What would you say is the best thing about working for this company?

This is a good type of question to start with. We want to avoid jumping into queries about compensation and benefits. You don’t want to appear as though all you’re interested in is money. Save that for the salary negotiation, which we’ll deal with in another episode. It might be all right to ask a question or two about compensation, but at the very least we should first ask a few general questions to establish that we are very interested in the job and that we have thought carefully about it. Also, avoid asking if you got the job - don’t be impatient, and don’t ask what the company does - do your research ahead of time. Finally, though it may well be okay to ask one or two tough questions if you have them, it might be better to open with one or two positive general questions like Yala’s that allow the interviewer to first put the company in the best light.

Let’s study a few more good general, positive questions that we can ask almost any company as a warm-up to tougher questions.

- What kinds of assignments might I expect in the first six months of the job?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?

Successful Interviews

- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- What do you like best about your company?
- Is there a lot of team work?
- What projects do you have in the development stage now?
- What are your plans for expansion?

Recall that Yala has just asked the interviewer what the best thing about working at Fun Beverages is. How does the interviewer respond?

Interviewer: Hmm... Let me think about that... That's an excellent question. I think what truly sets us apart is a genuine commitment to long-term development.

Yala: Uh huh.

Interviewer: There's a strong dedication here to helping people reach their full potential.

From the HR perspective, you should be prepared to answer this type of question because it is a chance to portray your company in the best light in order to recruit excellent prospects. In this case, the interviewer decides to emphasize long-term development. "What really sets us apart" means "what really *differentiates* us is...." The interviewer means that Fun Beverage's commitment to long-term career growth differentiates it from the competition. How does Yala respond?

Yala: Well, as I said, I'm definitely looking for a place where I can grow and make a long-term contribution.

Interviewer: Those are qualities we obviously really value in employees.

Yala refers back to a comment she has made earlier – "Well, as I said..." – to emphasize that her values are in line with the company's. Finding a good match – that is, demonstrating shared values or common perspectives – is an important interview goal. Let's listen to some more language for emphasizing shared perspectives:

- Yes, well, obviously this is an area where I think my values really align with this organization's.
- It sounds like our interests really intersect at several points.
- I also really value a cooperative, team work oriented working style.

What's Yala's next question?

Yala: Okay... Well, another question I might have is about how the human resources department is viewed in the company....

This time Yala is asking a tougher question – one about the relationship between HR and the rest of the company. Notice how she is a little bit more careful with her approach. She says, "another question I *might have* is..." When asking tough questions, there are a number of softening phrases you can use, as we've studied in previous episodes such as BEP 49 & 50. Let's review some of these.

- I was wondering...
- Perhaps you could tell me...
- Would it be possible to tell me...
- Could you possibly clarify a point for me...

How does the interviewer respond to Yala's tough question? First, he asks for clarification. Then Yala asks her question in more direct terms.

Interviewer: You mean in terms of...?

Yala: Well, would you say you get adequate budgetary and leadership support from upper management?

As an interviewer, it's important to ask for clarification. This may be especially important when interviewees are questioning *you* because they might be shy about asking you directly what's on their minds. By clarifying their queries, you show them that you are truly interested in what they have to say. We've handled asking for clarification in BEP 34 and 35, so those would be good episodes to review.

Now, before we finish the show today, let's go over some more tough questions that we can ask interviewers.

First let's listen to some general questions that we can ask about the company, its strengths and weaknesses, and how your job fits in.

- How important does upper management consider the function of this position to be?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured?
- What are your growth projections for next year?

Now, here are a couple of questions we might be able to ask about salary and benefits, if it's appropriate:

- Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?
- Does your company encourage further education?
- Do you offer flextime?

Some tough questions you can ask about staffing and turnover include the following:

- Have you cut your staff in the last three years?
- Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
- What is the largest single challenge facing your staff now?
- May I talk with the last person who held this position?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
- Has there been much turnover in this job area?

Successful Interviews

How does the interviewer respond to Yala's question about management support for HR? He begins by discussing historical changes within the company. Apparently, Fun Beverages has recently undergone a merger, and along with this has changed to a "matrix-style" management system. "Matrix management" means that the organizational structure is flat; instead of a top-down command and control structure, every employee has several functional managers and they all cooperate flexibly in teams based on each individual project.

Finally, there's one last question you can always ask an interviewer:

- What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

In this episode, we've covered a few basics and given you some ideas of the types of questions you can ask. The most important thing you can do to get ready for this part of the interview is to *prepare* by doing research on the company, and thinking up several good questions before the interview.

Now, let's practice some of what we've learned. You'll hear a series of cues that consist of question parts. Based on these parts, reconstruct the whole question. Try to use softeners. For example, if you hear "Important / management / consider / this position," you can say something like, "How important would you say management considers this position to be?" Let's give it a try.

Cue 1: Characteristics / achievers / this company / share?

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: Projects / you / have / development stage / now

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: Plans / for expansion

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: Describe / your company's / management style

Learner 4: _____

Cue 5: Largest single challenge / facing your staff / now

Learner 5: _____

Answer 1: What characteristics would you say achievers in this company seem to share?

Answer 2: Can I ask what projects you have in the development stage now?

Answer 3: I was wondering what are your plans for expansion?

Answer 4: Could you describe your company's management style?

Answer 5: What would you say is largest single challenge facing your staff now?

How did you do? Try doing the practice again to develop fluency.

That's all for this episode on Interviewing the Interviewer. We've talked about how important it is to prepare and we've seen that this is both a great opportunity to demonstrate our knowledge about the company and to find out more about whether or not it's a good match. Meanwhile, from the HR point of view, this is a chance to portray your organization in the best light.

Be sure to check out the study notes for this and other episodes. There you'll find complete transcripts, vocabulary descriptions, and review questions. Also, online at www.businessenglishpod.com you will find a wide variety of additional study material.

Thanks for listening!

Study Strategy

Research a company you'd like to interview at. What are its strengths and weaknesses? What can you find out about any potential challenges that you might encounter working there? Prepare a list of five questions that you could ask an interviewer.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Listening Quiz](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – General Questions](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Tough Questions I](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Tough Questions II](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Vocabulary Review](#)

[Asking the Interviewer Questions – Flashcards](#)

Language Review

I. Interview Questions

1. Review useful language by filling in the blanks.
2. What kinds of a _____s might I expect the first six months of the job?
3. What c _____s do the achievers in this company seem to share?
4. How do you feel about c _____y and individuality?
5. What do you like b _____t about your company?
6. Is there a lot of t _____m work?
7. What projects do you have in the d _____t stage now?
8. What are your plans for e _____n?
9. How important does upper management consider the f _____n of this position to be?
10. Could you describe your company's management s _____e and the type of employee who fits well with it?
11. What are the company's s _____s and weaknesses compared to its competition?
12. How will my leadership r _____s and performance be measured?
13. What are your growth p _____s for next year? Are salary a _____s geared to the cost of living or job performance?
14. Does your company encourage further e _____n?
15. Do you offer fl _____e?
16. Is this a new position or am I r _____g someone?
17. What is the largest single ch _____e facing your staff now?
18. May I talk with the last person who held this p _____?
19. Do you fill positions from the outside or pr _____e from within first?
20. Has there been much t _____r in this job area?

II. Interview Questions

Review useful language for describing shared values and for softening tough questions by putting the following jumbled sentences in order:

1. with this area really an align think where I this values organization's my is

2. really several interests at points it like intersect sounds our

3. now challenge would say largest your staff is single what you facing

4. style describe could you management your company's

5. expansion I plans are wondering are was your what for

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) Yala asks what the best thing is about working at Fun Beverages.
- 2) The interviewer says that there is "a strong dedication here to helping people reach their full potential."
- 3) She asks about whether HR gets "adequate budgetary and leadership support" from upper management.

Language Review

I. Interview Questions

- 1) What kinds of **assignments** might I expect the first six months of the job?
- 2) What **characteristics** do the achievers in this company seem to share?
- 3) How do you feel about **creativity** and individuality?
- 4) What do you like **best** about your company?
- 5) Is there a lot of **team** work?
- 6) What projects do you have in the **development** stage now?
- 7) What are your plans for **expansion**?
- 8) How important does upper management consider the **function** of this position to be?
- 9) Could you describe your company's management **style** and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- 10) What are the company's **strengths** and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- 11) How will my leadership **responsibilities** and performance be measured?
- 12) What are your growth **projections** for next year?
- 13) Are salary **adjustments** geared to the cost of living or job performance?
- 14) Does your company encourage further **education**?
- 15) Do you offer **flextime/flexitime**?
- 16) Is this a new position or am I **replacing** someone?
- 17) What is the largest single **challenge** facing your staff now?
- 18) May I talk with the last person who held this **position**?
- 19) Do you fill positions from the outside or **promote** from within first?
- 20) Has there been much **turnover** in this job area?

II. Interview Questions

1. This is an area where I think my values really align with this organization's.
2. It sounds like our interests really intersect at several points.
3. What would you say is largest single challenge facing your staff now?
4. Could you describe your company's management style?
5. I was wondering what are your plans for expansion are?

BEP 308 – Stress Questions

As we've discussed in other episodes on job interviews, one goal of the person conducting the interview is to get you to "let your guard down." Often, after a series of "warm-up questions," the interviewer will give you a tough question. This will likely come "out of the blue," that is, unexpectedly. We call these types of questions "stress questions" because part of the intention is to see how you react under pressure.



Common types of stress questions range from problems, such as how to solve a business case study or even a mathematics question, to "behavioral questions," such as how to deal with imaginary work situations involving conflict or communication.

The key with this type of question is "Don't panic!" which is the theme of this episode. We'll be looking at strategies and language that will help you deal with this type of query coolly and calmly.

Let's start with a bad example. We'll return to Michael's first interview with the electronics store.

Dialog - Bad Example

Michael: Now, here's another hypothetical question. Say we have two lines of LCDs.

Alexander: Two lines of LCDs...

Michael: That's right. One sells very well; the other one is a cheaper price, but it doesn't sell as well because the brand is not as well known. What can we do to increase sales of the second brand?

Alexander: Ah! The problem is quite clear.

Michael: Good. What's your suggestion?

Alexander: So, in life, there are trustworthy things and untrustworthy things. And everything is so because we will it to be so. I'd say, just put them in the front of the shop, right in the window, or, just cut the price or something. In this case what is required is taking practical action, instead of speculation.

Vocabulary

Interpersonal conflict: "Interpersonal" means between (among) persons. So interpersonal conflict is fighting among people. "Some departments have a lot of politics, which is usually accompanied by a lot of interpersonal conflict."

Outcome: Result. "What was the outcome of the match?"

To handle conflict: To deal with or resolve conflict. "How people handle conflict tells you a lot about their character."

Scenario: A scene, event, or story. "Let me give you a specific scenario involving a manager and an employee, and you tell me how you would react if you were the manager."

Bear with me: Wait for me. "Just bear with me for a second, please."

To play out: To unfold or happen. "It's impossible to tell now – we'll just have to wait to see how things play out."

To be proactive: The opposite of reactive, proactive describes the approach or attitude of solving problems before they happen. "Being proactive is a highly desirable quality for employees today because solving problems before they happen helps save companies a lot of money."

To be tasked with sth.: To be given the job of doing something. "He was tasked with finding the leak."

To resolve the situation: To solve or bring the "situation" (usually a problem of some sort) to a conclusion. "Tell me how you plan to resolve the situation."

Executive team: The group of executives or leaders at the top of a company. "Our executive team has a combined total of over 200 years of experience in this market."

Buy-in: "Buy-in" here refers to commitment, that is, being emotionally or financially invested in something. "To solve union-management problems, you need to have buy-in from both sides."

To credibly refute a rumor: Credibly means believably. Refute means disprove. "You can make all the denials you want, but no one will believe you. To credibly refute this rumor, you're going to have to show us facts."

To take concrete actions: Concrete means real or specific. "What concrete actions have you taken to resolve the situation?"

Quarterly review meeting: Quarterly means every three months or four times per year. A quarterly review meeting is, therefore, a meeting held every three months to review something, i.e. progress, etc. "We decided to hold a regular quarterly review meeting to keep closer track of the project."

Debrief - Bad Example

In this example, the interviewer has asked Michael a “problem” type of question. How does Michael respond? Though on the outside he doesn’t seem to be panicking, Michael actually responds in a way that shows he is “stressed.” First, instead of giving himself time to think, he answers quickly that “The problem is quite clear.”

How about the response itself? Does it seem organized and clear? Actually, Michael’s answer is illogical; he jumps around from point to point without making a clear conclusion. The most interesting suggestion he has – to put the LCDs in the store window – is buried in the *middle* of his presentation. Because his thoughts are disorganized, it seems that Michael is either nervous or not thinking clearly.

Actually, if you’re like me, a natural response to a stress question is to get nervous. Luckily, there’s a couple of strategies that will help us deal with any stressful question without panicking.

Let’s turn now to a good example. Yala, who is interviewing for an HR manager position, is asked a tough question by her interviewer. As you listen, try to answer the following questions. The answers will be posted in a few days on our website.

Listening Questions – Good Example

1) What is the interviewer’s “stress question?”

2) What does Yala do to give herself some thinking time?

3) How does Yala answer the question?

Dialog - Good Example

Interviewer: Now, I was wondering if you could describe a specific experience working in a group or team situation where there was interpersonal conflict?

Yala: So you mean how I approached the conflict?

Interviewer: Yes. Maybe you could describe what worked well, and what didn't, and what the outcome was.

Yala: Well, just give me a moment here to think about that.

Interviewer: That's okay. Take your time.

Yala: Obviously, I think handling conflict successfully is an important part of being a manager, particularly when you have to deal with many different groups of people...

Interviewer: Yes...so how has that played out in a specific scenario for you?

Yala: There was a time a couple of years back, the middle of 2006.

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Yala: There were rumors that we were going to move a product line to another plant in Mexico. And... uh... just bear with me for a second... I was proactive and brought the workers' concerns to management's attention.

Interviewer: How did they react?

Yala: Well, I was tasked with resolving the situation. So we called a meeting with union leaders and I was able to get two key members of our executive team to attend.

Interviewer: Getting management buy-in in this sort of situation is important.

Yala: Yes, and we were then able to credibly refute the rumors, and we reassured workers by communicating about the production plans...

Interviewer: Uh huh.

Yala: And we solicited opinions about how to improve communication to avoid the problem in the future.

Interviewer: So what concrete actions came out of this...?

Yala: Well the two main steps we took were 1) to set up a quarterly review meeting between senior managers and union leaders and 2) create a local version of the company newsletter.

Successful Interviews

Debrief - Good Example

The first thing we need to do when we get a stress question is to take a deep breath, maybe take a sip from our drink and *slow down*. Take control of the interview.

In the dialog, Yala uses two different ways to give herself time to formulate a response. What are they? Let's listen:

Interviewer: Now, I was wondering if you could describe a specific experience working in a group or team situation where there was interpersonal conflict?

Yala: So you mean how I approached the conflict?

The first thing that Yala does is clarify the question. She says, "So you mean...." This serves two purposes: first, she makes sure she completely understands the query. Second, she buys herself time to think about her response. Various useful phrases and strategies for asking for clarification and handling Q&A were dealt with in BEP 36 & 37. Let's just review a few key phrases:

- So let me just make sure I understand exactly what you're asking.
- That's an interesting question. Are you more looking for a work-related experience, or can I tell you something from my general life experience?
- Let me just run through the question again to make sure I understand all the parameters...

What is the second strategy Yala uses to give herself some thinking time? Let's go back to the dialog.

Interviewer: Yes. Maybe you could describe what worked well, and what didn't, and what the outcome was.

Yala: Well, just give me a moment here to think about that.

Here, Yala uses a specific phrase – "Well, just give me a moment here to think about that" to give herself a little extra time. Interviewers generally don't mind if you do this. It looks much better if you take control of the interview and give yourself some space to consider the problem than if you panic and just say whatever comes to mind.

Let's go over a few more phrases to buy yourself thinking time during an interview:

- Good question. Let me think a little bit about that.
- Okay, just bear with me for a little bit.
- Well, there are a couple situations that come to mind. Let me just think it through a little.
- All right, please just give me a sec to organize my thoughts.

After Yala has bought herself some time to think, how does the interview continue?

Interviewer: That's okay. Take your time.

Yala: Obviously, I think handling conflict successfully is an important part of being a manager, particularly when you have to deal with many different groups of people...

Here Yala has not yet formulated a detailed response to the question. Instead, she begins with a general statement of principle. Starting with a broad statement like this both 1) allows you to say something that you know the interviewer will agree with and 2) enables you to take a few more seconds to think of a detailed response. Consider a few more examples.

A: So if you had two buckets, one that held three gallons and one that held five gallons, how could you use them to measure out four gallons of water?

B: Well, hmmm... let me think about that. Obviously, this type of problem requires a little creativity...

A: Can you describe a time when you had to change your communication style to deliver a message or get your point across?

C: That's an interesting question. Please give me a few moments.... Hmmm... Well, being able to communicate with different groups of people is, of course, absolutely critical to being a leader...

How does the discussion continue? The interviewer wants to know how Yala's ability to deal with conflict between different groups of people has "played out in a specific scenario." In other words, how have Yala's conflict resolution skills worked in a particular example? Yala begins talking about a specific time "a couple of years back in 2006."

Yala: There were rumors that we were going to move a product line to another plant in Mexico. And... uh... just bear with me for a second... I was proactive and brought the workers' concerns to management's attention.

Notice how Yala again uses a *thinking time phrase* and then takes a sip of water to give herself a little break while she puts her thoughts together. She then uses one of the vocabulary terms for positive personal characteristics that we learned in Talking About Accomplishments Parts 1 and 2, "to be proactive." This, as you'll recall, is the opposite of "reactive" – it means to solve problems before they occur instead of just reacting to them.

As Yala demonstrates, we can use the language we learned for describing positive personal qualities to help us to respond to behavioral-type stress questions. Interviewers and HR people generally believe past behavior predicts future behavior. By describing how our behavior demonstrates positive personal characteristics, we are "speaking the interviewer's language." How does the interview continue?

Interviewer: How did they react?

Yala: Well, I was tasked with resolving the situation. So we called a meeting with union leaders and I was able to get two key members of our executive team to attend.

Successful Interviews

Notice how the interviewer asks Yala for specifics. From the HR perspective, it's important not just to be satisfied with general statements. We need details so that we can get deeper understanding of the candidate's experience. From the interviewee's perspective, adding details makes your story more believable.

How does the dialog continue?

Interviewer: Getting management buy-in in this sort of situation is important.

The interviewer participates in the discussion by mentioning how important "management buy-in" is. Here "buy-in" means something like commitment. The interviewer is pointing out that Yala successfully gained a commitment from management to engage with the problem. Making this sort of comment encourages Yala to keep going.

Next, Yala discusses how, working as a team with her management, they were able to "credibly refute" rumors. That means *believably disprove the stories*. In addition, they "solicited opinions," that is, gathered feedback about how to improve communication in the future.

Finally, how does the interview finish off?

Interviewer: So what concrete actions came out of this...?

The interviewer is understandably interested in concrete follow-up actions. If he hadn't asked her this, Yala would still have done well to talk about it. It's not enough simply to deal with a situation. We also have to think about how we *learn* from it. These days, most organizations put a lot of emphasis on *learning* and *improving processes*, so no matter what kind of behavioral question we get, it's smart to emphasize the long-term results that came out of the situation.

How does Yala respond?

Yala: Well the two main steps we took were 1) to set up a quarterly review meeting between senior managers and union leaders and 2) create a local version of the company newsletter.

Notice that Yala talks about the "two main steps we took." This is a good place to use an ordered list, such as first, second, third, and so on. As we've learned in other episodes, this is called "signposting language." Of course, as we've discussed elsewhere, sequencing or signposting language is important when dealing with all kinds of interview questions, which are essentially prompting you to give a series of short presentations. It would therefore be a good idea to review signposting in such episodes as BEP 101 and 102.

Here, we'll just review a couple of useful phrases that can help get you out of a tight spot in an interview.

If you're like me, sometimes you can't think of anything to say, so you just have to start talking. But then, half way through your speech, you realize that you have a much better, much more important point to make. What can you say? You can try something like this phrase:

But actually all of these points up to now, though worth mentioning, are rather minor. What I'd really like to emphasize is...

If you feel like you are just **talking nonsense**, you can say...

Sorry, perhaps I didn't make myself clear.

If it was too fast, and you sped through the main points **too quickly**, you can say...

Sorry, let me just recap on that...

If what you're saying sounds **too complicated**, you might try saying...

So, basically, what I'm saying is this...

Now, let's practice some of what we've learned today. In a moment, you will be asked a couple of stress questions. Use the strategies we have learned today to give yourself time to think. Start with a phrase, such as "Can you just bear with me for a moment..." or, "Let me just think about that for a second..." Then, make a general statement about the question to buy time as we've practiced already today. For example, if you hear, "Tell me about an assignment that was too difficult for you..." you might say something like, "Well, how people deal with difficult assignments really tells you a lot about a person's communication style."

Let's give it a try.

Cue 1: Tell me about a time when you faced a major obstacle at work.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: Tell me about a time when you failed.

Learner 1: _____

Okay, now let's listen to some example answers. Of course, your responses may differ from these.

Cue 1: Tell me about a time when you faced a major obstacle at work.

Learner 1: Well, let me think a little bit about that... How we deal with obstacles and what we learn from them is very important to job success...

Cue 2: Tell me about a time when you failed.

Learner 2: Hmm... good question... please just bear with me for a second. Life has its shares of successes and failures, and how we deal with failures says a lot about us...

That's about all for this episode. We've covered a variety of strategies and language for dealing with stress questions. We've talked about giving ourselves time to think and ordering our thoughts when we answer. The theme of today's

Successful Interviews

show has been *Don't panic!* We can't be prepared for every question, but practicing strategies like these can help us stay cool and calm and *take control of the interview*.

Thanks for listening!

Study Strategy

Below are some more common behavioral-type stress questions. For each one, formulate an answer using the strategies we've talked about today. Role play your answer, including asking for clarification and thinking time.

1. What can you do for us that other candidates can't?
2. Give me an example of a time when you had to think out of the box.
3. Tell me about a time when you failed.
4. What book are you currently reading?
5. Tell me about a time when you faced a major obstacle at work.
6. Tell me about an assignment that was too difficult for you. How did you resolve the issue?
7. What is your management style?
8. How would your past experience translate into success in this job?
9. How would you tackle the first 90 days?
10. Give me proof of your technical competence.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Stress Questions - Listening Quiz](#)

[Stress Questions - Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Stress Questions - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Stress Questions - Asking for Clarification](#)

[Stress Questions - Thinking Time](#)

[Stress Questions - Making an Additional Point](#)

[Stress Questions - Stress Questions Review](#)

[Stress Questions - Useful Vocabulary](#)

[Stress Questions - Flashcards](#)

Language Review**I. Asking for Clarification and Thinking Time**

Review asking for clarification and thinking time by filling in the blanks with words from the box.

bear	situations	understand	organize	run
looking	understand	think	related	general

Asking for Clarification

1. So let me just make sure I _____ exactly what you're asking.
2. That's an interesting question. Are you more _____ for a work-
_____ experience, or can I tell you something from my
_____ life experience?
3. Let me just _____ through the question again to make sure I
_____ all the parameters...

Thinking time

4. Good question. Let me _____ a little bit about that.
5. Okay, just _____ with me for a little bit.
6. Well, there are a couple _____ that come to mind. Let me just
think it through a little.
7. All right, please just give me a sec to _____ my thoughts.

II. Getting Yourself Out of a Tight Spot

Sometimes during an interview, you realize in mid-sentence that what you are saying isn't the best way to answer a question. How can you get yourself out of the tight spot? Let's review some useful phrases. In the following exercise, first unscramble (put in order) the sentences. Then match each sentence with its main purpose from the box.

A. I'm talking nonsense...	B. I have a more important point to make...
C. I'm saying something too complicated...	D. I'm speaking too quickly...

1. basically is what I'm so, this saying

2. on that let sorry me just recap

3. clear make I sorry didn't myself perhaps

4. though but what now, all of like to these points actually up really to
mentioning, are emphasize rather worth minor I'd is

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) The interviewer asks a behavioral question – i.e. a question meant to help them understand how you react to a particular kind of situation – about how Yala deals with conflict.
- 2) To give herself some thinking time, Yala both clarifies the question and uses a phrase – “Well, just give me a moment to think about that.”
- 3) She says that she was “proactive” in getting the two sides of the dispute to communicate with each other and, as the interviewer follows up on the question, she describes in a logical way the two key actions her company took to prevent future conflict of this kind.

Language Review

I. Asking for Clarification and Thinking Time

Asking for Clarification

1. So let me just make sure I **understand** exactly what you’re asking.
2. That’s an interesting question. Are you more **looking** for a work-related experience, or can I tell you something from my **general** life experience?
3. Let me just **run** through the question again to make sure I **understand** all the parameters...

Thinking time

4. Good question. Let me **think** a little bit about that.
5. Okay, just **bear** with me for a little bit.
6. Well, there are a couple **situations** that come to mind. Let me just think it through a little.
7. All right, please just give me a sec to **organize** my thoughts.

II. Getting Yourself Out of a Tight Spot

1. So, basically, what I’m saying is this... **C. I’m saying something too complicated**
2. Sorry, let me just recap on that... **D. I’m speaking too quickly**
3. Sorry, perhaps I didn’t make myself clear. **A. I’m talking nonsense**
4. But actually all of these points up to now, though worth mentioning, are rather minor. What I’d really like to emphasize is... **B. I have a more important point to make**

BEP 309 – Second Round Interviews

Congratulations! You were successful in your first round interview, and you have been called back for a second. What should you expect? The key word is *more* – there will be *more* questions, *more* pressure – and, of course, *more* likelihood that you will get the job.

An important function of second-round interviews is to find out whether we *fit* with the employer's *company culture*.



In this episode, we'll study how to demonstrate that we are a *good match* with an organization. In addition, we'll review some other useful second-round interview skills, such as *summarizing the previous discussion* and *referring to something you forgot to mention earlier*.

We'll listen to Sherry's second interview with a big international accounting firm, Grimshaw and Keene (commonly referred to as "GK.") The interviewer is George Tan, an Asia-Pacific key account manager.

As you listen, pay attention to how George and Sherry establish that she is a good fit for the organization, and try to answer the following listening questions. The answers will be posted in a few days on our website.

Listening Questions

- 1) George describes GK as both "high-pressure" and "tremendously rewarding," but he is concerned about whether or not Sherry is ready to "take the plunge." What does he mean by that?

- 2) What does Sherry say is one of the things that most attracts her to GK?

- 3) What is George's major concern about Sherry's work experience?

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Vocabulary

High-pressure (adj.): High intensity, high-paced. A lot of pressure. "Working on an ambulance crew is a high-pressure job."

Tremendously rewarding for s/o: To be very worthwhile for s/o. "Working as a volunteer was a tremendously rewarding experience."

To take the plunge: Plunge means dive. *To take the plunge* is an idiom which means/meaning to boldly enter a new situation. "After considering it for a while, I took the plunge and quit my job to go back to university."

Company/work culture: The particular way of doing things at a company. "Our company culture is characterized by a fast-paced, high-pressure environment."

To excel in sth.: To do very well at something. "He really excels in analytical thinking – there's not many problems he can't solve."

Fast-paced environment: A situation that requires quick reactions and fast movement. "After living in the countryside, it can be challenging to adapt to the fast-paced environment of a big city."

To brief s/o on sth.: To tell someone the main details about something. "Before I went into the meeting, my secretary briefed me on what had already been discussed so far."

To recap briefly: *Recap* is short for *recapitulate*, which means to summarize or repeat. "Could you just briefly recap what you said last time?"

To assess risks: To analyze the risks. The noun form is *risk assessment*. "Before we enter this new market, we need a comprehensive assessment of all the risks involved."

Quantitative expertise: Knowledge and skills in math and numbers. "A lot of financial positions require significant quantitative expertise."

Client-facing work: Work that requires dealing directly (face-to-face) with customers. "For client-facing work, it's not enough to have quantitative expertise; you also need good interpersonal skills."

To bring sth. to the table: To offer something. "He brings a lot of experience and knowledge to the table."

To be a people-person: To be the kind of person who enjoys building and maintaining relationships. Extroverted. "He's a real people-person – building relationships comes naturally to him."

To be proactive (in sth.): To take the (first) initiative in doing something; to take care of something before being asked to or before it becomes a problem. "He is very proactive in looking for ways to save money."

To be born out in sth.: To be proven by or evidenced in sth. "His assertion that the customer was not being entirely truthful was born out in the later events."

To hone one's skills: To sharpen or improve one's abilities. "He honed his technical skills through years of working as an IT specialist."

To be closely involved in/with sth.: To be closely related or closely connected with something. "I have been involved closely in this project from the beginning, so I can tell you anything you need to know."

Dialog

George: Well Sherry, you probably already know that GK is a **high-pressure** place to work...

Sherry: Yes, I've heard that.

George: ...but it's definitely also **tremendously rewarding** for the right person...

Sherry: Uh huh.

George: And I was just wondering whether you're ready to ... what's the word I'm looking for... **take the plunge**.

Sherry: Actually, the **work culture** at GK is one of the things that most attracts me about the company. I am a highly-focused, very energetic person, and I am ready to **excel in a fast-paced environment**.

George: Okay, that's great. Sounds like there could be a fit there. Now, Linda has **briefed me a little on** your background, and I see that you interned at Armstrong.

Sherry: Yes.

George: Could you perhaps just give us some more specifics on what you were doing?

Sherry: Yes, sure. **To recap briefly**, I was working in a team to employ a new statistical approach for **assessing internet security risks**. Basically, the client was developing a new internet retail strategy, and we were in charge of examining possible invisible costs...

George: **[Fade in]** Okay, thanks for that. I can see that you bring a lot of **quantitative expertise** to your work.

Sherry: Thank you.

George: But in addition, you know this is a management trainee position, and it's going to involve a significant amount of **client-facing work**.

Sherry: Uh huh.

George: So what do you **bring to the table** in terms of skills in customer interaction?

Sherry: To start with, I'm a **people-person**, and I've always been **proactive in** building relationships, and I think this is really **born out** in my personal and professional activities. For example, I was a co-founder of my college debate club, and we went on to participate in a lot of local and regional competitions.

George: Yes, I can see how that would **hone your skills**.

Sherry: Oh, and there's something I forgot to mention earlier. During my work at Armstrong, I was also **involved closely in** a series of meetings where we communicated our results to the customer.

Debrief

One of the most important functions of a second-round interview is to determine how well you *fit* with the company – and that's the main theme of this episode: *Focus on fit*. At this stage, employers already know that you are a good candidate. Now, they want to determine whether you are a *good match* for their organization. In other words, it's not enough to be qualified. We also have to be *someone they can work with*. At the same time, we should remember that it's okay *not to fit*. If there's not a good match between us and their organization, now is a good time to find out.

How does George, the interviewer, start off a discussion of *fit*? He begins by talking about the *company culture* at GK. He tells Sherry that it is a *high-pressure* but *tremendously rewarding* place to work. In other words, the right people – *only* the right people – will be very happy there. Next, he asks her a *probing* (or exploratory) question that aims to find out whether she thinks she is the right person for the job...

George: And I was just wondering whether you're ready to ... what's the word I'm looking for... **take the plunge**.

Plunge means *fall* or *dive*. To *take the plunge* is an idiom that refers to bravely and boldly entering a new situation. George is trying to find out if Sherry is ready for GK's high-pressure environment. How does Sherry respond?

Sherry: Actually, the work culture at GK is one of the things that **most attracts me about** the company. I am a highly-focused, very energetic person, and I am ready to **excel in** a fast-paced environment.

Sherry expresses that she is a good match for GK by saying, "the work culture is one of the things that most attracts me." She *reinforces* this statement by describing positive personal characteristics that fit well with GK's culture – she is *highly focused*, *very energetic* and she *excels in* (that is, she does well in) *fast-paced environments*.

Let's practice some more expressions that we can use to indicate a good fit.

- I'm someone who naturally seeks to foster mutual understanding among my friends and colleagues, so the culture of collaboration at this company really appeals to me.
- Because of my natural inclination towards open and frank relationships, I think I would be a great fit for this style of teamwork.
- I feel a strong attraction to the way of doing things here.
- From everything I've learned about your operation, I'm confident my personality would be a great match with your team.
- The company mission statement – "Innovating for tomorrow" – really resonates with me.

In the last example, a "mission statement" is a short slogan or motto that sums up a company's or organization's basic approach to business. To *resonate with something* or *someone* means to move together or vibrate in harmony with. Idiomatically, this is another way of describing a *close fit* or a *good match*.

After their discussion about fit, George and Sherry move on to talk about her skills and experience. What kind of questions should she expect George to ask in a second-round interview?

Second-round interviews present both *new* and *old* challenges. On the technical side, we should be prepared for more detailed queries about our work, our skills, and our experience. We may be given case studies – “*what if*” problems that we have to analyze and solve.

But don't be surprised if we hear many of the *same* questions we were asked in the first interview – another person is likely to be interviewing you this time. Don't expect them to know everything from your first discussion. For instance, George starts by asking Sherry about something that already came up in her previous interview...

George: Now, Linda has briefed me a little on your background, and I see that you interned at Armstrong.

Sherry: Yes.

George: Could you perhaps just give us some more specifics on what you were doing?

At this point, it will be useful for Sherry to summarize her previous discussion before she goes into more detail. Let's see how she does this...

Sherry: To recap briefly, I was working in a team to employ a new statistical approach for **assessing internet security risks**.

Sherry starts her summary by saying, “*To recap briefly...*” *Recap* is short for *recapitulate*, which is another word for summarize. Specifically, in her internship Sherry developed new approaches for *assessing*, that is measuring, the security risk to companies from the internet.

Recapping on our previous discussion is something we can expect to do in a second interview. Let's study some more useful expressions for this:

- Let me just briefly go over what I mentioned last time.
- To sum up what I said before...
- In brief, there are several important factors that make me a strong candidate.
- As I mentioned in our previous discussion I've been working in the manufacturing field for 15 years...

George praises Sherry's response to encourage her. He says that she obviously brings a lot of quantitative expertise – that is, knowledge of numbers and math – to her work. But he has another concern. What is it?

George: But in addition, you know this is a management trainee position, and it's going to involve a significant amount of **client-facing work**.

Sherry: Uh huh.

George: So what do you **bring to the table** in terms of skills in customer interaction?

Successful Interviews

Here, George is *probing* or asking Sherry about her skills in another important area – *client-facing work*, or situations in which there is actual *face-to-face interaction* with the customer. The management trainee position for which Sherry is interviewing will require a significant amount of such direct communication with the customer, so George wants to know that Sherry can *bring* the required communication skills *to the table*. In this idiom, *table* refers to a business situation; what we *bring to the table* refers to the skills and knowledge that we have *to offer*.

This idiom is one useful way for an interviewer to *probe whether a candidate's skills match our requirements*. Let's explore some other useful expressions:

- What *specific experiences* do you have in conflict resolution?
- I'm hoping to *get a clearer picture of your approach to customer relation management, since this is a particular priority for us*.
- Can you tell us about a *specific time when you had to solve a problem under high pressure*?

How does Sherry highlight her communication skills in response to George's question?

Sherry: To start with, I'm a **people-person**, and I've always been **proactive in building relationships**, and I think this is really **born out** in my personal and professional activities.

Sherry says that she is a *people-person*, that is, she is the kind of person who enjoys being around and interacting with other people. Furthermore, she is *proactive in building relationships*. In other words, *she takes the first initiative* to make contact with other people. Finally, she emphasizes how these qualities are *born out* in her personal and professional activities. *To be born out in* means *to be proven by*. So Sherry is saying that her interpersonal skills are *demonstrated* or *proven by* her activities. To back up her claim, she provides an example. She recalls how she co-founded her college debate team.

George responds positively to Sherry's statement. He says he can see how her participation in a debate team would *hone her skills*. *To hone one's skills* is a common collocation that means to *sharpen* or *improve* one's abilities.

Now, let's review some more useful language and expressions for highlighting how our skills match the job's requirements.

- I think my interpersonal skills are *strongly evidenced* in my years of involvement in school government.
- My work in this project *testifies to my ability* to think analytically and to solve problems.
- This experience really *embodies my approach* to dealing with conflict in the workplace.
- My active involvement in organizing after-work activities *provides a great example of* my commitment to building strong teams.

When George brings up communication skills, it reminds Sherry of something she forgot to mention earlier. What is it?

Sherry: Oh, and there's something I forgot to mention earlier. During my work at Armstrong, I was also **involved closely in** a series of meetings where we communicated our results to the customer.

During the previous discussion of her internship at Armstrong, Sherry neglected to mention the client-facing work she did there. So takes advantage of the opportunity presented by George's question to highlight this key point.

Often in an interview, a new discussion topic reminds us of a point we should have made earlier. And in a second interview, we may want to bring up points we forgot to make in our first interview. Let's review some more language for dealing with this kind of situation.

- I forgot to mention my time in the army...
- Regarding our previous discussion about my technical knowledge, let me just add something to what I was saying before.
- There's something I should have said earlier.
- That reminds me... I also encountered this kind of situation in my previous job, which I was discussing earlier.

Now, it's your turn to practice. First, we'll review "mentioning something you forgot earlier." Imagine you are in an interview. The interviewer has just asked you a question that reminds you of something you should have said before. In the cue, you'll hear the subject you should have mentioned. After the beep, use one of the phrases we studied.

For example, if you hear:

Example cue: My experience as team leader. <beep>

You could say, [for example]

Example answer: That reminds me... I should have mentioned my experience as a team leader...

Other useful expressions include "I forgot to mention..." and "Let me just add something to what I was saying before."

Are you ready? Let's give it a try.

Cue 1: A major project I worked on. <beep>

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I also worked as a volunteer. <beep>

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: My second Master's degree. <beep>

Learner 3: _____

Now listen to some example answers. Of course, your responses may differ from these.

Successful Interviews

Answer 1: That reminds me... I forgot to mention a major project I worked on.

Answer 2: Let me just add something to what I was saying before. I also worked as a volunteer.

Answer 3: That reminds me... I should have mentioned my second Master's degree.

Next, we'll review some useful vocabulary and collocations that we studied in this episode. You'll hear a series of sentences with a verb *blanked out* or replaced with a *beep*. Repeat the whole sentence saying the missing word.

For example, if you hear...

Example cue: To sum <bEEP> what I said before...

You will say...

Example answer: To sum up what I said before...

Each question will be followed by an example answer. Are you ready?

Cue 1: The culture of collaboration at this company really <bEEP> to me.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: The company mission statement really <bEEP> with me.

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: In <bEEP>, there are several important factors that make me a strong candidate.

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: My work in this project <bEEP> to my ability to think analytically and to solve problems.

Learner 4: _____

Answer 1: The culture of collaboration at this company really **appeals** to me.

Answer 2: The company mission statement really **resonates** with me.

Answer 3: In **brief**, there are several important factors that make me a strong candidate.

Answer 4: My work in this project **testifies** to my ability to think analytically and to solve problems.

That's all for this episode on second-round interviews. We have studied language for demonstrating that you are a good fit for an organization, and we've practiced *highlighting skills*, *summarizing the discussion* and *mentioning something you forgot to bring up before*.

You can access the study notes for this and other episodes at www.businessenglishpod.com. There you'll find complete transcripts, vocabulary explanations, and language review exercises.

See you next time, and thanks for listening!

Language Review**A. Useful Language**

Review useful collocations and language by filling in the blanks with words from the box below.

discussing	fit	previous	reminds	appeals
mentioned	briefly	add	foster	inclination

1. I'm someone who naturally seeks to _____ mutual understanding among my friends and colleagues, so the culture of collaboration at this company really _____ to me.
2. Because of my natural _____ towards open and frank relationships, I think I would be a great _____ for this style of teamwork.
3. Let me just _____ go over what I _____ last time.
4. As I mentioned in our _____ discussion, I've been working in the manufacturing field for 15 years...
5. Regarding our previous discussion about my technical knowledge, let me just _____ something to what I was saying before.
6. That _____ me... I also encountered this kind of situation in my previous job, which I was _____ earlier.

B. Probing and Highlighting skills

Probing and highlighting skills are important tasks of the interviewer and interviewee respectively. Fill in the blanks below to review useful collocations.

1. What specific _____ do you have in conflict resolution?
2. I'm hoping to get a clearer _____ of your approach to customer relation management, since this is a particular priority for us.
3. Can you tell us about a specific time when you had to solve a _____ under high pressure?
4. I think my interpersonal _____ are strongly evidenced in my years of involvement in school government.
5. My work in this project _____ to my ability to think analytically and to solve problems.
6. This experience really embodies my approach to _____ with conflict in workplace.
7. My active _____ in organizing after-work activities provides a great example of my commitment to building strong teams.

Study Strategy

Think of your dream job at your dream company. You may wish to use the internet to help you search for a specific opportunity or job description. Referring to a copy of your résumé, consider what type of specific probing questions you might be asked to determine a good fit in personality and skills. Prepare a list of questions and answers. You may also wish to role play with a colleague or a friend.

Answers

Listening Questions

1. What does he mean by that? *Plunge* literally means "to dive in." *To take the plunge* is an idiom that refers to bravely entering a new situation. George is concerned about whether or not Sherry is prepared mentally and emotionally "to dive into" GK's high-pressure work environment.
2. Sherry says she is most attracted to GK's "work culture."
3. Sherry is interviewing for a management trainee position. If offered the job, she will have significant direct customer contact. George is thus very concerned about Sherry's "client-facing" experience, that is, what kind of skills and experience she can "bring to the table" or offer the company in terms of direct face-to-face interaction with customers.

Language Review

A. Useful Language

1. I'm someone who naturally seeks to **foster** mutual understanding among my friends and colleagues, so the culture of collaboration at this company really **appeals** to me.
2. Because of my natural **inclination** towards open and frank relationships, I think I would be a great **fit** for this style of teamwork.
3. Let me just **briefly** go over what I **mentioned** last time.
4. As I mentioned in our **previous** discussion, I've been working in the manufacturing field for 15 years...
5. Regarding our previous discussion about my technical knowledge, let me just **add** something to what I was saying before.
6. That **reminds** me... I also encountered this kind of situation in my previous job, which I was **discussing** earlier.

B. Probing and Highlighting skills

1. What specific **experiences** do you have in conflict resolution?
2. I'm hoping to get a clearer **picture** of your approach to customer relation management, since this is a particular priority for us.
3. Can you tell us about a specific time when you had to solve a **problem** under high pressure?
4. I think my interpersonal **skills** are strongly evidenced in my years of involvement in school government.
5. My work in this project **testifies** to my ability to think analytically and to solve problems.
6. This experience really embodies my approach to **dealing** with conflict in the workplace.
7. My active **involvement** in organizing after-work activities provides a great example of my commitment to building strong teams.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Second Round Interviews - Quiz](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Gap-fill](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Second Round Interviews – Useful Language](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Probing and Highlighting Skills](#)

[Second Round Interviews – Mentioning a Point you Forgot Earlier](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Vocabulary Review](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Flashcards](#)

BEP 310 – HR Review: Comparing Candidates

As part of our series on job interviews, in this episode we'll be taking a closer look at the process from the *HR perspective*. Specifically, we'll be studying the language of *reaching a decision* about *whom to hire*.

A Brazilian business unit of fast moving consumer goods company Fun Beverages has recently interviewed several people for an HR manager position. Now the regional HR director, Ted, and the business unit general manager, George, are meeting to discuss the *short-listed*, or final, candidates.



As you listen, pay attention to the language they use to *compare the two interviewees* and to decide which one is the *best fit*. In addition, we'll study how they *support a candidate*, *emphasize priorities*, *express reservations* (or second thoughts), and *suggest action*.

While listening, try to answer the following questions. The answers will be posted in a few days on our website at www.businessenglishpod.com:

Listening Questions

1) Which candidate do they prefer and why?

2) What are the relative strengths and weaknesses of the two main candidates, Ronaldo and Yala?

3) What are the main reservations about Yala?

Vocabulary

To stand out: To distinguish oneself/itself from others. "She really stands out from the crowd."

To look great on paper: To have a strong résumé. Implies there are shortcomings in other respects. "She looks great on paper, but she fails to impress in person."

(To have a case of) nerves: To be nervous. "She had a bad case of nerves before the interview – her hands were shaking as she started talking."

Communication skills: Ability to communicate. "Good communication skills are essential to this job."

To strike s/o as sth.: To seem to s/o to be sth. "She strikes me as a good communicator."

It's a tough one.: It's hard to decide or to choose. "Choosing between them is a tough one – they're about the same."

Soft skills: Non-technical skills, such as communication, negotiation, conflict resolution, etc. "Soft skills training is an often-overlooked part of managerial development."

Technical qualifications: Credentials or abilities in technical areas. "He's got great technical qualifications."

Credential: Certificate or diploma. The plural, "credentials," refers more generally to qualifications. "He's got a credential in conflict resolution."

Learnable: Able to be learned. "English can be tough, but it's definitely learnable."

To fit well with: To suit sth. Useful for describing fit between employee and company. Also "to fit in somewhere." "He really fits in well here."

Dynamic style: Energetic personality. "Her dynamic style impresses everybody who meets her."

To align well with: To match or fit well with. "Her personality aligns well with our organizational culture."

Organizational culture: The personality of a company. "Our organizational culture is very relaxed for a bank."

Staid and reserved: Quiet and cautious; conservative. "People of his generation tended to be more staid and reserved than the younger people nowadays."

Marketing-oriented: Focused on marketing (rather, than, for example, manufacturing). "Fast moving consumer goods companies tend to be very marketing-oriented."

To take to sth. like a fish to water: To adapt to something quickly and well. "He took to living abroad like a fish to water."

To have what it takes to do sth.: To have the necessary personality qualities to do sth. "She has what it takes to make it here."

Compensation: Payment. "Compensation should not be the most important factor in job satisfaction."

To be on the high end of the range: To be near the top of a series or scope. "I'm looking for a salary on the high end of your range."

To out of the budget: To be an amount above what is budgeted for sth. Also, to be outside a budget. "Unfortunately, your salary requirements are out of our budget."

To have a firm offer on the table: To have a definite offer off employment in one's hand. "They haven't given me a firm offer yet, so I'm hesitant to talk money with them."

To keep s/o or sth. on the back burner: To put sth. outside one's immediate attention, but keep it available in case it is needed. "We've got to put this project on the back burner and prioritize other things until we can get a definite answer to our questions."

Successful Interviews

Dialog

Ted (HR Manager): So after the final round of interviews, two candidates really **stand out**.

George (Business Unit Manager): Yala and Ronaldo?

Ted: That's right.

George: What set them apart? I liked Annette as well.

Ted: She **looks great on paper**, but she didn't perform very well in the interview.

George: **Nerves?**

Ted: Not only. I have questions about her **communication skills**.

George: Okay. Well, between Yala and Ronaldo who **strikes** you as the better candidate?

Ted: **It's a tough one**. They're both very qualified. Yala probably has better **soft skills** – conflict management, negotiation – whereas Ronaldo has better **technical qualifications**.

George: Really?

Ted: He's been certified in PeopleSoft, and he has a senior-level HR **credential**.

George: That's good, but the technical side is **learnable**. What we really need is smart people who will **fit well with** our organization.

Ted: Yes, Yala is probably a better overall match. I think her **dynamic style aligns** well with our **organizational culture**.

George: What about Ronaldo?

Ted: Not bad either, but he's a little more **staid and reserved**.

George: Yala's mostly been working in manufacturing, right?

Ted: Yes, that's right.

George: How is she going to handle the shift to a more **marketing-oriented** organization?

Ted: Honestly, I think she'll take to it **like a fish to water**. I'm confident she **has what it takes** to succeed here.

George: Then what's holding you back?

Ted: Well, the main issue I'm worried about is **compensation**... Her salary history suggests she'll want **something on the high end of our range**, maybe even **out of our budget**.

George: Have you talked to her about it?

Ted: Not yet. She wanted to postpone the discussion until she had a **firm offer** on the table.

George: Smart woman. Well, let's give her an offer and see how she reacts. In the meanwhile, we can keep Ronaldo **on the back burner**.

Ted: That's exactly what I was thinking.

Debrief

George and Ted have reached agreement about hiring. Let's study the language they use.

To start off, Ted, the HR manager, says that after the final round of interviews, two candidates – Yala and Ronaldo – really *stand out*, that is really *distinguish themselves from the others*.

The business unit manager, George, wants to know exactly what *set them apart*, or what made them different from the rest.

Asking about differences between candidates is an important part of deciding whom to hire. Listen to some more useful expressions for this purpose:

- What would you say **differentiates** the two candidates?
- How do they **measure up** to each other?
- What do you see as being the **key differences**?
- Who is stronger?
- How do they **compare to** each other?

George also likes a third candidate, Annette. What does Ted say about her?

Ted: She **looks great on paper**, but she didn't perform very well in the interview.

George: **Nerves?**

Ted: Not only. I have questions about her **communication skills**.

Ted says Annette "looks great on paper" – that is, her résumé or CV looks strong – but she didn't perform well in the interview. George wonders if her poor performance was due to *nerves*, that is, because she was nervous. But Ted says, "not only" – suggesting it wasn't just nerves – he also "has *questions*" – that is, *reservations* or doubts – about Annette's communication skills.

Of course, when comparing candidates we don't always have positive things to say. It's important also to be able to talk about negatives. Listen to more examples of *discussing reservations*.

- I **have questions** about his ability to work under pressure.
- The main **issue I'm worried about** is his technical skills.
- There is a **question mark next to** his management experience.
- I'm **concerned about** her **lack of** experience in a customer-facing role.

What happens next? George asks a more specific question about the difference between the two finalists, Yala and Ronaldo. He wants Ted to tell him who *strikes him as* the better candidate, that is, who seems to him to be the more promising interviewee. How does Ted respond?

Ted: **It's a tough one**. They're both very qualified. Yala probably has better **soft skills** – conflict management, negotiation – whereas Ronaldo has better **technical qualifications**.

Successful Interviews

"It's a tough one" means it's hard to decide – the two candidates are about equal.

Ted uses the adverb "*whereas*" to directly compare the two interviewees: Yala has better *soft* skills *whereas* Ronaldo has better *technical* qualifications. By soft skills, Yala means *non*-technical skills, such as communication.

Let review some more phrases and idioms for comparing candidates.

- John is stronger in engineering, **whereas** Sally is better in sales.
- Bill has a **bit of an edge** over Susie when it comes to customer relationship management experience.
- They're both excellent presenters, but I think George has **better mastery of** the technical side.
- Honestly, it's a **dead heat** between the candidates on the short list, but I'm especially impressed with Alex's ability to crunch the numbers.
- Among the final round interviewees, I think both Linda and Miranda really **stand out** for their communication skills.

To have an edge over someone means to be better than someone.

And if two people are *in a dead heat*, it's like they are tied equally as in a race, — that is, one is not better than the other.

Next, Ted discusses Ronaldo's technical skills – Ronaldo is certified in the HR software "PeopleSoft." Also, he has a senior-level HR "credential" or certificate. How does George react to Ronaldo's better technical capabilities?

George: That's good, but the technical side is learnable. What we really need is smart people who will **fit well with** our organization.

George feels that the technical side is *learnable*, that is, it can be learned. In his view, the priority is, instead, to find "smart people who *fit well with* our organization." George wants someone whose personality will match the company. To emphasize this priority, he uses the phrase, "What we really need is...."

In making hiring decisions, usually there are many candidates with equally strong, but different, qualifications. To decide between them, we must *set and address* – that is, *give voice to* – specific priorities.

Now let's, review several more expressions that can be used to address priorities:

- **What we really need is** people with strong sales skills.
- I think the **main priority for** our organization is finding people with the vision it takes to succeed in the marketplace.
- We have to **focus on** candidates who have the basic skills they need to succeed in this environment.

How does Ted respond to George?

Ted: Yes, Yala is probably a better overall match. I think her **dynamic style aligns** well with our **organizational culture**.

Does Ted think Yala's personality suits their business? Yes. Yala is *dynamic* – or energetic – this style will fit better with their organizational culture. Ronaldo, on the other hand, is more *staid* and *reserved*, that is quiet and careful.

When making the final choice between candidates, our judgment of how well they fit our organization – that is, "organizational fit" – is often one of the most important factors.

Let's review some expressions for discussing a good organizational fit:

- Sandy's goals and values **align well** with those of our organization.
- I think she'll **fit in very well** with our team.

What can we say when we think there is a *bad* fit?

- He's a **highly qualified** candidate, but I'm just not sure how well he would fit in with our corporate culture.
- If you ask me, **we need someone with** a more outgoing personality in this role.

Next, George voices a concern about Yala. What is it? Yala has spent most of her career working in manufacturing, where HR management tends to be more routine and less strategic than in a fast-moving consumer goods company, like Fun Beverages. George wonders how Yala is going to "handle the shift to a more fast-paced, marketing-oriented organization." How does Ted reply?

Ted: Honestly, I think she'll take to it **like a fish to water**. I'm confident she **has what it takes** to succeed here.

Obviously, Ted strongly supports Yala's application. He thinks Yala will take to Fun Beverages *like a fish to water*. This idiom describes someone who *adapts quickly and well* to a new environment. Ted also says Yala *has what it takes*, that is has the necessary qualities, to succeed in their company.

We've already studied how to express reservations about a candidate. Now, let's listen to some further ways to *express support for a candidate*.

- I'm confident she **has what it takes** to succeed here.
- I'm **in favor of** hiring Rebecca, and let me give you the reasons.
- George's application **has my support**.
- I think Sally **would do very well** here.

After Ted has said so many positive things about Yala, George is surprised that she doesn't seem to completely support Yala's application. He wants to know what is "holding Ted back," that is, keeping him from wholeheartedly backing Yala's candidacy.

But Ted has a reservation of his own, namely that Yala will want more money – more *compensation* – than they are able to offer. As he puts it, Yala's salary

Successful Interviews

history suggests "she'll want something on the high end of our range, maybe even out of our budget." What does George say?

George: Have you talked to her about it?

Ted: Not yet. She wanted to postpone the discussion until she had a **firm offer** on the table.

Yala hasn't talked money yet with Ted. She prefers to postpone the discussion until she has a "firm offer on the table," that is, until Fun Beverages has made a definite offer of employment to her.

George: Smart woman. Well, let's give her an offer and see how she reacts. In the meanwhile, we can **keep Ronaldo on the back burner**.

Ted: That's exactly what I was thinking.

The dialog finishes with George suggesting that they "keep Ronaldo on the back burner." What does this mean? Cooking stoves often have four *burners* or flames – there are two in [the] front and two in [the] back. Dishes that require our attention we put on the front burners, whereas dishes that cook slowly or that require less attention we put on the back burners. So *to put or keep something on the back burner* means to put something *outside of* our immediate attention, but keep it available in case it is needed. In the dialog, George wants to keep Ronaldo waiting in case Yala's salary requirements do indeed turn out to be too high. This is the action George suggests taking.

Thus, the dialog has finished with George recommending action. Of course, when we meet to discuss candidates, it's important to agree on the next step. Here are a few more examples of possible actions we can take:

- We'll just need to **run this decision by** senior management to get final approval.
- **I recommend** forwarding the application to human resources for final approval.
- Let's give her an offer to see how she reacts.
- That's it then – we're all agreed – he's hired.

Now, it's your turn to practice the language we have learned in this episode.

First, we'll go over comparing candidates.

Imagine you are in a hiring meeting and your boss asks you to compare two interviewees. You will hear a series cues composed of *the two candidates names* and their *relative strengths or weaknesses*. Use the language we have studied to describe how the two people measure up to each other.

For example, if you hear ...

Example cue 1: Tina – better technical qualifications; Sally – better soft skills.

You can say something like...

Example answer 1: Tina has better technical qualifications, whereas Sally has better soft skills.

Or if you hear...

Example cue 2: Michael – little work experience; Sam – a lot of work experience.

You can say something like...

Example answer 2: They're both excellent candidates, but Sam has a bit of an edge over Michael when it comes to work experience.

Other useful expressions include *to have better mastery of*, *to be a dead heat between*, and *to really stand out from*.

After each question you will hear an example answer. Bear in mind that in each case there are many possible correct responses.

Let's give it a try.

Cue 1: Tina – good marketing experience; Rob – good sales experience.

Learner 1: _____

Example Answer 1: Both candidates are good, but Tina has better marketing experience whereas Rob has better sales experience.

Cue 2: Scott – average technical skills; Margaret – excellent technical skills.

Learner 2: _____

Example Answer 2: Honestly speaking, Margaret seems to have much better master of the technical side.

Cue 3: Rick – great sales skills, good soft skills; Ruth – great sales skills, excellent negotiation ability.

Learner 3: _____

Example Answer 3: It's a dead heat between the candidates when it comes to sales skills, but I'm especially impressed with Ruth's negotiation ability.

Next, we'll review some of the useful vocabulary and collocations that we studied in this episode. You'll hear a series of sentences with a verb *blanked out* or replaced with a *beep*. Repeat the whole sentence saying the missing word.

For example, if you hear...

Example cue: The main issue I'm worried <beep> is his technical skills.

You can say:

Example answer: The main issue I'm worried **about** is his technical skills.

After each response, we'll play the correct answer. Okay, let's get started.

Successful Interviews

Cue 1: Finding people with **<beep>** is the main priority for our organization.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: We have to **<beep>** on candidates who have good basic skills.

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: Sandy's goals and values **<beep>** well with those of our organization.

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: I'm confident she has what it **<beep>** to succeed here.

Learner 4: _____

Cue 5: We'll just need to **<beep>** this decision by senior management.

Learner 5: _____

Answer 1: Finding people with **vision** is the main priority for our organization.

Answer 2: We have to **focus** on candidates who have good basic skills.

Answer 3: Sandy's goals and values **align** well with those of our organization.

Answer 4: I'm confident she has what it **takes** to succeed here.

Answer 5: We'll just need to **run** this decision by senior management.

That's all for this episode on comparing job candidates. We've looked at a variety of language useful for reaching a decision about hiring, including *asking about differences, discussing reservations, addressing priorities, discussing organizational fit, supporting a candidate, and taking action.*

Don't forget to check out the study notes for this and other episodes at www.businessenglishpod.com.

Thanks for listening!

Language Review

A. Asking about Differences

Put the jumbled sentences in order to practice useful phrases for asking about differences.

1. would candidates you the say differentiates what two

2. do measure they how up to each other

3. see do as key being the you differences what

4. who stronger is

5. do compare they how each to other

B. Comparing Candidates

Fill in the blanks in the sentences below with words from the box to review key language for comparing candidates.

edge	list	mastery	crunch	stand
whereas	skills	side	bit	impressed

- John is stronger in engineering, _____ Sally is better in sales.
- Bill has a _____ of an _____ over Susie when it comes to customer relationship management experience.
- They're both excellent presenters, but I think George has better _____ of the technical _____.
- Honestly, it's a dead _____ between the candidates on the short _____, but I'm especially _____ with Alex's ability to _____ the numbers.
- Among the final round interviewees, I think both Linda and Miranda really _____ out for their communication _____.

Answers

Listening Questions

- 1) Ted talks about how Yala has better soft skills than Ronaldo and, importantly, how her dynamic style will be a better fit with their organization. George agrees.
- 2) Ronaldo has better technical qualifications whereas Yala has better soft skills. In addition, Yala has a more dynamic style, which would be a better fit with their organization.
- 3) George has a concern about whether Yala will be ready to adapt from the manufacturing business to the fast-paced, market-oriented environment in a fast moving consumer goods company. Ted is worried that Yala's salary requirements may be too high.

A. Asking about Differences

1. What would you say differentiates the two candidates?
2. How do they measure up to each other?
3. What do you see as being the key differences?
4. Who is stronger?
5. How do they compare to each other?

B. Comparing Candidates

1. John is stronger in engineering, _____ Sally is better in sales.
2. Bill has a _____ of an _____ over Susie when it comes to customer relationship management experience.
3. They're both excellent presenters, but I think George has better _____ of the technical _____.
4. Honestly, it's a dead _____ between the candidates on the short _____, but I'm especially _____ with Alex's ability to _____ the numbers.
5. Among the final round interviewees, I think both Linda and Miranda really _____ out for their communication _____.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Second Round Interviews - Quiz](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Gap-fill](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Second Round Interviews – Useful Language](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Probing and Highlighting Skills](#)

[Second Round Interviews – Mentioning a Point you Forgot Earlier](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Vocabulary Review](#)

[Second Round Interviews - Flashcards](#)

BEP 311 – Job Interviews: Salary Negotiation

You've had your first and second interviews, you've performed well, and you've been selected. You're one of the lucky few – you've succeeded: you've got a job offer in hand. But now comes one of the hardest parts of the whole process – *negotiating your salary*. If you make a mistake here, all of your time and effort might be wasted.

For salary negotiation, preparation – doing your research – is obviously important. In the internet age, there are many websites that focus on salary information, so investigating the market is much easier than it has been in the past.

Knowledge, however, is not enough. We also need to have the confidence to *broach*, or bring up, the subject and the tools to *bargain up* the *initial* or first offer in order to *reach a compromise*. You will only get what you deserve if you *ask for it*. So in today's episode, we'll focus on the skills you need to successfully *talk money*.



Fun Beverages International has already emailed an offer to Yala Santos for an HR manager position in one of its Brazilian business units. Yala has written back asking to talk with the HR director, Ted, about the details. We'll be listening to their conversation.

While you listen, try to answer the following questions. The answers will be posted in a few days on our website at www.businessenglishpod.com

Listening Questions

1. Why does Ted say he needs Yala to begin work by the suggested start date?

2. How does Yala broach the subject of compensation?

3. How much over the median or average market rate does Ted say Fun Beverages offered Yala in recognition of her skills and experience?

4. What is the final compromise they discuss?

Successful Interviews

Vocabulary

Recruitment season: Recruitment refers to looking for and hiring promising employees. Season is a time of year. "In the fall recruitment season, many employers recruit talented students from university."

To be coming up quick: To be approaching rapidly. "My start date at the new company is coming up quick."

To really be able to use sth.: Means sth. is very useful. "We could really use some rest and relaxation now."

Compensation: Payment. "Compensation is above the market average at our company."

(To conduct) a competitive analysis of: Two possible meanings – 1) to conduct an analysis of the competition; 2) to conduct an analysis that is competitive. "We conducted a competitive analysis to determine what kind of offers our competitors were giving employees."

Market leaders: The leaders in an industry or market. "We're one of the market leaders in fast moving consumer goods."

To take (a high) average: To compute the average. A "high average" would be in the high part of the middle range. "We took the average compensation for this position."

In recognition of sth.: To recognize sth. "In recognition of your hard work, you are receiving a large bonus this year."

Median: Average. "We're offering you 10% over the median."

To be a little on the low side: To be on the lower end of a range. "I think, honestly, this offer is a little on the low side."

To be on the table: To be offered. "When he graduated from college, he already had several job offers on the table."

To reflect the gap in/between A and B: To be representative of the difference between A and B. "The emergence of luxury brands in many developing countries reflects the great income gaps there."

To offer a competitive market rate: To offer a salary that is competitive with other employers. "This is already a competitive market rate for this position, so I don't think we can go much higher than this."

Benefits: Non-monetary advantages of working at a company, such as healthcare, vacation, etc. "Benefits are an important part of the compensation package."

Advancement opportunities: Chances to get promoted. "You will start out in a relatively low position, it's true, but we have great advancement opportunities."

Salary history: A candidate's previous salaries at former jobs. "Please share your salary history with us."

Qualifications: The things that make you suitable for a job, such as skills, experience, scholastic degrees, etc. "He has great qualifications, including 10 years' (insert) experience and a PhD (degree)."

To have budgeted for sth.: To have planned in the budget for sth. "We have budgeted for unexpected situations."

To meet s/o halfway: To compromise on sth. by arriving at a figure halfway between your suggestion and theirs. "He wanted 5, and she wanted 10, so they met halfway at 7.5" (insert).

(Specific) annual performance targets: A performance target is a goal you have to reach to demonstrate good performance, or work. Annual means yearly. Specific means clear. "Meeting annual performance targets forms the most important criterion for determining your annual bonus."

Indicators: Measurements. "GDP is an indicator of growth."

Dialog

HR Director (Ted): You've seen our suggested start date. Is that something you can manage? Fall **recruitment season** is **coming up quickly**, and **we could really use** your help.

Yala: Yes, I can definitely make it, as soon as **compensation** is agreed.

Ted: Okay, let's talk money.

Yala: Well, just to get us going, can I ask how you arrived at your offer?

Ted: Sure. We conducted a **competitive analysis of the market leaders** and **took a high average**.

Yala: That seems reasonable. But I think I have more to offer than the market average.

Ted: I agree. **In recognition of** your skills and experience, we're offering you 10 percent over the **median**.

Yala: I see. But don't you think the figure we're working with **is a little on the low side** for a senior HR manager? In my research, I've been seeing numbers closer to 15 or 20% above what's currently **on the table**.

Ted: Well, to a certain extent, that might **reflect the gap** between national-level managers and business unit managers. For this position, I'm confident **we're offering a competitive market rate**, especially when you look at the **benefits**.

Yala: I agree that the benefits are great, and so are the **advancement opportunities**. Considering my **salary history** and **qualifications**, though, 20% over your base would enable me to accept the offer immediately.

Ted: Honestly, **that's more than we have budgeted for the position**. But we typically offer 6% annual raises. **With good performance**, you can get up to 10 or 11%, so I'd say it would be possible to **reach your target** within a year.

Yala: Okay, could we **meet halfway** and discuss a number closer to 15% initially, then agree on a 10% annual increase, with good performance?

Ted: That's definitely something we could consider.

Yala: I suppose the next thing to discuss, then, are the **specific annual performance targets**.

Ted: Sure. We have very clear performance **indicators** and **expectations** for senior management, right across the business. **[fade out]**



Successful Interviews

Debrief

It sounds like Yala and Ted are well on their way to reaching a compromise. Let's examine the language they use.

As job candidates (or employees) in a salary negotiation, the first – and sometimes hardest – thing we need to do is actually *broach the subject* of compensation.

How does Yala bring up money? First Ted asks her if she can start in time for *fall recruitment season*. Recruitment refers to finding and hiring promising new candidates. *Fall recruitment* usually takes place among upcoming graduates at university. Can Yala *make it* or start by then? Yes, but only under one condition...

Yala: Yes, I can definitely make it, as soon as compensation is agreed.

Ted: Okay, let's talk money.

Yala: Well, just to get us going, can I ask how you arrived at your offer?

To keep the negotiation positive, it's important to focus on what we *can* do. Yala demonstrates this kind of *can-do* attitude: She "can definitely" start by Ted's suggested date, *as soon as* compensation is agreed.

Next Ted says, "Okay, let's talk money," and Yala responds by asking him how he arrived at his offer. The ball is now in Ted's court – that is, the next move is for him to make. Yala has thus followed the two basic rules of bringing up compensation: 1) *Be positive*; and 2) *Let the other side make the first move*. In other words, you can "start the game," but try not to be the first person to mention a number - we don't want to start too low.

Now, let's review some more language we can use to broach the subject of compensation.

- Before we finish, I'd like to raise the issue of compensation.
- I wanted to discuss compensation and benefits with you so that I could get a clearer picture of how you arrived at your offer.
- Can we talk about compensation?
- How did you arrive at your offer?
- I was wondering what factors were considered in coming up with this offer?

What happens next? How does Ted say Fun Beverages arrived at Yala's offer?

Ted: We conducted a **competitive analysis** of the **market leaders** and **took a high average**.

Ted is saying that, like many employers, Fun Beverages has surveyed salary levels at its leading competitors. They have "taken a high average" to arrive at a "base salary" or "base" – that is, the basic salary for the job. Ted is saying that the base of their company is actually higher than that of many competitors.

Notice Ted is being *vague* – like Yala, he avoids bringing up definite numbers. How does she respond?

Yala: That seems reasonable. But I think **I have more to offer than the market average.**

At this point it's important for Yala to state her reasons for why she deserves more than the base. To do this, she shows confidence in her ability by saying she "has more to offer than the market average." This is a clever move because Ted is likely to agree with her – *of course* he wants to hire above-average employees.

How else, as candidates, can we demonstrate confidence?

- I am sure that my skills and experience will be a great asset to your organization.
- I believe that my skills and experience place me well above the market average.
- Your organization needs good people who have what it takes to help the company succeed.
- I am sure I can make a strong contribution to your organization.

So Yala has said she deserves more than the market average. Let's listen again to what Ted says in response.

Ted: I agree. **In recognition of** your skills and experience, we're offering you **10 percent over the median.**

Ted is prepared for Yala's strategy – he says that they are already offering her 10% more than the "median," or average.

Now that Ted has brought up an actual number, Yala replies with some figures of her own.

Yala: I see. But don't you think the figure we're working with **is a little on the low side** for a senior HR manager? In my research, I've been seeing numbers closer to 15 or 20% above what's currently **on the table.**

Here Yala is *bargaining up* the 10% over the base salary that Ted says he is giving her. She uses a negative question to be diplomatic – "Don't you think it's a little on the low side?" Then she refers to her salary research – she says she has seen numbers 15 or 20% higher than the one *on the table*, that is, the one currently being offered.

Let's review some more expressions for bargaining up.

- In my research, I've been seeing numbers closer to 15% or 20% above what's currently on the table.
- Don't you think that might be a little on the low side?
- The offer seems a little low, but I am really excited about the job.
- An offer 10 or 15% higher than this one would give me something to seriously consider.

Successful Interviews

In addition to the phrases we have just heard, another effective strategy is to *use silence* – simply nod, say, “uh huh,” and wait for the person sitting across the table to reply. Often the *more* the other side is talking, the *better* you are doing.

How does Ted reply to Yala’s attempt to bargain up the base salary? He *stays firm*.

Ted: Well, to a certain extent, that might **reflect the gap** between national-level managers and business unit managers. For this position, I’m confident **we’re offering a competitive market rate**, especially when you look at the **benefits**.

First, Ted implies that there might be an error in Yala’s research. The *gap* or difference in salaries that Yala is seeing might just *reflect* or represent the difference between local business unit HR managers and country-level HR managers. Yala is applying for a local business unit job.

Next, Ted shows confidence in his offer – he’s “confident they’re offering a competitive market rate,” especially when you *look at*, or consider, the benefits.

Staying firm is a useful negotiation skill for both employer and candidate.

Let’s look at some more useful language. First, let’s study some phrases you can use as an employer...

- We’re confident that this is a competitive market rate.
- That’s as high as we can go.
- To be honest, that range is outside of our budget.

Now, what can you say to stay firm as a candidate?

- I’m confident that I’m asking for a fair price.
- That’s as low as I can go.
- I’m not prepared to accept less.

So Ted is staying firm with his offer. How does Yala choose to respond? She uses very *positive language* to make her case.

Yala: I agree that the benefits are great, and so are the **advancement opportunities**. Considering my **salary history** and **qualifications**, though, **20% over your base** would enable me to accept the offer immediately.

When negotiating compensation, it’s often important to be very clear that we are not just motivated by money. We should make positive statements about the job, and why we think it’s a good opportunity. In this spirit, Yala agrees with Ted that the position represents a great chance for her – she discusses the benefits and also the *advancement*, or promotion, opportunities.

Notice that Yala avoids saying “if” – she does *not* say, “If you give me 20% over your base, I will accept the offer immediately.” “If” can also mean *if not*, so “if” always includes the possibility of failure. Instead of “if,” Yala says, “Twenty

percent over your base would *enable me to accept immediately.* *Enable to* is much more positive and confident – it emphasizes what we *can do*, and doesn't suggest any possibility of failure.

Now, listen to more examples of positive language that we can use in making offers and counter-offers.

- I'm excited about this opportunity.
- I agree that the **benefits** and **advancement opportunities** are great.
- Some upward movement on the salary **would allow me to** consider the offer seriously.
- An offer 20% higher than what's on the table **would enable me to** sign the contract immediately.

In these examples, "would allow me to" works similarly to "would enable me to" to keep a positive emphasis.

What does Ted think about Yala's proposal? He says that, honestly, it's a little more than they have budgeted for the position. But he brings up annual raises, or increases, in salary. Typical raises are 6%. With good performance, Yala can expect 10% or more. So it would be possible to reach her target of 20% over the base within a year – in other words, he is offering her 10% now, and 10% a year later.

Ted finally appears to have made a concession – that is, to give up something in order to reach an agreement.

Listen to Yala's response.

Yala: Okay, could we **meet halfway** and discuss a number closer to 15% initially, then agree on a 10% annual increase, with good performance?

This exchange represents the key moment in the negotiation, for which the previous discussion was merely preparation. Having first made a counter-offer of 20% over the base, Yala is now asking to "meet halfway" with Ted at 15%. In addition, she keeps the concession that Ted has already made – 10% annual performance increases.

Ted responds positively to Yala's suggestion.

Ted: That's definitely something we could **consider**.

Now, let's study phrases that are helpful in reaching a compromise.

- Why don't we meet halfway?
- That's something we could seriously consider.
- That's getting closer to a figure that I can really accept.
- We've both made concessions – I think this is a good offer.
- We're really excited to have you onboard.
- I'm looking forward to working here.

Successful Interviews

How does the dialog finish? Yala asks Ted to discuss *specific annual performance targets* for her annual raise. She doesn't want to accept the job only to find later that these targets are unrealistic. Ted assures her, however, that they have clear performance *expectations* and *indicators*, that is, clear measurements for performance. Yala and Ted are talking specifics and moving closer to a *final agreement*.

Now let's practice some of what we've learned.

First, let's practice positive language. Imagine you are negotiating your salary with an employer. Use "would allow me to" and "would enable me to" to make your case.

For example, if you hear:

Example cue: 5% over your base; start the job immediately. <beep>

After the beep, you can say something like:

Example answer: I'm excited about this opportunity. An offer of 5% over your base would enable me to start the job immediately.

Now you try it:

Cue 1: 10% over your base; consider the position seriously.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: Annual raises of 15% with good performance; accept the offer right way.

Learner 2: _____

Here are some example answers. Bear in mind that there are many possible correct responses.

Answer 1: This is a great opportunity. An offer of 10% over your base salary would allow me to consider the position seriously.

Answer 2: I'm very excited about this job. Annual raises of 15% with good performance would enable me to accept the offer right away.

Now you'll hear a series of sentences with a verb *blanked out* or replaced with a *beep*. Repeat the whole sentence saying the missing word.

For example, if you hear...

Example cue: How did you <beep>? at your offer?

You will say...

Example answer: How did you **arrive** at your offer?

After each response, we'll play the correct answer.

Cue 1: Before we finish, I'd like to raise the **<beep>** of compensation.

Learner 1: _____

Cue 2: I am sure that my experience will be a great **<beep>** to your organization.

Learner 2: _____

Cue 3: I'm not prepared to **<beep>** less.

Learner 3: _____

Cue 4: Why don't we meet **<beep>** way?

Learner 4: _____

Answer 1: Before we finish, I'd like to raise the **issue** of compensation.

Answer 2: I am sure that my experience will be a great **asset** to your organization.

Answer 3: I'm not prepared to **accept** less.

Answer 4: Why don't we meet **half** way?

That's all for this episode on salary negotiation.

We've studied how to *broach the subject of compensation, demonstrate confidence, stay firm, use a positive approach and reach a compromise.*

Don't forget to check out the study notes for this and other episodes at www.businessenglishpod.com. There you'll find complete transcripts, vocabulary explanations, and language review exercises.

Thanks for listening, and see you next time!

Study Strategy

What is your dream job? Use an internet search engine to perform research on the average salary for this job in the geographic region you would like to work. Then write out a salary negotiation dialog using the language we have studied.

Language Review

A. Broaching the Subject and Showing Confidence

To practice useful language for broaching the subject of salary negotiations and showing confidence in your abilities, select the best expression for each blank from the box below.

contribution	compensation	benefits	arrive	above
issue	picture	factors	asset	takes

1. Before we finish, I'd like to raise the _____ of compensation.
2. I wanted to discuss compensation and _____ with you so that I could get a clearer _____ of how you arrived at your offer.
3. Can we talk about _____?
4. How did you _____ at your offer?
5. I am sure that my skills and experience will be a great _____ to your organization.
6. I believe that my skills and experience place me well _____ the market average.
7. Your organization needs good people who have what it _____ to help the company succeed.
8. I am sure I can make a strong _____ to your organization.

B. Staying Firm

Put the jumbled sentences in order to practice useful phrases for asking about differences. Type the correct responses in the gaps below the jumbled words. (You don't need to add any punctuation, i.e., ", " ". " etc.)

1) that are market this is confident competitive a rate we

2) go as we high is that as can

3) is range our to be of honest that budget outside

4) that our is offer final

5) I confident am am that I asking price for a fair

6) not I to less prepared accept am

Answers

Listening Questions

1. Fall recruitment season, when new candidates from university are recruited and hired, is "coming up quick," that is, very soon. Ted says they "could really use" or need Yala's help with this.
2. Yala broaches the subject by saying that she can definitely make the requested start date "as soon as compensation is agreed." Later, she asks Ted how he reached the offer.
3. In recognition of her skills and experience, Ted says Fun Beverages offered Yala 10% over the market rate.
4. Yala wants 20% over the base or market rate. Ted says that 10% increases can be negotiated each year with good performance. At the end of the discussion, Yala suggests 15% over the market rate and 10% annual performance increases. Ted says they can definitely consider this proposal.

Language Review

A. Broaching the Subject and Showing Confidence

1. Before we finish, I'd like to raise the **issue** of compensation.
2. I wanted to discuss compensation and **benefits** with you so that I could get a clearer **picture** of how you arrived at your offer.
3. Can we talk about **compensation**?
4. How did you **arrive** at your offer?
5. I am sure that my skills and experience will be a great **asset** to your organization.
6. I believe that my skills and experience place me well **above** the market average.
7. Your organization needs good people who have what it **takes** to help the company succeed.
8. I am sure I can make a strong **contribution** to your organization.

B. Staying Firm

- 1) We are confident that this is a competitive market rate.
- 2) That is as high as we can go.
- 3) To be honest that range is outside of our budget.
- 4) That is our final offer.
- 5) I am confident that I am asking for a fair price.
- 6) I am not prepared to accept less.

Links (click a link to open the exercise)

[Salary Negotiation – Listening Quiz](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Gap-fill Exercise](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Dialog & Vocabulary Definitions](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Broaching the Topic & Showing Confidence](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Bargaining up & Being Positive](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Staying Firm](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Vocabulary Review](#)

[Salary Negotiation – Flashcards](#)

Useful Language

Vivid Verbs for Describing Personal Characteristics and Abilities

Management	Communication	Research	Technical	Teaching
Administered Analyzed Assigned Chaired Consolidated Coordinated Delegated Developed Directed Evaluated Executed Improved Increased Organized Oversaw Planned Prioritized Produced Recommended Reviewed Scheduled Strengthened Supervised	Addressed Arbitrated Arranged Collaborated Convinced Corresponded Developed Directed Drafted Edited Enlisted Formulated Influenced Interpreted Mediated Moderated Negotiated Persuaded Promoted Publicized Reconciled Recruited Translated	Authored Clarified Collected Critiqued Diagnosed Evaluated Examined Extracted Identified Inspected Interpreted Interviewed Investigated Organized Reviewed Summarized Surveyed Systematized	Assembled Built Calculated Computed Designed Devised Engineered Fabricated Maintained Operated Overhauled Programmed Remodeled Repaired Solved Upgraded	Adapted Advised Clarified Coached Communicated Coordinated Demystified Developed Enabled Encouraged Evaluated Explained Facilitated Guided Informed Instructed Persuaded Set goals Stimulated Trained
Financial	Creative	Helpful	Administration	
Administered Allocated Analyzed Appraised Audited Balanced Budgeted Calculated Computed Developed Forecasted Managed Marketed Planned Projected Researched	Acted Conceptualized Created Customized Designed Developed Directed Established Founded Illustrated Initiated Instituted Integrated Introduced Invented Originated Performed Planned Revitalized Shaped	Assessed Assisted Clarified Coached Counseled Demonstrated Diagnosed Educated Expedited Facilitated Familiarized Guided Motivated Referred Rehabilitated Represented	Approved Arranged Catalogued Classified Collected Compiled Dispatched Executed Generated Implemented Inspected Monitored Organized Prepared Processed Purchased Recorded Screened Specified Systemized Validated	

BEP 302 – Previous Experience (Part 1)

Interview small talk

A: How are you doing today, Sam?

B: Fine, thank you. And you?

A: Please have a seat.

B: Thank you.

A: Thanks for coming.

B: The pleasure's all mine. I'm really looking forward to this opportunity to talk with you.

C: Did you have any trouble finding us?

D: No trouble at all, thank you. Your directions were very helpful.

A: What can I get you? Would you like a cup of tea or coffee?

B: Thank you. Actually, just a cup of water would be great, if it's not any trouble.

Talking about hobbies or free time

A: How about when you're not interviewing? What do you usually do on a Saturday?

B: Actually I'm an avid golfer. It's a great way to get some fresh air and meet people.

A: Surely you're not working *all* of the time.

B: Of course not. I do enjoy blowing off some steam in the gym, and I participate in intramural sports on the weekends.

A: What kind of leisure activities do you prefer?

B: Well, like most people, I enjoy movies and music, but I'm also a big fan of books.

Emphasizing the benefit to the potential employer

- I have a good understanding of this type of business gained through years of experience.
- I've got a lot of hands-on experience in retail management.
- I've always been interested in electronics.
- I have a strong willingness and drive to learn.

Highlighting useful skills gained during studies

- Beside the theoretical knowledge I've gained, I've also learned a lot of practical skills.
- Through writing my thesis I've learned about how to be rigorous, how to work in a team, and how to operate under tight deadline pressures.
- Working part-time while going to university has taught me a lot about time management and balancing priorities.

BEP 303 - Previous Experience (Part 2)

Highlighting your experience with vivid vocabulary

- I was mainly **responsible** for **implementing** new accounting procedures, which **succeeded** in reducing our tax burden by 15%.
- I see my role as a manager as a **facilitator** for **change** – to be supportive of my staff's needs and to make sure they have the **tools** to **adapt** to the changing marketplace...
- By **participating** in the university debate team, I've been able to **develop** both my **communication** and **leadership** skills.
- Over the past year, I have **succeeded** in **rolling out** an **innovative** new system for measuring productivity. It was a challenge, but it really **paid off** with an 18% increase in customer satisfaction.

Positive personal characteristics

- Although this industry is different, I think my experience as a team leader demonstrates a lot of management skills that fit well with this job; specifically, my ability to listen, to be flexible and innovative in my approach.

Turning weaknesses into strengths

- One good thing that has come out of my time out is catching up on a lot of training and reading for my work.
- Taking care of my mother during her illness reinforced my commitment to help people.
- I had to take time out for health reasons, but it gave me a chance to re-evaluate my goals.
- I emerged from the experience with a new sense of direction.
- I volunteered to help small local businesses with their taxes, which has given me a deeper perspective on dealing with SME's.

BEP 304 – Talking about Accomplishments (Part 1)

Describing personal characteristics

- My work on this project shows that I am **self-disciplined** and **resourceful**.
- I consider myself to be an **enterprising, energetic** person, and that really comes out in this situation.
- As you can see, I am both **detail-oriented**, and a **determined problem solver**.
- One of my biggest advantages is my ability **to adapt well to** new situations.
- This shows my willingness **to be an assertive communicator**, when necessary.
- Being in charge of this team taught me the importance of being a **decisive leader**.
- It was a wonderful experience for me because I really **thrive on challenge**.

Describing teamwork-oriented qualities

- I've got a sincere interest in **good teamwork**, and I'm **sensitive** to the needs of other people.
- My success in this project demonstrates a quality of which I am very proud – my **broad-minded** and **flexible** perspective in dealing with people.
- Through the whole process, I have remained a **committed team player**.
- The reason I love this work is that I am truly a **conscientious** person at heart.
- I pride myself on being a very **cooperative** individual.
- Part of what makes me such an **effective team member** is that I am a very **eager learner**.

Encouraging people to talk

- That's very interesting.
- Please go on.
- Please continue.
- I can see what you're saying.
- Would you mind expanding on that a little?
- Could you give me an example?

Summarizing your main point

- These are definitely areas where I developed a lot during this time.
- Through this experience I made great strides in these key skills.
- I would say that this was one of the most important factors in my personal growth.

BEP 305 –Talking about Accomplishments (Part 2)

Setting the context of your accomplishment

- Our company had been undergoing restructuring, so employees needed to adapt to new ways of doing things.
- Towards the end of 2007, we got a big new customer and started receiving huge orders.
- All through 2006, a series of budget cuts really put our department under financial pressure.

Discussing our role in a project

- Upper management decided that corporate culture was a key to surviving the changes, so a committee was set up to create a training plan. I was put in charge of getting employee feedback on company values.
- Our existing supply chain couldn't really handle the size of the orders, so the key challenge was to strengthen our logistics system, and fast.
- Employee morale really went downhill, so my role was to devise innovative ways to increase team spirit.

Describing analytical, management and communication skills

- I **headed up** a team of six to tackle the problem.
- First, we spent three months carefully **evaluating** the issue.
- I **improved** the process **consolidating** several steps.
- We **prioritized** company teambuilding through a series of internal promotions and activities.
- I **organized** a committee and **delegated** key tasks.

Revealing positive outcomes

- As a result of my efforts, we measured a productivity increase of 5% in my department, which translated into savings to the company of \$56,000.
- The new system was successful, and I'm happy to say that our hard work really paid off.
- Not only have surveys shown a great increase in employee satisfaction, but we can all feel the difference.
- It was a very rewarding experience – both professionally and personally.

BEP 306 – Discussing your Weaknesses

Identifying your weakness tentatively

- I tend to be a bit of a perfectionist, so sometimes I get kind of hung up on the details of things.
- Well, I have a tendency to overwork, so for me, maintaining a work-life balance is a challenge and a priority – both for my personal sake and for my long-term performance.

Asking for specific examples

- Could you be more specific?
- Could you give me some examples?
- What do you mean by that?

Putting your weaknesses in a positive light

- But, actually, this also works to my advantage in many situations, because I often spot problems that other people don't see.
- Of course, it's a double-edged sword, because I'm a highly effective and productive person.

Describing how you overcame a weakness

- As I've matured as a person and an employee, I'm become much better at knowing when it's time to analyze something carefully and when it's time to let it go. I think this has made me both more effective and more productive – the best of both worlds.
- I'm finding that by paying attention to my tendency to overextend myself, I'm able to maintain a higher level of consistent effort, and that's having a positive impact on my job performance.

Demonstrating a positive attitude

- In a nutshell, I strive to bring to my work a flexible combination of methodical analysis and strong forward momentum.
- Overall, it's consistent high performance that wins the day, and I work hard to embody that long-term commitment in everything I do.

BEP 307 - Asking the Interviewer Questions

Do you have any questions for me?

- I think that just about covers everything I wanted to get to. How about you? Do you have anything you'd like to ask before we finish the interview?
- We'd like to turn it over to you before we finish – do you have any questions you'd like to ask us about the company?

General Questions

- What kinds of assignments might I expect in the first six months of the job?
- What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?
- How do you feel about creativity and individuality?
- What do you like best about your company?
- Is there a lot of team work?
- What projects do you have in the development stage now?
- What are your plans for expansion?

Emphasizing shared perspectives

- Yes, well, obviously this is an area where I think my values really align with this organization's.
- It sounds like our interests really intersect at several points.
- I also really value a cooperative, team work oriented working style.

Softeners

- I was wondering...
- Perhaps you could tell me...
- Would it be possible to tell me...
- Could you possibly clarify a point for me...

Tough Questions

- How important does upper management consider the function of this position to be?
- Could you describe your company's management style and the type of employee who fits well with it?
- What are the company's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured?
- What are your growth projections for next year?
- Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?
- Does your company encourage further education?
- Do you offer flextime/flexitime
- Have you cut your staff in the past three years?
- Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
- What is the largest single challenge facing your staff now?
- May I talk with the last person who held this position?
- Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?
- Has there been much turnover in this job area?

Next action

- What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

BEP 308 – Stress Questions

Asking for Clarification

- So let me just make sure I understand exactly what you're asking.
- That's an interesting question. Are you more looking for a work-related experience, or can I tell you something from my general life experience?
- Let me just run through the question again to make sure I understand all the parameters...

Thinking time

- Good question. Let me think a little bit about that.
- Okay, just bear with me for a little bit.
- Well, there are a couple situations that come to mind. Let me just think it through a little.
- All right, please just give me a sec to organize my thoughts.

Starting with a general principle

A: So if you had two buckets, one that held three gallons and one that held five gallons, how could you use them to measure out four gallons of water?

B: Well, hmmm... let me think about that. Obviously, this type of problem requires a little creativity...

A: Can you describe a time when you had to change your communication style to deliver a message or get your point across?

C: That's an interesting question. Please give me a few moments.... Hmmm... Well, being able to communicate with different groups of people is, of course, absolutely critical to being a leader...

Adding an Additional Point/Correcting Yourself

- *But actually all of these points up to now, though worth mentioning, are rather minor. What I'd really like to emphasize is...*

If you feel like you are just **talking nonsense**, you can say...

- *Sorry, perhaps I didn't make myself clear.*

If it was too fast, and you sped through the main points **too quickly**, you can say...

- *Sorry, let me just recap on that...*

If what you're saying sounds **too complicated**, you might try saying...

- *So, basically, what I'm saying is this...*

BEP 309 – Second Round Interviews

Indicating a good fit

- I'm someone who naturally seeks to foster mutual understanding among my friends and colleagues, so the culture of collaboration at this company really appeals to me.
- Because of my natural inclination towards open and frank relationships, I think I would be a great fit for this style of teamwork.
- I feel a strong attraction to the way of doing things here.
- From everything I've learned about your operation, I'm confident my personality would be a great match with your team.
- The company mission statement – "Innovating for tomorrow" – really resonates with me.

Summarizing the previous discussion

- Let me just briefly go over what I mentioned last time.
- To sum up what I said before...
- In brief, there are several important factors that make me a strong candidate.
- As I mentioned in our previous discussion I've been working in the manufacturing field for 15 years...

Probing skills match

- What *specific experiences* do you have in conflict resolution?
- I'm hoping to *get a clearer picture of your approach* to customer relation management, since this is a *particular priority for us*.
- *Can you tell us about a specific time when you had to solve a problem under high pressure?*

Highlighting skills match

- I think my interpersonal skills are *strongly evidenced* in my years of involvement in school government.
- My work in this project *testifies to my ability* to think analytically and to solve problems.
- This experience really *embodies my approach* to dealing with conflict in the workplace.
- My active involvement in organizing after-work activities *provides a great example of* my commitment to building strong teams.

Mentioning something you forgot to say earlier

- *I forgot to mention* my time in the army...
- Regarding our previous discussion about my technical knowledge, let me just add something to what I was saying before.
- There's something I should have said earlier.
- That reminds me... I also encountered this kind of situation in my previous job, which I was discussing earlier.

BEP 310 – HR Review: Comparing Candidates

Asking about differences

- What would you say **differentiates** the two candidates?
- How do they **measure up** to each other?
- What do you see as being the **key differences**?
- Who is stronger?
- How do they **compare to** each other?

Discussing reservations

- I **have questions** about his ability to work under pressure.
- The main **issue I'm worried about** is his technical skills.
- There is a **question mark next to** his management experience.
- I'm **concerned about** her **lack of** experience in a customer-facing role.

Comparing candidates

- John is stronger in engineering, **whereas** Sally is better in sales.
- Bill has a **bit of an edge** over Susie when it comes to customer relationship management experience.
- They're both excellent presenters, but I think George has **better mastery of** the technical side.
- Honestly, it's a **dead heat** between the candidates on the short list, but I'm especially impressed with Alex's ability to crunch the numbers.
- Among the final round interviewees, I think both Linda and Miranda really **stand out** for their communication skills.

Addressing priorities

- **What we really need is** people with strong sales skills.
- I think the **main priority for** our organization is finding people with the vision it takes to succeed in the marketplace.
- We have to **focus on** candidates who have the basic skills they need to succeed in this environment.

Discussing organizational fit

- Good fit

- Sandy's goals and values **align well** with those of our organization.
- I think she'll **fit in very well** with our team.

- Bad fit

- He's a **highly qualified** candidate, but I'm just not sure how well he would fit in with our corporate culture.
- If you ask me, **we need someone with** a more outgoing personality in this role.

Supporting a candidate

- I'm confident she **has what it takes** to succeed here.
- I'm **in favor of** hiring Rebecca, and let me give you the reasons.
- George's application **has my support**.
- I think Sally **would do very well** here.

Taking action

- We'll just need to **run this decision by** senior management to get final approval.
- **I recommend** forwarding the application to human resources for final approval.
- Let's give her an offer to see how she reacts.
- That's it then – we're all agreed – he's hired.

BEP 311 – Job Interviews: Salary Negotiation

Broaching the subject

- Before we finish, I'd like to raise the issue of compensation.
- I wanted to discuss compensation and benefits with you so that I could get a clearer picture of how you arrived at your offer, if possible.
- Can we talk about compensation?
- How did you arrive at your offer?
- I was wondering what factors were considered in coming up with this offer?

Showing confidence

- I am sure that my skills and experience will be a great asset to your organization.
- I believe that my skills and experience place me well above the market average.
- Your organization needs good people who have what it takes to help the company succeed.
- I am sure I can make a strong contribution to your organization.

Bargaining up

- In my research, I've been seeing numbers closer to 15% or 20% above what's currently on the table.
- Don't you think that might be a little on the low side?
- The offer seems a little low, but I am really excited about the job.
- An offer 10 or 15% higher than this one would give me something to seriously consider.

Staying firm – from the company's side

- We're confident that this is a competitive market rate.
- That's as high as we can go.
- To be honest, that range is outside of our budget.

Staying firm – from the candidate's side

- I'm confident that I'm asking for a fair price.
- That's as low as I can go.
- I'm not prepared to accept less.

Being positive

- I'm excited about this opportunity.
- I agree that the benefits and advancement opportunities are great.
- Some upward movement on the salary **would allow me to** consider the offer seriously.
- An offer 20% higher than what's on the table **would enable me to** sign the contract immediately.

Reaching a compromise

- Why don't we meet halfway?
- That's something we could seriously consider.
- That's getting closer to a figure that I can really accept.
- We've both made concessions – I think this is a good offer.
- We're really excited to have you onboard.
- I'm looking forward to working here.