



INTERVIEW CHARISMA

Evidence-based Strategies
to Help You Win the Job You Deserve

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Career Knows Publishing, Norwalk, Connecticut



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*To job candidates whose skills and work values would
have made you terrific employees,
but who were not offered jobs after the interview.*



*To the scholars who have spent their careers
publishing high-quality research
in the field of employment interviewing.*

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	About This Book	xi
PART I	Four Interview Stages	
Chapter 1	Stage 1 – Meet-and-Greet Six blind men and the job interview – You cannot <i>not</i> communicate – Your appearance makes you suited for the job – Handshakes are ink-blot tests	3
Chapter 2	Stage 2 – Building Rapport, or Writing a Rapport? Writing a rapport over coffee – Your best offense is a good defense – Posture for better effect – A hands-on approach – What an attractive voice says about you	25
Chapter 3	Stage 3 – The “Formal” Interview Selling yourself is easier when you define yourself – Venn and how to create an impression – Giving the right answer to the wrong question Speak to the Job – Benefit from the fruits of your labour – How to use Words, Appearance, and Body Talk to pull a WABT out of your hat – Nothing succeeds like success stories – Raise the BAR on your interview skills Speak to the Company – If the company fits, join it – E(value)ating the company culture	51
Chapter 4	Stage 4 – Ask Questions It’s more difficult to ask than to answer – Ask not what the company can do for you—ask what you can do for the company	93

PART II Common Interview Emotions

- Chapter 5 Be Mindful 107
The mindful umbrella – Having a FIT to get the point across – Observing body-talk that hides in plain sight – Beliefs are boomerangs that come back to bite you
- Chapter 6 Get Motivated 123
Your future affects who you are now – When your job is a calling, shout it out – The value-added effect of happiness – Don't sweat it when you're anxious - How to talk yourself out of feeling depressed
- Chapter 7 Overcome Objections 147
How one man filled another woman's shoes – Down from the mountain in good spirits – Recognizing the motive behind an illegal question
- Chapter 8 Keep It Real 167
Why play the game when you can play the professional? – Three tactics of influence – The 2% rule - Your conscience will unmask you – Not all smiles are equally alike
- Chapter 9 Be Realistic 181
The contrast effect means it's difficult to follow a good act – The halo effect is not just for angels – Interviewers' pet theories should be put on a leash – The journey is more important than the destination
-
-

PART III Pearls of Wisdom from a Sea of Research

Chapter 10	Evidence-based Advice	195
	No one has the right to their own personal set of facts – Finding a wrinkle in the research – High-sounding statements should be grounded in evidence	
Chapter 11	A Theory of Interview Charisma	215
	Gravity and charisma are forces that emanate from within – The eyes have it, but so do the ears – The well-dressed handshake	
Chapter 12	A History Lesson	241
	Antique research is timeless – A toast to role-play interviews during the time of Prohibition – Having words with a work-sample – Meta-analyze this	
	Acknowledgements	265
	References	268
	Index	281

ABOUT THIS BOOK

You have only one opportunity in an interview to project your value to a company, so it's important to know the techniques that work and those that don't. The best techniques are evidence-based; they are supported by research. But most of the research on the employment interview is designed to help employers. Until now, these techniques have not been available to job candidates. *Interview Charisma* helps you move forward in your career by translating pearls of wisdom from high-quality research into practical interview advice. You will be able to walk into an interview with the mindset: This is the job for me. Let me explain to you why I'm going to be good at this job and why I'm enthusiastic about your company.

The golden rule of interviewing is this:

An interview moves through four stages and interview charisma is created by mastering each and every stage.

An interview starts with a greeting, which leads to getting acquainted, then to exchanging the facts, and ends when the applicant asks questions. Interview Stage 1 is when you "meet and greet" the interviewer. It lasts only a few seconds, starts with your visual appearance, and ends with the handshake. Stage 2 takes up the

next few minutes during which you “build rapport” through small talk. The talk may be small but its impact on interviewers is large. Stage 3 is the “formal interview” and that’s when you show how your skill set matches the job and how your work values fit with the company culture. And Stage 4 is when the questions you ask show your deeper understanding of the job and the company. Each stage requires different skills.

Charisma in the interview happens when there is synergy among the four stages. The confidence that comes from doing well in one stage transfers to other stages. That’s the “it” factor. Think of the difference between adding and multiplying:

Without synergy, you get $2 + 2 + 2 + 2 = 8$

With synergy, you get $2 \times 2 \times 2 \times 2 = 16$

By knowing and preparing for all four stages, you will project an image of being more organized, intelligent, and motivated. Your voice will be strong and your speech fluent. Your answers will be concise, job related, and easier for the interviewer to remember. The more aware you are of how interviewers think, the easier it is to communicate your personal brand.

The techniques of *Interview Charisma* work with all interviewers, regardless of their race, gender, ethnicity, or age. The techniques work for top-, middle-, or lower-level positions. They work in the typical unstructured, conversational, nondirectional

interview style in which decisions are made on “gut feel,” as well as in the newer structured styles such as competency, situational, and behavioural interviews. It doesn’t matter if the interview is face-to-face, video, or over the telephone, whether the company is large or small or is located in a city, the suburbs, or a rural area. Once you learn the approach, you can use it with all interviewers in all situations.

Interview Charisma gives you a maximum return on your investment in time and energy because what you learn about the job as you prepare for the interview also helps you succeed on the job once you start working. That’s because the standards a company uses to hire you into the job may be the same as those used to measure your performance on the job. If you know what the company is looking for in the interview, then you will also know what may be expected on the job.

* * *

Interview Charisma is divided into three parts. In Part I, each of the four stages is described in a separate chapter. Each chapter tells you What to Know, Understanding the Interviewer, and What to Do. You will learn why each interview stage is important, what the interviewer is thinking at that point, and how you should react. It’s much easier to act with conviction when you know why you are doing what you are doing.

Part II includes five chapters, each of which answers a separate question. What's the message value of the interviewer's body language? What's the best way to boost your motivation before an interview? What's the best response to negative questioning? Should you be honest? How should you handle rejection?

Part III is for readers who want the deepest level of understanding. Three main questions are discussed: How is this evidence-based book different from other interview books? How good is the evidence for a theory of interview charisma? And what have we learned after a century of research about selecting the best candidates? The value that meta-analysis has brought to the field is highlighted, and my personal ideas about interview charisma are supported by findings from experiments and field studies.

Please visit www.interviewcharisma.com for more information about this book. Or write to me at uco@interviewcharisma.com if you have a story to share. And let me know when you win the job you deserve!

PART I

The Four Interview Stages

An interview moves through four stages
and interview charisma is created by
mastering each and every stage



CHAPTER ONE

Meet and Greet

*T*here is an ancient parable from India about six blind men who argue about an elephant. One man walks into the side of the elephant and declares it to be like a wall. Another feels the tusk and declares, “Ah, an elephant is like a spear.” The third takes the trunk in his hand and says, “No, it’s more like a snake.” The fourth reaches out and touches the knee and declares the elephant is like a tree. The fifth holds the ear and argues that the elephant is like a fan, and the last blind man seizes on the swinging tail and wonders how the others could be so wrong—“Of course, an elephant is like a rope.” The blind men argue long and hard, each man feeling he knows the truth. Everyone knows how an elephant looks, so to us the folly is obvious. But what about an interview?

Read six books about how to prepare for an interview and you will get six different opinions. One book advises that the first 60 seconds are the key to winning the interview, another tells us to dress for success, a third gives us best answers to 101 questions, a fourth talks about creating success stories, a fifth tells us how to ask great questions, and a sixth prescribes guerilla marketing tactics for the employment jungle. Like the blind men, each book is only partially correct. It's important to have the big picture so you can prepare for the entire interview.

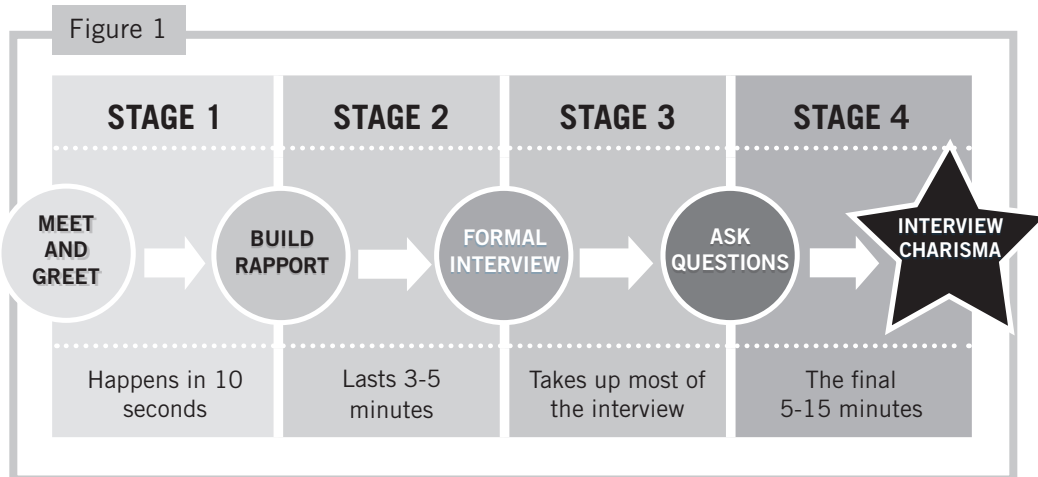
Preparing for an interview is much easier when you take it one step at a time. Inch by inch, life's a cinch; yard by yard, life is hard. When you watch a film in slow motion, you see more detail. Look at an employment interview in slow motion and you see four separate stages. *Interview Charisma* illustrates the four stages, tells you what interviewers are thinking, and how you should respond.

Stage 1 starts the moment you and the interviewer meet eye-to-eye and ends with the handshake. It flashes by and is over before you know it—yet the effects last throughout.

Stage 2 starts when the interviewer offers coffee or exchanges pleasantries like, “So, did you have any trouble finding the place?” One of the biggest interview mysteries of all occurs during this stage: Do interviewers make up their minds in the first few minutes of the interview?

Stage 3 is the “formal” interview. You will know it has begun when you hear something like, “So, tell me about yourself. Why do you think you'd be good for this position?” Most people think of Stage 3 as ‘the job interview,’ but it's really only one of four parts.

Stage 4, the last stage, starts when the interviewer says, “Well, do you have any questions about us?” Most job candidates miss the opportunity to set themselves apart from their competition by failing to ask good questions.



Your interview confidence comes alive when you work on each stage because there is synergy among the four stages. Synergy is energy. Synergy means the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. Synergy is what happens when you wash your hands. Wash one hand alone and it cleans up somewhat, although it's awkward, but let one hand wash the other and both hands become much cleaner. Same with the four stages of interviewing. What you do and say in one stage gives you a confidence boost for the other stages. Your confidence will reach a tipping point where everything snaps into focus. It's like the feeling you have when you add that last piece of a 5,000-piece jigsaw puzzle. Your mindset suddenly changes from looking for the parts to seeing the big picture.

Companies manage well when they hire well and, as the gap between research and practice lessens, more interviewers are using behavioural, competency, or situational interviews. These are called structured interviews by business psychologists. Almost a century of research shows that interviewers hire the best employees when they: a) carefully analyze the job requirements and then use high-quality job specifications to drive the interview, b) use the

same set of prepared questions with all applicants, c) compare the answers of an individual candidate against predefined benchmark answers, and d) avoid making quick decisions and withhold judgement until the end of the interview. The benefit of structuring the interview is that candidates are judged against the requirements of the job instead of in the abstract.

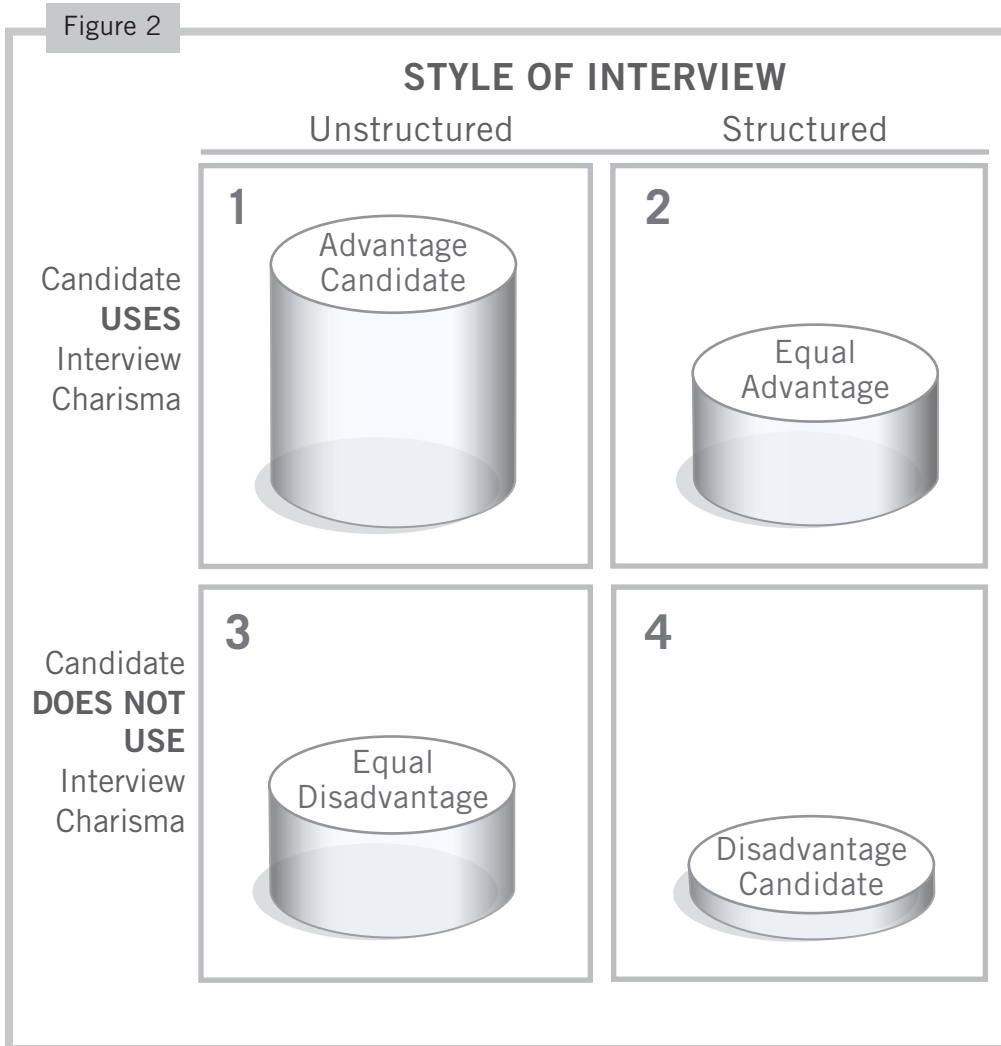
A structured interview for a computer programmer position might start with:

“We’ve done a thorough job analysis for this programmer/analyst position and have learned that user relations, coding, testing, and debugging are the most important job requirements. For the next hour, I’ll be asking questions that measure how your skills meet these requirements.”

This is quite different from the typical, conversational, unstructured interview question:

“Tell me about yourself. Why do you feel you would be good for this job?”

Interview Charisma will prepare you for both types of interviews. Figure 2 shows what happens when interviewers and job candidates are prepared—or unprepared. Box 3 in the lower left happens all too often. Neither party is prepared—it’s the blind leading the blind. Without structure, interviewers quickly become overtaxed with too much information and hire on subjective characteristics. But every disadvantage has its advantage. *Interview Charisma* shows you how you can help keep the interview job-related (Box 1) so that interview decisions are more



objective. And if the interviewer does use a structured format, then you will know exactly how to react (Box 2). Finally, Box 4 shows what happens when unprepared candidates come up against prepared interviewers. That's the same as stepping into a boxing match with a trained boxer—you won't last long.

Stage 1 / Meet and Greet

Stage 1 starts the moment the candidate and the interviewer first see one another eye-to-eye and ends with the handshake. It's over in only a few seconds but the effects last throughout the interview. No words are spoken other than a brief introduction, but you are already being judged. We judge others by their appearance, posture, facial expressions, and handshake, and it's only natural that others judge us by the same standards. Style is how we present ourselves. Substance is what we present. Style does for substance what a frame does for a painting and what packaging does for a product.

What to Know

Style appeals to the emotions and substance appeals to logic. Good style opens the door so that you can present your substance, and your substance then opens another door to hire value. This principle is as old as time. Just as commercials first catch our attention before they pitch the product, job candidates need to attract the interviewer's attention before presenting the real message. In the *Interview Charisma* framework, if you present your style well in Stages 1 and 2, then you create the opportunity to present your substance in Stages 3 and 4. Style sells substance and substance sells hire value.

Remember this:

You cannot not communicate. You are *always* sending messages, so you may as well make your messaging work for you. Your appearance and actions during the first few seconds of the interview are a window into who you are. Politicians are mindful of how they appear to their electorates. Criminal defense lawyers costume their clients to project the proper

Don't let this happen to you. Your message to the interviewer is, "I'm competent, I'm friendly, and I'm here to help." Clothing shows judgement, body talk shows motivation, and a handshake conveys personality. Wrong clothing? Hmm, what else about this candidate isn't right? Body talk too relaxed? Hmm, probably won't take the job seriously. Limp, wet-noodle handshake? Hmm, probably too shy for the position. Interviewers can't see you as an individual if you give them a reason to label you.

Understanding the Interviewer

Interviewers need to reduce the uncertainty that occurs when two strangers first meet. Numerous studies show that strangers form impressions of one another on very little information. People can tell you within 100 milliseconds (one-tenth of a second) whether a stranger's face looks trustworthy, and within 48 milliseconds whether a face is threatening. But it's impossible to recognize and analyze all of the details in every person or situation, so people use shortcuts or rules of thumb called heuristics. Sometimes we make immediate decisions and think in an unthinking way. Stereotyping is an example of a decision heuristic.

Popular books such as *Blink: The Power of Thinking Without Thinking* romanticize the notion that instant reactions are accurate. It makes great cocktail party talk when you can say that within 10 seconds you lasered in on a sixth century B.C. statue of a young boy acquired by the Getty Museum in California for 10 million and knew it was fake. *Blink* popularized the idea that judgements based on so-called thin slices of behaviour are as good as judgements based on thick slices. However, although we think quickly, we don't always think accurately. Author Daniel Kahneman, in *Thinking Fast and Slow*, debunks the myth that blink-thinking is accurate. He reminds us that when we hear of successful examples of blink-fast

thinking, they're usually from experts who have long histories of knowledge on particular subjects. The rest of us think fast because we're either lazy or don't have the time to drill deeper.

So, do interviewers make accurate blink-think decisions? There is no research that shows that split-second intuition is a good substitute for reason. Almost 100 years of employment interview research supports exactly the opposite: a slow, deliberate, rational approach is the only way to make accurate hiring decisions. Interviewers make the best decisions when they use a structured interview format that is driven by high-quality job specifications, and when they wait until all job-related information has been collected. In fact, basic intelligence is the best predictor of future job performance, but we are unable to judge someone's intelligence after a split-second exposure to their face.

What to Do

Everyone knows that appearance is important in an interview. It's common knowledge and common sense, which can actually make us complacent. What people don't know is that the effect of a candidate's appearance on a hiring decision is five times greater when the interview is unstructured, and that's most interviews! Different jobs require different interview attire and clothing styles change over time, so you will need to determine what's appropriate in your situation.

Pay special attention to your appearance and handshake during Stage 1. Look your best, smile, and give a firm handshake. As for the rest, be your authentic self. You don't need to do, feel, or say anything out of the ordinary. Your résumé opened the door to the interview; now keep the momentum going so that Stage 1 opens the door to Stage 2. Remember, style sells substance and substance sells hire value.

Look Good

An interview is a formal conversation and requires a more formal image. You need to look the part to get the part. Your interviewer may not remember what you wore, but she will remember the message: suited for the job or not suited. Interviewers infer how you think from how you look—appearance equals competence. “If you can’t get the appearance right, then what else is there about you that you can’t get right?” Appearance is a knockout factor, so ensure that the interviewer focuses on you and not your appearance. If you are an Einstein and your reputation precedes you, then you don’t need to think about your appearance. In all other instances, you do.

Two employment interviewers had this to say:

Clothing is a big deal. It’s a very big deal. I think for an interview you need to be in some sort of business attire. Even if it’s for a creative job, I think there’s a level of respect there. Some candidates come in and the clothes are not up to date. I make a judgement whether or not they have skills that are going to meet today’s marketplace. It doesn’t have to be the latest designer, but you need to have something up to date. It’s not that hard. Hair style is a big deal too. If there’s too much hair going on, it’s like you’re looking at the hair. Another big mistake is perfume or cologne—it’s massive. People just pour themselves in this stuff.

Of course you notice how the person is dressed, their appearance and how they present themselves. Is the person uncomfortable? Does the person make eye contact? And all of that consciously or subconsciously goes through your head, of course, when you’re



“My interview coach advised me to always wear a suit.”

meeting someone for the first time ... you're assessing someone. If you're dressed inappropriately ... you're done. If you have a body piercing ... a nose ring ... if you're sloppy ... if you come in late, we can't send you out. How you dress for an interview shows judgement (or lack of).

You may have personal integrity, but how good is your visual integrity? Job candidates often make the mistake of thinking that the interviewer's visual system is nothing more than a mechanical camera that captures an image. Actually, within the first seconds of meeting you, people take note

including her face, is acceptable in the Middle East but not in Europe or North America. To present the proper visual in the interview, dress so that the interviewer will feel comfortable with you.

A study in Austin, Texas about status and obedience highlights how people react to clothing. People, who were waiting on a city street corner for the light to change, readily followed models who disobeyed WAIT signals and crossed early when the models were dressed in a suit, white shirt, tie, and polished shoes, but did not follow models who were dressed in soiled trousers, unpressed denim shirt, and scuffed shoes. The study was repeated in a French city where 55% of the pedestrians followed well-dressed models but only 9% followed poorly-dressed models.

John Malloy, author of *Dress for Success*, provides numerous examples of how the clothing you wear influences others. In one study, secretaries and receptionists in New York City obliged requests to pass on envelopes to their bosses more quickly when the man making the request wore a high-status beige raincoat, than when he wore a low-status black raincoat. In another study, Malloy, dressed in a business suit, panhandled for money during rush hour in Grand Central Station. He would stop people, say that he was terribly embarrassed but that he had forgotten his wallet, and ask for money to get home. He received four times as much money when he wore a tie. An interviewer said,

If you're recruiting for the executive assistant to the CEO ... there's a certain look that person has to have if it's for a Fortune 500 company, as opposed to a back office data entry clerk ... appearance doesn't matter as much.

In another experiment, one group of interview candidates wore ties to their interviews, whereas the second group did not do so. Each man in

the latter group was instructed to say that, although he had his tie with him when he left his house, he left it on the counter after stopping for a cup of coffee. The candidate explained that he did not return for the tie because doing so would have made him late for the interview. Malloy writes, “Those men who wore their ties to the interview were offered jobs; those without them were turned down.” Malloy’s research was conducted in the 1970s when ties for men were arguably more important than they are today, especially when companies have a dress down policy, but the moral of the story is that appearance counts, whatever the fashion trends of the day may be.

It’s how you present yourself. It’s usually younger people, unfortunately. They come in with their coffee in one hand and the phone in the other. So, they’re not treating it like a serious interview ... which turns the interviewer off, of course. Again, it’s judgement, it’s all judgement.

Some candidates get the message about appearance with great difficulty. These are the skeptics who insist on being judged for what they offer, not on how they look. Dressing for an interview “feels staged,” they say. They pride themselves on not paying attention to how they appear to others, and don’t worry about first impressions because, “Once people see who I really am, they will like me.” Such candidates think their verbal credibility, or what they say about themselves, is more important than their visual credibility, what they show about themselves. And there is merit to their argument; objective criteria should be more important than subjective criteria. But it’s like the man who insists on having the right of way while crossing the street on a pedestrian crosswalk, even while a truck barrels down on him. He was right—dead right.

The ultimate rule of personal power is that the person with the power is permitted to break the rules. Unless your reputation precedes

you, you need to conform to the demand characteristics of the interview. Ensure that the interviewer focuses on you and is not distracted by your (lack of) appearance. Make others comfortable by dressing for the part. Use some street smarts and emotional intelligence and play the system to your advantage instead of railing against it. Hiring decisions are affected by appearance and, although that may not be an accurate way to decide, it's better to be on the good side of those effects. Your appearance, dress, posture, and facial expressions are all under your control. Focus on the right things to do and then do them right.

A job recruiter expressed her frustration with job candidates that she sent out to her corporate clients:

We prepare job candidates. "This is what you have to say, this is what you have to do and how you should look." And they still don't do it. They still don't do it.

Shake Hands

Stage 1 ends with a handshake. The hands tell a story. The appearance and softness of a hand tells you something about the person's lifestyle. Callused hands tell a different life story.

It costs nothing to have a good handshake. A handshake has five parts: grip, strength, vigour, duration, and eye contact. Grip is full when the hands interlock completely, or partial when you shake more with your fingers. Business handshakes between and across genders should always use a complete hand grip. Strength will depend on the culture. In Western cultures, it's good to give a moderate squeeze so that you're not accused of a limp handshake. Other cultures actually prefer a shake with no squeeze. Vigour (or pump) means how low and high the arms move as they go up and down. Duration is how long you shake. Finally, eye

contact means to look the other person in the eye as you shake hands and varies from none to direct.

The *cooperator handshake* has medium muscle modulation (a firm grasp), is waist high, lasts 1.8–2.3 seconds, and is a pump and a half. There's a complete grip and both hands are vertical, which says, "You and I are equal." The politician's handshake of clasping your left hand over the other person's right hand, or holding onto their upper right arm, should never be used with someone you are meeting for the first time because it is perceived as a false attempt to accelerate rapport. People with dead-fish, wet-noodle handshakes are often unaware; therefore, it's useful to ask your friends to comment on how you shake hands.

The handshake is a sign of welcome; therefore, you should let the interviewer lead and wait until he extends his hand before you extend yours—but be ready for it. If you need to move closer to shake the interviewer's hand, step first and then extend your hand (not the other way around). Keep your center of gravity and stay centered. The interviewer will see you as relaxed and in control. Both men and women should shake with a complete and firm grip of the other person's hand, and initiate a good pump. Don't adjust your handshake. Keep it firm even if the interviewer's hand is weak. Look the other person in the eye while shaking hands. If you are unsure whether you've been maintaining eye contact, simply remind yourself to do so next time you shake someone's hand. Looking away gives the impression that you are insecure, hiding something, or disinterested. Think of a reason for really wanting the job and smile sincerely as you address the interviewer by name: "I'm pleased to meet you, Mr. James." You will gain more respect if you pronounce the interviewer's name correctly. Finally, don't sit down until the interviewer sits down, or offers a seat. As a general rule of thumb, throughout the interview, follow the interviewer's cues, especially when transitioning through the interview stages.

Professor Greg Stewart of the University of Iowa measured handshakes in a real interview setting and discovered that job candidates with good handshakes are perceived by interviewers to have extrovert personalities. During an interview, extroverts present as proactive self-starters, assertive, dominant, able to control situations, having drive, decisive, ambitious, and having a positive outlook. Who wouldn't want such people around? That's why the handshake is so important.

Making inferences about personality from a handshake is a good example of decision heuristics. We make decisions based on very little information, and read into things that are not there. People with a firm handshake are seen as being more persuasive, sociable, and friendly, and as having better interpersonal skills, whereas a soft handshake communicates a shy and even neurotic personality (at least in Western culture). Who needs fancy Rorschach inkblot tests to measure personality when a handshake will do?

I get a lot of women from the Pacific Rim that are not comfortable shaking hands like a man, so I will coach them because I know that it's a cultural thing. I tell them, "You're in the United States now."

Professor Stewart conducted his research in North America and the advice to shake firm is appropriate in many parts of the world, such as North America, Europe, Russia, and Australia/New Zealand. However, in much of the rest of the world, such as Africa, South America, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East, it is normal to shake with a softer grip. The attitude is that, "By shaking your hand firmly, I feel like I'm trying to tell you something. If I'm secure in who I am, then I don't need to convey so much energy in my handshake. A soft shake is warmer, and I'll use it especially if you are my friend." It's important to adjust your handshake according to the country in which you find yourself.

CHAPTER 1 SUMMARY

- An interview moves through four stages that normally occur in the same order:

1–Meet-and-Greet	3–Formal Interview
2–Building Rapport	4–Asking Questions
- There is synergy among the four stages. Synergy means the whole is greater than the sum of the parts.
- Job candidates who learn the principles of *Interview Charisma* will be prepared for both structured and unstructured interview styles.
- Stage 1 lasts only a few seconds. It starts the instant you first see the interviewer and ends with the handshake.
- The style you present in Stage 1 opens the door to presenting your substance later on.
- The only interviews that accurately predict a candidate's future job performance are structured interviews.
- Be mindful about your appearance because it has a much larger effect on interviewers than most people realize.
- Learn how to shake hands well, and maintain eye contact, because interviewers associate a good handshake with an extrovert personality. And extroverts are perceived as being proactive.
- People who have charisma in the interview project it in many ways that are linked together. For example, people who dress better also have better handshakes.

*Style sells substance
and
substance sells hire value*



CHAPTER TWO

Building Rapport, or Writing a Rapport?

You know that Stage 2 has started when interviewers say, “Did you have any trouble finding the place?” or “Would you like a cup of coffee?” or comment about the weather, or a newsworthy public event. Interviewers build rapport to create a comfortable, trusting atmosphere that puts candidates at ease and encourages them to open up and talk freely. This is often described as exchanging pleasantries, small talk, chitchat, making light conversation, breaking the ice, initial subtleties, and banter.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



I remember talking with my friend Eric some 30 years ago. I was the studious, introvert, graduate school student, and he was a musician. We discussed how our chosen occupations influenced our lives. He said, “Your job takes you away from people, and mine brings me in contact with people.” Truer words were never spoken. Writing is a wonderful process of self-discovery. You don’t know what you’re thinking until it appears in words. But writing requires solitude, and for two years my house became a cloister. During that time, my friends stayed in touch. Whenever they called to say, “Hey, what’s new?” I carried on endlessly about the chapter I happened to be writing that month. They were always gracious and listened patiently. They engaged in ideas, told me when they didn’t like something, and gave me their friendship. Special thanks to Florence Alberta, Kim-Van Beers, Peter van den Berg, Don Campbell, Rick and Orda Crawford, Peggy Feitsma, Ricardo Frazer, Eva Freed, Lorraine Gelard, Larry Oliver, Margie Pettersen, Krzysztof Skowronski, John and Bonnie Vaught, Jack Whittaker, Ron Williams, and Jeffrey Williamson.

Three employment professionals graciously allowed me into the world of employment recruiting. I interviewed the interviewers and their quotes are sprinkled throughout the book. Supplementing evidence-based knowledge with the voice of experience is a win-win strategy and gives the book an extra sparkle. Thanks to Maryann Donovan, President, Impact Personnel, Maryann@impactpersonnel.com; Maureen Mackey, Mackey and Guasco Staffing, Maureen@mackeyandguasco.com; and Lisa Rose, Director, JACE Consulting Company, Lisa@jaceconsultingcompany.com, and author of *GUMPTION* and *Our Family Journey*.

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INDEX

A

Abilities, 125
Abrasive styles, 149
Accomplishments, 53, 62
Accurate hiring decisions, 11
Action, 63
Active listening, 109, 120
Active participation, 97
Adaptability, 135
Advice, evidence-based
 about, 195
 book difference, 202–207
 challenge, 196–200
 defining, 200–202
 general questions, 211–212
 interviewing the interviewers, 207
 stage 1 interview, 209
 stage 2 interview, 209
 stage 3 interview, 210
 stage 4 interview, 210
 thought topic, 213
 appendix, 209–212
 summary, 208
Age, 159
Ah Ha Moment, 216
Amplitude variability, 43
Anger, 138, 155
Answers, 66, 156
Anxiety, 123, 132, 134, 144
Anxiety level, 136
Appearance
 about, 11–12
 clothing, 12

 definition of, 258
 eye contact, 12
 fine-tune, 216
 hairstyle, 12
 and handshakes, 226
 influence of, 242
 of listening, 115
 message sent by, 15
 nonverbals, 14
 perfume/cologne, 12
 personal, 260
 professional and hiring decision, 14
 reliance on, 199
 sent by message, 15
Attractiveness, 242
Awareness, 107

B

Back to the Future (movie), 124–125
Background, 62
Background, Action, and Results (BAR).
 see BAR (Background, Action, and
 Results)
Bandura, Albert, 116–117, 124
BAR (Background, Action, and Results)
 about teamwork, 68
 acronym for, 78
 for communication, 154
 display through, 66
 elements of, 62–63
 long, 65
 personal crafted, 171
 short, 64

-
- sourcing, 67
 - study and polish, 177
 - success story, 88
 - usage of, 73–74
 - use of, 109, 132
 - Barrick, Murray, 14, 27–28, 200, 224, 257–258, 260
 - Beat-the Odds Interviews* (Sorcher, M.), 152
 - Behavioral interview, 5
 - Behaviour
 - and beliefs, 109, 116–117
 - extrovert, 30
 - job candidates, 204–205
 - nonverbal, 99, 259
 - verbal, 259
 - Beliefs, 109, 116–117, 125
 - Bell-shaped curve, 172
 - Benchmark answers, 251
 - Best-answer books, 207
 - Blind review, 201
 - Blink-think decisions, 11
 - Body language, 32, 39, 135, 173
 - Body posture, 36
 - Body talk
 - body language, 32
 - communication through, 36–37
 - cues from, 109
 - establishing, 57
 - focus on, 48
 - influence of, 259
 - of interviewer, 120
 - by interviewers feeling negative, 113
 - by interviewers feeling positive, 112
 - preparation of, 33
 - reflection from, 111
 - signals from, 102
 - speech scores and, 44
 - use of, 262
 - Bona fide occupational qualification (BFOQ), 160
 - Book difference
 - advice, evidence-based, 202–207
 - control groups, 202–206
 - personal brand, 206–207
 - Breaking the ice, 34
 - Breath control, 46
 - Breathing, 36
 - Bridge opportunities, 78
 - Burnett, Jennifer, 198, 216, 218, 220, 224, 231–232
 - Business books, 206
 - Business etiquette, 21
- C**
- Cable, Daniel, 82
 - Calling
 - job as, 144
 - work as, 130
 - Campion Michael, 169–171
 - Can/can't do examples, 140–143
 - Candidate ranking, 242
 - Candidate skill set, 29
 - Career group, 154–156
 - Carnegie, Dale, 175–177
 - Challenge, 196–200
 - Chaplin, Charlie, 139–140
 - Charisma. *see also* interview charisma theory
 - in action, 57
 - vs. gravity, 215
 - Charisma examples, 216–230, 236
 - Cheating, 175
 - Cheerful feelings and emotional reserves
-

-
- Cheerful feelings, 133
Cheerfulness, 137
Cheshire Cat quotation, 55
Childcare responsibilities, 160
Children, 160
Chin-popping, 109
Chuang, Aichia, 83
Citizenship, 159
Clothing, 10, 15, 199
Cognitive bias, 97
Cognitive therapy, 132
Company and job, 51
Company appeal, 51
Company culture, 51, 80–81, 85, 89
Company fit, 84, 91
Competency interview, 5
Complaining, 155–156
Conclusions, 256
Confidence, 5, 137
Confidence level, 151
Conscientious interviewees, 230
Conscientiousness, 30
Contrast events, 182
Control groups, 201–206
Controversial questions, 99
Conversation pauses, 175
Cooperator handshake, 19
Corporate values, 86
Correlation coefficient, 252
Covey, Steven, 202
Creativity, 244
Credentials, exaggerated, 169
Credibility, 42
Cronshaw, S. F., 256–257
Culture fit, 83, 89
Custom-tailored questions, 95–96, 102
Cynicism, 109
- D**
Darnold, Todd C., 224, 235
Degrees of separation, 60
DeGroot, Tim, 42–44, 198, 221, 223–225, 233–234
Depression
 combating, 123
 fighting, 138
 fixing, 137–143
 as inward anger, 138
 and job interview, 132
Development, 151
Dictionary of Occupational Titles, 59
Dipboye, Robert, 186
Disbelief, 109
Dress for Success (Malloy, J.), 16
Duchenne, Guillaume, 175
Duchenne smile, 175
Dustin, Susan L., 224, 235
- E**
Early pioneers, 242–244
Echoing, 115
Education degree claims, 171
Efficacy, 228
Einhorn, Lois, 204–205
Electromyographs, 127
Elephant parable, 3
Emotional frames of mind
 depression fixing, 137–143
 normal anxiety, 134–137
 value of happiness, 132–134
Emotional reserves and cheerful feelings, 133
Emotions, negative, 137
Employment interviewing
-
-

- about, 197–200
 - principles of, 195
 - End-of-interview questions, 102
 - Envelope passing study, 16
 - Evaluations, first and second, 28
 - Evidence-based, knowledge, 202
 - Exaggerating, 169, 171
 - Experience
 - development and, 151
 - personal, into success story, 152–153
 - sources of, 152
 - Extra tips
 - complaining, 155–156
 - smiles, 155
 - Extrinsic reasons, 130
 - Extrovert behaviours, 30
 - Extrovert candidates, 31
 - Extrovert personalities, 28
 - Extrovert personality and speech characteristics, 44
 - Extrovert scores and interview confidence, 229
 - Extroverts, 48, 137, 225, 230
 - Eyes
 - contact, 36, 216
 - focus of, 119
 - viewing, 40
 - views, 19
 - F**
 - Fake smiles vs. genuine, 177
 - Fakes, genuine and polite, 175
 - Faking it, 171
 - False statements, 171
 - Family culture, 80
 - Fear vs. rejection, 126
 - Feeling, Fit, and Thought (FFT), 109–110
 - First impressions, 185
 - Fitness to company, 82
 - Foot pointing, 101
 - Formal interview
 - about, 51
 - getting organized, 88
 - interview tips, 87
 - profile checklist, 90
 - speak to the company, 79–86, 89
 - speak to the job, 88
 - what to do, 56–60
 - what to know, 52–53
 - what to know about interviewer, 54–55
 - summary, 88–89
 - Fredrickson, Barbara, 133
 - Freud, Sigmund, 138–139
 - Friendliness, vs. judgment, 26
 - Fundamental attribution error, 155
 - Future, optimistic attitude about, 124
 - Future visualization, 124–129
 - G**
 - Game (in title), 168
 - Gazing, 40
 - Gender, 159–160
 - Gender stereotypes, 161
 - Gender use, 118
 - General mental ability (GMA), 66, 242
 - General questions, 95, 211–212
 - Genuine and polite fakes, 175
 - Getting organized, 88
 - G-factor, 30
 - Glass as half-empty view, 148
 - Good questions, 189
-

H

Halo effects, 182–187
Halo example, 185
Hand gestures, 36, 41
Handbook challenge, 196
Handbook of Principles of Organizational Behavior (Locke, Edwin), 196
Hands, 36, 41
Handshakes
 about, 10
 and appearance, 226
 and culture, 18
 and dress, 216
 elements of, 18–21
 firm, 11
 by gender, 21
 influence of, 225
 interview, 18–21
 limp, 18–19
 mechanics of, 18
 method of, 112
 in real interview setting, 20
Hands-on approach, 41–42
Handwriting, 114
Happiness, 132
Happy emotions, 133
Happy memories, 133
Head movement, 40
Head position, 113
Head tilting, 112
Hearing, vs. listening, 114
Height, 172
Heimberg, Richard, 140
Hiring decisions, 30
 and professional appearance, 14

 single vs. multiple interviews, 83
 on stereotypes, 54

Holding back gesture, 148

Honesty, 135–136

Hoovers Report, 59

Humour, 34

I

Illegal questions, 160, 163–164

Image

 failure to create, 167

 influence tactics, 169–177

 influence tactics of, 169–177

 managing, 168–169

 smiles, 175–177

 teeth display, 175–177

 thought topic, 179

 summary, 178

Imagination, of possibilities, 129

Impressions

 of another, 10

 vs. hiring decisions, 32

Inferential status, 202

Influence tactics

 exaggerating, 170–171

 lying, 171–175

 overly agreeable, 169–170

Information collection, 71

Informed purchases, 200

Ingratiation, 169

Initial impression, 28

Insecurity, 127

Intelligence, 11, 30, 66, 69, 242

Internal locus of control, 188

Interview (s), 188

 about, 109–111

- correct way to, 55
 - end signal, 102
 - ending, 97, 99
 - interview tips, 112–113
 - job related, 6
 - lunch or dinner, 119
 - nondirective and stress types, 196–197
 - physical reaction to, 135
 - preparation for, 54
 - as self-fulfilling prophecies, 117
 - structured, 256
 - structured vs. unstructured, 11
 - subjective, 243
 - unstructured, 256
 - visualization of, 128
 - ways to, 55
 - before the what to do, 62–70
 - during the what to do, 71–78
 - Interview anxiety, 132, 134
 - Interview awareness, 241
 - Interview blueprint, 55, 58, 71
 - Interview charisma theory
 - about, 215
 - Ah Ha Moment, 216
 - Charisma examples, 216–230
 - appendix, 231–238
 - Interview performance, 127
 - Interview plan, 108
 - Interview process, 168
 - Interview skills, 91
 - Interview structure, 196
 - Interview styles, 7
 - Interview tips, 40
 - body talk by interviewers feeling
 - negative, 113
 - body talk by interviewers feeling
 - positive, 112
 - formal interview, 87
 - what to do, 70–71, 78
 - Interview-confidence, and extrovert scores, 229
 - Interviewers
 - attention, 8
 - body talk of, 120
 - interruption by, 113
 - judgement of, 26
 - name of, 19
 - perceptions, 85
 - playing up to, 169
 - training, 244
 - Interviewing
 - confidence about, 228–229
 - the interviewers, 207
 - Intrinsic motivation, 131
 - Intrinsic reasons, 130
 - Introvert interviewees, 225
 - Intuition, 99
 - Inward anger, 138
 - IQ tests, 30
- ## J
- Jackson, Phil, 69
 - Jaywalking leaders, 16
 - Jaywalking leaders study, 17
 - Job analysis, 6, 52–53, 59, 67, 88, 177, 248–249
 - Job and company, 51
 - Job calling, 129–132
 - Job candidates, 246
 - Job content and interview car analogy, 117
 - Job description, 58–59, 158
-
-

-
- Job interview history
 about, 241
 early pioneers, 242–244
 job analysis, 248–249
 meta-analysis and structured
 interview, 255–260
 moral(s) to, 260–262
 situational interview, 250–255
 structured interviews, 244–248
 thought topic, 263
- Job offers, 168, 188
- Job performance, 11, 260
- Job position, 58
- Job posting, 58, 84
- Job preparation, 54
- Job requirements, 197
- Job responsibilities, 67, 88, 150
- Job skills, 135
- Job spaces, 59
- Job-related answers, 72
- Jordan, Michael, 69
- Journal of Counseling Psychology, 140
- Judge, Timothy, 82
- Judgments
 fast and frugal, 200
 vs. friendliness, 26
- K**
- Kacmar, E. Michele, 61
- Kahneman, Daniel, 10
- Kennedy, John F., 41
- Knock out factors, 32, 168
- Knowledge, evidence-based, 200–201
- L**
- Language pace, 115
- Latham, Gary, 250–252, 257
- Law of controllability, 177
- Leg movement, 110
- Lessons learned, 149–150
- Levishina, Julia, 169–171
- Liars, 173
- Liden, Robert C., 224, 227, 236
- Linguistic cues, 44
- Lip crossing, 109
- Listening
 active, 120
 appearance of, 115
 vs. hearing, 114
- Locke, Edwin, 196
- Look good, 12–18
- “Loser” thought, 138
- Lying, 171–175
- M**
- Magson, E. R., 242, 260
- Marital status, 160
- Martial arts story, 153–154
- Martin, Christopher L., 224, 236
- Media, 60
- Medical conditions, preexisting, 159
- Medley, H. Anthony, 196
- Meet and greet
 about, 1–7
 look good, 12–18
 stage 1, 8
 summary, 22
 thought topic, 23
 what to do, 11
 what to know, 8–10
 what to know about interviewer, 10–11
 summary, 22
-
-

-
- Memories and stereotypes, 161
Mental ability IQ, 66
Message
 appearance sent by, 15
 clothing sent by, 15
 congruence, 36–37
Meta-analysis and structured interview, 255–260
Micro gestures, 101
Milgram, Stanley, 60
Mindfulness
 about, 107–108
 in the interview, 108–115
 interview tips, 118–119
 thought topic, 121
 and you, 116–117
 summary, 120
Mirroring, 40
Misinterpreted questions, 96
Modern Times (movie), 133
Molloy, John, 16–17
Moral(s), 260–262
Most-asked questions, 108
Motivation
 about, 123
 emotional frames of mind, 132–143
 expectancy-valence theory of, 188
 future visualization, 124–129
 job calling, 129–132
 thought topic, 145
 summary, 144
Motowidlo, Stephan, 216, 218, 220–221, 224, 231–233
Mourning period, 137
Muller-Lyer illusion, 9
- N**
Name of interviewer, 19
National origin, 159–160
Native language, 159
Neckties, 16
Negative emotions vs. confidence, 137
Negative halo, 183–184
Negative questions, 147–148
Negativity bias, 31
Nepotism policy, 185
Nodding, 36
Nondirectional approach, 71
Nondirectional comments or questions, 75–77
Nondirectional interview, 72–73, 79, 197
Nonverbal behaviours, 99, 259
Nonverbal communication, 109–110, 177, 242
Nonverbals, 36
Normal anxiety, 134–137
Notebook, leatherbound, 118
- O**
Objections, overcoming
 about, 147–149
 extra tips, 155–158
 illegal questions, 159–161, 163–164
 thought topic, 165
 weakness, 149–153
 work history gap, 153–155
 summary, 162
Occupational Information Network (O*Net), 59
Occupational Outlook Handbook (OOH), 59
Olli-Pekka Kallasvuo (OPK), 206
-

Onboarding, 95, 115
Open-ended questions, 72
Optimistic attitude, 31
Oral test, 56
Organization, 88
O'Rourke, L. J., 245–246, 255
Outcomes, 188
Overlap, 56

P

Packaging, 9
Palm display, 112
Panel interviews, 111
Panhandling study, 16
Paralinguistic cues, 44–45
Parsons, Charles K., 224, 236
Participation, active vs. passive, 97
Passive participation, 97
Pauses, 43, 175
Pedestrian cross walk, 17
People
 effective vs. ineffective, 202
 names of, 118
Performance, 188
Personal accomplishments, 66
Personal brand, 57, 206–207
Personal information, 34
Personal power rule, 17
Personal problems, 137
Personal pronoun, 70
Personal questions, 99
Personal shortcomings, 150
Perspective, 147
Pet theories, 186–187
Phone behavior, 116
Phone calls, 99, 114

Phone presence, 119
Physical attractiveness, 258
Physical characteristics, 172
Pitch, 42
Pitch variability, 43
Placebo, 199, 201
Pleasantries, 25
Politician's handshake, 18
Polygraph tests, 173
Pop psychology, 139
Positive approach, 151
Positive halo, 183
Positive-negative asymmetry effect, 31
Posture, 36–40
Posture exercises, 38–39
The Power of Thinking without Thinking, 10
Predictive validity study, 252
Preparation, 125
Presentation style, 169
Probing questions, 94
Process of elimination, 31
Professional appearance and hiring decision, 14
Profile checklist, 90
Psychodynamics, 139
Psychological characteristics, 172
Psychological functioning, 132

Q

Questions
 awkward, 187
 controversial, 99
 custom-tailored, 95, 102
 end-of-interview, 102
 general, 95

- good, 189
 - ineffective, 187
 - misinterpreted, 95
 - most-asked, 108
 - personal, 99
 - prepare for, 52
 - prepared, 6
 - probing, 94
 - specific, 95
 - structuring, 94
 - technical, 99
 - time for, 98
- Questions, asking, 93–103
- about, 93
 - thought topic, 103
 - what to do, 98–101
 - what to know, 94–97
 - what to know about interviewer, 97
 - summary, 102
- Quick decisions, 6
- R**
- Race, 159
- Racial prejudice, 161
- Rapport development
- about, 25–26
 - body talk, 36–37
 - building, 33
 - hands-on approach, 41–42
 - information collection through, 71
 - interview tips, 40
 - posture, 37–40
 - small talk, 32–36
 - thought topic, 23
 - voice, 42–47
 - what to do, 32–47
 - what to know, 26–29
 - what to know about interviewer, 29–32
 - summary, 48
- Reactive approach, 108
- Realism
- about, 181
 - thought topic, 191
 - what can be controlled, 188
 - what can't be controlled, 182–187
 - working through rejection, 188–189
 - summary, 190
- Reality, 167, see also image
- Recency effect, 185
- Refreshments, 118
- Rejection, 125–127
- Research, evidence-based, 197
- Result, 63
- Résumé, 29, 118, 171, 245
- Rewards, 130
- Roaming eyes, 36
- Rogers, Carl, 132
- S**
- Sabbatical, self-imposed, 154
- Sackett, Paul, 83
- Scott, W. D., 242–243
- Self-actualization, 132
- Self-efficacy, 228
- Self-fulfilling prophecy, 136
- Self-help books, 206
- Self-talk, 138
- Seligman, Martin, 131
- Serial position effect, 97
- The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People (Covey, S.), 202–203
-

-
- Signature strengths, 131
Silence, 157
Sitting style, 37
Situational interview, 5, 250–255
Situational questions, 251, 254
Skill set, 51, 53, 56, 59, 160
Skill set (verbals), 14
Small talk, 32–36
Smiles, 155, 175
fake vs. genuine, 177
fakes, 176
perfunctory, 176
with teeth, 176
Smiling, 36
Social, media, 60
Social media, 87
Social skills, and motivation, 184
Socks, long, 119
Sorcher, Melvin, 152
Speak to the company, 79–86, 89
Speak to the job, 88
Specific questions, 95
Speech attributes, 259
Speech characteristics, and extrovert personality, 44
Speech rate, 43, 66
Speech scores, body talk and, 44
Springbett, B. M., 26–27
Stage 1, 4, 8
Stage 1 interview, 209
Stage 2, 4, 25
Stage 2 interview, 209
Stage 3, 4
Stage 3 interview, 210
Stage 4, 4
Stage 4 interview, 210
Stage symmetry, 35
Steam kettle theory of emotion (psychodynamics), 139
Steepling, 41
Stereotypes, 54, 161, 186, 248
Stewart, Greg, 20–21, 62, 198, 224, 235
Stories, 66
Strengths, 131, 149
Stress, 136
Stress interviews, 157–158
Structured answers, 261
Structured format, 14
Structured interviews, 5–6, 28, 55, 71, 197, 244–248, 256, 260
Structuring questions, 94
Style, 8–9
Subjective interviews, 243
Substance vs. style, 8
Success stories, 53, 61–62
Success story, 88
Survey, 227
Swearing, 118
Sweaty palm, 119
Sweaty palms challenge, 196
Sweaty Palms (Medley, H. A.), 196
Symmetry among stages, 35
Synergy, 5
- T**
Talent acquisition scouts (headhunters), 123
Talking vs. thinking, 115
Teamwork, 68–69
Technical questions, 99
Technical words, 70
Teeth and smiles, 176
-
-

- Temporary employee, 185
Thinking Fast and Slow (Kahneman, D.), 10
Thinking vs. talking, 115
Thought topic
 advice, evidence-based, 213
 Charisma examples, 236
 company fit, 91
 interview skills, 91
 job interview history, 263
 meet and greet, 23
 motivation, 145
 rapport development, 23
 realism, 191
 on style, 23
Ties, 16
Title, formal, 118
Title VII of the Civil Right Act of 1964, 159–161, 163–164
Tone of voice, 101
Truth stretching, 170
Tullar, William, 94
Twain, Mark, 52
- U**
Unstructured interviews, 197, 245, 247, 256
Unstructured rapport, 28
- V**
Value of happiness, 132–134
Value statements, 132
Venting, 139
Verbal behaviours, 259
Verbal imitation, 115
Verbal skills, 28
Verbals vs. nonverbals, 14
VIA Survey of Character Strengths, 131
“Victory loves preparation” tenet, 53
Virtual media, 60
Virtues, 131
Visual integrity, 12–13
Visualization of interview, 128
Visualizing technique, 128, 144
Vocabulary, 115
Voice, 36
 changes, 66
 improvement, 45
 lower-pitched, 42
 rapport development, 42–47
 resonance, 46
 tone of, 101
- W**
WABT, 216
Wagner, Ralph, 247
Wanous, John, 158
Watching, 40
Weakness
 as strength, 149
 vs. strengths, 131
What can be controlled, 188
What can't be controlled
 contrast events, 182
 halo effects, 182–187
 pet theories, 186–187
 realism, 182–187
What to do
 about, 60–62
 before the interview, 62–70, 98
 during the interview, 71–78, 98–101
 formal interview, 56–60
-

-
- for interview, 11
 - interview tips, 70–71, 78
 - social skills and body language, 32–47
 - What to know, 8–10, 26–29, 52–53
 - What to know about interviewer, 10–11, 29–32, 54–55
 - “What You See May Not Be What You Get” (Barrick), 14
 - Wiesner, W. H., 256–257
 - Wilde, Oscar, 56
 - Willpower, 139–140
 - Wonderlic, Eldon, 247
 - Wonderlic intelligence test, 247
 - Word selection, 157
 - Words, Appearance, and Body Talk (WABT), 60
 - Work
 - approach to, 130
 - as calling, 130
 - experience, 52
 - history, 67
 - samples, 60
 - Work performance and extroverts, 230
 - Working through rejection, 188–189
 - Work-value statements, 85
 - Worries, 134
 - Written tests, 56
-
-

