

THE SUCCEEDING AT INTERVIEWS POCKETBOOK

By Peter English

Drawings by Phil Hailstone

"A practical, easy-to-read guide that debunks some of the myths about selection processes. Reading it will guarantee all candidates a better chance of success!"

**Marita Brown, National Programme Lead, Graduate Schemes, NHS
Leadership Centre**

"After reading this book the challenge will be knowing which jobs to turn down!"

Octavius Black, Managing Director, The Mind Gym

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IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

SPOTTING OPPORTUNITIES



How would you answer each of the following questions in a positive way that illustrates one of your key points about your experience and achievements?

'Tell us about your current job'

'How would you handle a difficult colleague?'

'What would you say your strengths are?'

'What weaknesses do you have?'

'Why do you want this job?'

IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

CURRENT JOB



*'Tell us about
your current job'*

Pitfalls

The danger is that because you haven't yet settled into the interview you will give a hurried or waffly answer which involves listing all your duties, tailing off as you struggle to remember points 24 and 25 on the third page of your job description.

Note that this question will often be asked early in the interview. Because of the horns/halo effect it is important to have a strong answer prepared and rehearsed.

IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

CURRENT JOB



'Tell us about your current job'

How to answer this question

Avoid simply listing every aspect of your job. Remember, your aim in the interview is to sell yourself and let the panel know about your strengths.

Give one sentence which summarises your role:

'I manage the accounts team.'

Then go on to talk about one of the stories or examples that illustrates one of your strengths:

'One of the things I've really liked about the job is that I've been able to raise the profile of the accounts team so that we are seen as more than just number crunchers. We used to be a bit of a backwater within the organisation, but now we get invited to contribute to a whole range of initiatives.'

IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

STRENGTHS



*'What would you say
your strengths are?'*

Pitfalls

There are two traps to avoid here:

1. Feeling uncomfortable about *blowing your own trumpet* and, as a result, giving a half-hearted answer:

'I suppose I'm quite good at organising myself.'

2. Giving a lot of opinions about yourself without any supporting evidence:

'I'm really good at getting on with people, I'm extremely well organised, very reliable and a real self-starter.'

IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

STRENGTHS



*'What would you say
your strengths are?'*

How to answer this question

- It's good to have **three strengths** you can talk about confidently
- The trick is to focus your answer on qualities that you know are **crucial to the job**, and to give evidence in support of your answer



'I believe I have three particular strengths: firstly, getting on with a wide range of people; secondly, I'm very well organised; and thirdly, I'm good at working on my own initiative. If I could just give a short example of each of these ...'

IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

WEAKNESSES



'What weaknesses do you have?'

Pitfalls

The dangers here are:

1. Claiming you don't have any weaknesses (which will lead the interviewers to conclude that you are an egotist who lacks self-awareness)
2. Talking about a weakness that will worry them:

'I'm hopeless at meeting deadlines.'



IN THE INTERVIEW

ANSWERING THE QUESTIONS

WEAKNESSES



'What weaknesses do you have?'

How to answer this question

- **Have two weaknesses** – When you've described your first weakness some panels will ask for another one, partly because they suspect that you have 'prepared' your first weakness especially for the interview.
- **Make sure they are things that won't worry the panel unduly** – Some weaknesses are more acceptable than others, depending on the job. A secretary can get away with saying, *'I sometimes find it hard to delegate; I often prefer to do things myself to make sure they get done the way I like'*. This obviously wouldn't be a good weakness for a managing director.
- **Talk about how you have worked on your weaknesses** to ensure that they don't become a problem. *'I work quite quickly, and sometimes I have a tendency to dive into tasks without taking a few moments to think things through. I've learned to discipline myself to spend a bit more time on planning, rather than constantly reacting to new demands on my time.'*

About the Author

Peter English

Peter has more than twelve years experience in management and organisational development. For the past seven years he has run his own consultancy practice and during this time he has trained hundreds of managers in how to use the latest selection techniques when recruiting people to their organisations. He has also managed large scale recruitment campaigns for a major UK employer.

Peter uses the insights gathered from his recruitment experience to coach individuals and groups on how to present themselves confidently and professionally at interviews and assessment centres.

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