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## WAYS TO MASTER THE **ART OF THE** **INTERVIEW**



**HOW TO** sell your story  
**5 THINGS** you should never do  
**THE SECRETS** to answering behavioural questions  
**THE JEDI MIND TRICK** of mirroring  
**CLOSING THE DEAL** and final words

Hudson

# CHAPTER I PREPARING FOR SUCCESS

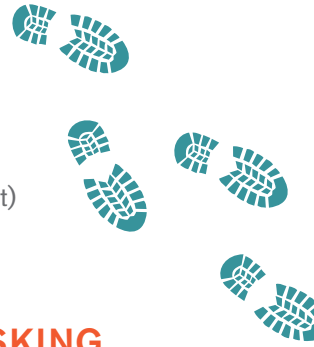
*“Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”*

Seneca, Philosopher

## 1 BEGIN YOUR JOURNEY

“It goes without saying that to be successful, you have to be prepared. That means: do your research. Research as much as you can about the organisation: its history, corporate culture, competitors, profitability, future plans. Also see if you can find any information about your interviewer — and make sure you know their full name (and how to pronounce it) as well as title.”

Dean Davidson, Executive General Manager, Hudson Recruitment Australia



## 3 PREPARE TO ANSWER THE BIG THREE QUESTIONS

According to Tulika Tripathi, Managing Director, Hudson Asia, there are three main questions every interviewer is seeking the answer to:

- 1) Have you got the necessary skills to do the job?
- 2) Have you got the necessary mindset and motivation to do the job well?
- 3) Will you fit in?

If you’ve made it to the interview stage, you almost certainly possess the right skill set to do the job. Your opportunity to stand out from the (similarly qualified) pack will be by demonstrating your will to succeed and showing that you will be a good cultural fit with the company.

## 2 CONSIDER ASKING FOR A MID-MORNING, MID-WEEK INTERVIEW TIME

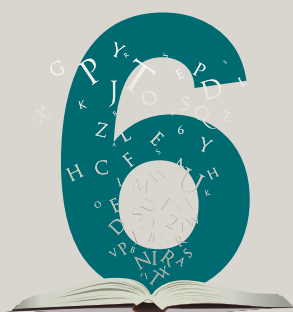
Ideally, you want to be interacting with your interviewer at a time when they’re not preparing for the week ahead, finishing up before the weekend, or thinking about getting lunch or going home.

## 4 GET IN THE ZONE

We all have our different ways of preparing for an important event. Whatever yours is – meditating, breathing exercises, exercising, listening to upbeat music, talking to a supportive friend – schedule time to do it before your interview so you’re in a positive frame of mind.

## 5 INTERVIEWS STILL MATTER – A LOT

Close to 100 per cent of hiring managers across APAC say that interviews are still important.



## A WORD FROM OUR EXPERT

“The best way to avoid performing poorly at an interview is to be well prepared. Find out as much as you can about the company and the role, think about the story you’re going to tell about why you’re the best person for the job and prepare for possible interview questions.”

Kate Herbert, Hudson Career Management

*“Your first impression of a thing sets up your subsequent beliefs.”*

Daniel Kahneman, Psychologist

## 7 YOU’VE GOT ONE-TENTH OF A SECOND TO IMPRESS

Experiments conducted at Princeton University suggest interviewers size up candidates in the blink of an eye, forming an impression in one tenth of a second – and not significantly altering that impression even when they’ve had more time to look them up and down.

## 8 COLOUR CODE YOURSELF

According to US colour psychology specialists, something in reassuring blue is the safest bet when it comes to a job interview outfit. White or grey respectively suggest you’re the organised or logical type, red conveys you feel powerful and black can either come across as glamorous or severe. Avoid green, yellow or purple unless you want to project a creative, fun-loving image.

## 9 IT’S NOT WHAT YOU SAY BUT HOW YOU SAY IT

Albert Mehrabian’s definitive study on verbal and non-verbal communication found that:

- 7% of communication is what you say: actual words
- 38% is how you say it: things like your tone of voice, rate of speech and volume
- 55% is non-verbal: all the other non-verbal cues and signals you give without saying anything such as general appearance, facial expression, body language and gestures

*“The most important thing in communication is hearing what isn’t said.”*

Peter Drucker,  
Management Consultant & Author

## 10 HAVE YOUR SHAKE AND SMILE DOWN PAT

What your father told you is true – a firm handshake creates an immediate positive impression. You should also start smiling as soon as you enter the room. University studies have confirmed what we all intuitively sense – smiles are usually reciprocated and create positive feelings in the two parties beaming at each other.

Keep your body language open and receptive by maintaining eye contact, sitting up straight and leaning in towards the interviewer to signal your interest and enthusiasm. Under no circumstances cross your arms, tap your foot or fidget with things like a pen or phone. Speak expressively and confidently and avoid verbal tics such as adding “you know” to sentences.

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“The first thing an interviewer will notice is how much effort you’ve put into being well presented. Always err on the side of formality – even if you’re going for a job at a funky IT company the interviewer will be impressed if you’ve dressed up in a suit. The second thing the interviewer will notice is your demeanour, so make sure you respond to them in a friendly manner and smile frequently.”

Kate Herbert, Hudson Career Management

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## EMPLOY THE JEDI MIND TRICK OF MIRRORING

When two people become comfortable with each other they will start ‘mirroring’, that is, mimicking the way the other person has their legs, arms and even facial expression. You can kickstart the process of building rapport with your interviewer by consciously copying their body language.

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## WORK – AND READ – THE ROOM

If more than one person is interviewing you, make sure you don’t only focus on the person asking most of the questions. It may well be the interviewer who says nothing who makes the final hiring decision, so maintain regular eye contact with everyone in the room.

# 14

## OVERCOME UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

While both interviewers and interviewees would like to believe that job interviews are a fair and objective process, there is no shortage of research to show that some candidates have an unfair advantage from the start.

This is known as ‘unconscious bias’, which is the tendency to favour those who look and act as we do, and those who we judge to be physically attractive or charming. The good news for those of us without the looks and charisma of a George Clooney or Angelina Jolie is that with the right preparation and attitude you can make yourself seem more attractive.

According to Simon Moylan, Executive General Manager, Hudson Talent Management, Asia Pacific, “while job interviewers have the same unconscious biases as everyone else – it’s human nature, after all – if you prepare thoroughly, provide intelligent answers, speak confidently and put in some effort to build rapport, unconscious bias can be overcome.”



## A WORD FROM OUR EXPERT

“Interviewers, like everyone else, form an impression of someone in a matter of seconds and are then inclined to interpret everything that subsequently occurs through the lens of that first impression. Candidates therefore need to project confidence and friendliness from the moment they walk in the door.”

Christina D’Arcy, Hudson Career Transition and Executive Coach

## CHAPTER III BUILDING AND ESTABLISHING

*“So many people out there have no idea what they want to do for a living but they think that by going on job interviews they’ll magically figure it out. If you’re not sure, that message comes out loud and clear in the interview.”*

**Todd Bermont,  
Business Leader & Author**

### 16 REMEMBER, IT’S WHO YOU ARE, NOT WHAT YOU KNOW

“By the time you make it to the interview stage they assume you have the skills necessary to do the advertised job, or can be easily trained to acquire them. What interviewers are focused on is whether you will be a good ‘cultural fit’, where your values, behaviour and ethics align with that of the organisation.”

**Roman Rogers, Executive General Manager,  
Hudson New Zealand**

### 17 BE AUTHENTIC

Unless you’re a very skilled actor, it’s unlikely you’ll be able to believably maintain a false persona for the duration of a job interview. Nor is it advisable to try – few things will destroy your chances of getting that dream role faster than your questioners concluding you’re being dishonest. If you really want a job you’re well suited to, it’s best just to be yourself and be judged on that basis.

### 18 SELL YOUR STORY

Rather than making all sorts of grand but unsupported claims about yourself, it’s better to demonstrate the value you can deliver by citing concrete achievements, facts and stats. So if at your last job you cut absenteeism by eight per cent or raised the daily output of your department by 15 per cent, your interviewer will probably want to know about it.

However, the interview is not just about citing data. If you really want to sell yourself you need to sell your story and craft your career arc. So mould your quantifiable achievements into a coherent narrative such as:

“I was hired to turn around a department that was suffering from high turnover, low morale and below average productivity. As I have in a number of previous roles, I was able to boost both productivity and employee engagement by X amount over the course of six months by introducing initiatives A, B and C.”



### 19 CLARIFY YOUR PERSONAL BRAND

Brands are usually about one or two characteristics. With Volvo, you think safety. With Apple you think innovation and design. With Louis Vuitton, you think luxury.

Ask yourself what’s the one strong impression you’d like to leave your interviewer with and keep that front of mind while answering their questions. If, as in the previous example, you want to be thought of as the person who turns around poorly performing departments, you will respond differently to questions than if you want to be thought of as the person who cuts costs.

### 20 BE A SPECIALIST

Rather than portray yourself as a general all-rounder, it can be more effective to just highlight your exceptional abilities in one or two areas. Analysis conducted by Stanford Business School about the employment prospects of its MBA graduates found that those exhibiting “spikiness”, that is, specialisation and high competence in a few skills, did better than those who had an average level of competence over a wider range of skills.

*“I had a job interview at an insurance company once and the lady said, ‘Where do you see yourself in five years?’ and I said, ‘Celebrating the fifth year anniversary of you asking me this question.’” Mitch Hedberg, Comedian*

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## MASTERING BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

Interviewers often ask 'behavioural questions' to see how you've handled certain situations in the past, based on the premise that the best predictor of future behaviour is past behaviour.

Here are a couple of oft-asked behavioural questions and some tips about how to answer them successfully.

**Question:** Tell me how you handled conflict with a co-worker in the past?

**Answer:** The interviewer is trying to establish three things with this question:

- 1) You're self-aware enough to realise when a workplace conflict exists and should be addressed.
- 2) You're able to devise a strategy to deal with the conflict.
- 3) You're able to implement that strategy successfully.

If you claim you've never had a conflict with anyone in a workplace you might be perceived as either having no self-awareness or lying. A good strategy might be to discuss a significant but not too serious issue you were having with a colleague and explain how you maturely and rationally worked out a way to resolve it.

**Question:** Tell me about a project you worked on that failed.

**Answer:** The interviewer is trying to ascertain if you can (a) Learn from your mistakes and (b) Rectify them. So you might have an answer along the lines of:

"My department had a goal of lifting sales by 15 per cent one quarter but only managed to increase them by five per cent. I realised I had to make some hard decisions about moving on some poor performers and, once I did that, sales increased by 25 per cent the following quarter."

There are lots of other behavioural questions you may be asked, such as how you handled a stressful situation, took initiative or motivated your team. Whatever the question, aim to demonstrate your ability to identify a challenge, issue or opportunity, and to devise and implement a plan to deal with it.

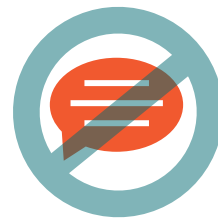
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## BE GUIDED BY CAR

Interviewers are likely to be impressed if you consistently use the CAR (Context, Action, Result) method to answer their questions. What this means is you:

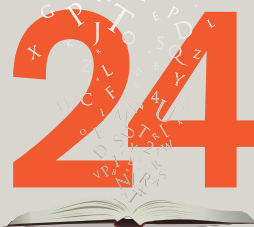
- 1) Describe the relevant **C**ontext or situation
- 2) List the **A**ctions you took to complete that task or resolve the situation
- 3) Finish with a description of the (impressive) **R**esults of your actions.

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## MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN ANSWERING BEHAVIOURAL QUESTIONS

- o Describing team actions – the interviewer wants to know what actions *you* took so talk about 'I' instead of 'we'
- o Theoretical statements – don't describe what you 'would' do; instead, describe what you *did* do in an actual situation
- o General statements – be as specific as possible and avoid generalisations
- o Opinions – the interviewer is interested in facts and situations, not your personal beliefs or judgments (unless the question pertains to these).



## A WORD FROM OUR EXPERT

"Of the hundreds of people I've interviewed, the exceptional ones were all confident, alert but relaxed, and concise rather than cagey when answering questions. They were also positive and other-directed, meaning they were focused on their team members and colleagues flourishing rather than just obsessed with advancing their own careers."

**Christina D'Arcy, Hudson Career Transition and Executive Coach**

*“All failure is failure to adapt, all success is successful adaptation.”*

Max McKeown, Behavioural Strategist

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## MAKE OR BREAK QUESTIONS

It's possible to recover from answering many questions poorly but there are a few that will derail your candidature if not handled appropriately. Here's how you can deal with some of the more difficult questions.

**Why were you let go from your last job?**

If you were made redundant due to reasons unrelated to poor performance – for example, a company restructure – be sure to articulate that. Otherwise, try to reassure the interviewer that the issue that resulted in your previous employment being terminated won't recur.

**Isn't someone with your background overqualified for this role?**

If you're making a sideways move it's advisable to explain that you're not doing it out of a lack of other options but rather because you're keen to move into another industry or develop a new skill set. You'll also need to highlight your transferable skills.

**Can you explain this gap on your CV?**

Explain, rather than try to hide, any gaps in your employment – you took some time off to spend with your family, further your studies or travel. Be sure to mention if you engaged in activities such as volunteering for a charity or doing some consulting work.

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## ANSWERING OTHER TRICKY QUESTIONS

**What salary would you be expecting?**

Research what the industry standard is so you know your market worth and can ask for a fair and appropriate, but realistic, rate.

**Why do you want to move on from your current role?**

Many people move on from a job due to a poor relationship with their manager, but even if that's the case, it's never good form to badmouth your previous or current boss. The best way to answer this question is to actually find something – anything – positive to say about your employment situation but explain you need to move on to broaden your skill set and progress your career.

**What are your weaknesses?**

Honesty is still the best policy so identify a weakness, but preferably not one that's going to impact greatly on your ability to get the job done. For example, not being a people person is going to be less of a problem if you're applying for a position as scientific researcher than it is if you're applying for a job in sales.

*“My alarm bells start ringing if a candidate turns up late, underdressed or underprepared, or if they denigrate a previous employer or manager.”*

Dean Davidson, Executive General Manager, Hudson Recruitment Australia





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## RECOVERING FROM A MISSTEP

If you realise you've fumbled an answer, first off, don't panic – it happens to the best of candidates. Secondly, frankly acknowledge that you probably didn't provide the information the interviewer was seeking and ask if you can answer the question again. If you've drawn a complete mental blank it might be best to just allow the interview to move on and, if it's feasible, email the interviewer later with the response you would have liked to have given.



## A WORD FROM OUR EXPERT

"I start to worry when a candidate volunteers that they have trouble managing their emotions. I've had candidates say they have anger management issues and frequently end up in screaming matches with co-workers, and needless to say it hasn't furthered their cause."

**Christina D'Arcy, Hudson Career Transition and Executive Coach**

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## FIVE THINGS THAT YOU SHOULD NEVER DO IN AN INTERVIEW:

### Swear

Four-letter words might be much more common and socially acceptable these days but they remain jarringly inappropriate in the context of a job interview.



### Overshare

Ideally, avoid bringing up your personal life at all. If it can't be avoided, don't go any further than referring to 'a personal issue' – a job interview is never the place or time to discuss the impact a relationship breakdown had on your career path.



### Veer into over-familiarity

Establishing a warm rapport is good; overstepping professional boundaries is not.



### Leave your phone on (or, even worse, look at it)

Either make sure you're free of any potential digital distractions before entering an interview or double-check they are switched off.

### Ask about the perks

Once a job offer has been made you can ask about extras like leave entitlements, company cars and subsidised gym memberships. But at the interview, ask not what the company can do for you but rather what you can do for the company.





*“For every sale you miss because you’re too enthusiastic, you will miss a hundred because you’re not enthusiastic enough.”*

Zig Ziglar, Salesman & Motivational Speaker

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## THREE QUESTIONS YOU MUST ASK

Towards the end of an interview, you will be asked if you want to pose any questions to your interviewer. The answer to that query should always be “yes” and these are three questions you should ask.

**What are the top three challenges for a person in this role?**

If you’re lucky enough to be offered the role you want to know what you’re getting yourself into. This question will give you some idea of the issues you will have to confront if you get the job and what kind of resources will or won’t be made available to you to deal with them.

**What does success look like six months into this job?**

As well as reassuring the interviewers you’re the motivated, goal-orientated type, this question will clarify what the KPIs are that you might be judged on and what you’ll need to prioritise if you are offered and accept the job.

**What happens now?**

You want to avoid either inappropriately pestering the recruiter or missing out on a valuable opportunity because you failed to follow up. Ask the interviewer how long you should wait before following up if you don’t hear back and whether they would prefer to be phoned or emailed.

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## CLOSE ON A POSITIVE NOTE

The end of an interview is your last chance to sell yourself. While remaining mindful of the interviewer’s time it is expected and appropriate that you aim to leave a positive impression by:

- Briefly mentioning any of your relevant achievements or skills that haven’t come up
- Thanking the interviewer for their time
- Emphasising your interest in the job (you’re much more likely to miss out on it for appearing too diffident than you are for seeming too eager)

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## PSYCHOMETRIC TESTING

Some organisations require job candidates to undertake psychometric testing, based on the principle that particular roles are best filled by an individual with a particular behavioural style and set of cognitive abilities.

If sitting tests makes you anxious, you may wish to do some free psychometric tests online beforehand to familiarise yourself with what’s involved. Be aware there are no ‘right’ answers for personality assessments and that it’s inadvisable to try to manipulate your answers by responding in a way you believe your potential employer will find most appealing.

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## DON'T FALL AT THE LAST HURDLE

The people who conduct interviews, be they the organisation's managers or professional recruiters, frequently have a lot of competing responsibilities and may not end up getting back to you by the nominated date. Other things being equal, you're more likely to end up the successful candidate if you send a courteous email or make a polite phone call, reiterating your interest in the role and asking how things are coming along than if you don't bother.

# 34 IT'S ALL ABOUT YOU

"Candidates need to own their job search – it's not up to an employer or recruiter to find you a position. It's about you, the candidate, taking the initiative and following up about a job you've interviewed for and, if you don't get it, asking for feedback and learning from the experience."

Kate Herbert, Hudson Career Management



# FINAL WORDS 35

"If you've ever asked yourself, 'How did that person get that job or promotion when they obviously shouldn't have?' the answer is almost always, 'Because they interview really well'. The good news is that interviewing well is a learnable skill and one that's valuable in progressing your career in a range of situations that extend well beyond the formal job interview."

Mark Steyn, Chief Executive Officer, Hudson Asia Pacific

**Good luck!**

# ABOUT HUDSON

Hudson is a global recruitment and talent management company that helps to transform workplaces and unleash the full potential of both individuals and organisations. Our expert recruiters specialise in matching talent with opportunities where they will be able to thrive and which fit their career goals.

We have developed a number of proprietary tools to help candidates in their job search and we have access to positions across a wide range of industries and professions. To see what roles may be of interest to you, search our latest jobs now at [hudson.sg/job-search](https://hudson.sg/job-search).

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As an experienced leader in our field, we understand the expectations of organisations and are able to provide unique insights and advice to help maximise the success of our candidates. For more useful tips to help you in your job search, visit our Job Seeker section ([hudson.sg/job-seekers](https://hudson.sg/job-seekers)).



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