

E. Interview Preparation

You may have already experienced a situation where you are contacted by an employer and they want to do an interview *tomorrow*. I don't know about you but I used to get *incredibly* stressed because I wanted to do my best but I barely had enough time to prepare!

That's when I realized two things. First, it's so, so important to interview with other companies at *least* once a year – even if you're not actively looking. You'll feel more in your element and have a better idea about what the market is looking for.

And second, you have to take a proactive approach towards interview preparation. Meaning, you have to start prepping from *before* you get the call from a company or recruiter.

When preparing for an interview, you are essentially building a compelling case that demonstrates why you are the ideal candidate for the job. Your goal in any interview is to highlight skills, success stories, and strengths that will reduce your training and onboarding time (because that costs a lot of money). So, if you can prove to the company that you can hit the ground running, you bolster your case.

For example, if you know that the company has recently founded its marketing department, you can develop an answer like this:

“You’re building your marketing department and more specifically, you’re looking to build and expand your footprint in the beauty and fitness market. I have five years of marketing leadership experience in that. I can help you grow more efficiently and focus on the right things from the beginning.”

So, it matters *a lot* to give the right answers in an interview.

This is easier said than done because a lot of thought goes into the right answers. You have to look deeper into the question and understand what is the interviewer looking for? This is where we go back to the job listing and pick out some of these finer details.

First, you have to consider the size of the company and filter out details that may hurt your case. If you've had experience working in small companies and are now applying for a director position at a company that makes billions in sales, it won't sound impressive to mention that you managed an annual marketing budget of \$10,000!

The hiring manager will say, *“This person probably won’t be able to handle things at our level with our significantly smaller budget. I’d rather have someone who can handle things at our level.”*

And even if you make it to the end, you won't have a lot of ground to stand on when negotiating your total compensation package.

For small-sized companies	Show you can get results with a smaller budget, smaller teams, working independently, and finding shortcuts without compromising results.
For big corporations	Show that you can cut the red tape to get things done/revitalize stalled initiatives, easily manage large-sized budgets, collaborate cross-functionally on projects, and guide large teams successfully.

Additionally, pay attention to the subtle requirements, ones that are hidden between the lines.

Imagine a situation where a job listing says “We are looking for a marketing director who nurtures team members and inter-department collaborations,” but in the interview, you don’t share examples of collaboration or use “we” in your answers – obviously, you won’t come across as a collaborative leader!

Below are a few examples of a job listing requirement and how to incorporate that need into your answer:

1. Independent innovators, then you can assume that they want candidates who self-initiate work and find cutting-edge solutions to problems. And your interview should include statements like,

“I realized that the manner in which we were communicating with our customers, internally and externally, wasn’t efficient enough. That’s why I looked into automated marketing communication solutions and pitched them to the department head. I explained how I’ve run tests on my own team and how it sped up communications, reduced friction, and reduced the number of customer complaints. I led a beta test of the solution on two more teams before defining and leading a full roll-out across the marketing department.”

2. A self-starter who can work in a fast-paced growing company and/or high-pressure environment, they’re looking for an independent-minded person who leads the conversation. And your interview should include statements like,

“I brought up the need for a formal way to track campaign performance. Prior to my joining, the main way to evaluate campaign performance was the total sales at the end of the year but that wasn’t painting the right picture. It didn’t allow leaders to make better decisions. That’s why I presented the need for structured analytics and I proved my case by using a few different analytics like Google and HubSpot to provide leaders with sharp insights into campaign performance.”

3. Someone who puts the voice of the customer first, they’re looking for someone who prioritizes understanding customer needs and uses them as the foundation for all business decisions.

“One of the biggest improvements I brought at this company was by establishing a think tank that met on a quarterly basis to get direct customer feedback. I shortlisted and invited our top business customers,

led the discussion to understand their current and upcoming needs, and then used that to reshape the way we were doing product creation and product marketing. It led to us rebranding our top two products. It was a big endeavor but it was worth it because we wound up seeing a dramatic increase in sales for both products, a 13% and 16% increase each.”

4. Someone to coach and develop marketers or salespeople, they’re looking for a person who can train and develop people. This may involve teaching individuals from scratch or building upon an existing knowledge base.

“For example, one thing I did at the ad agency was, spearhead the creation of a new and extensive creative training program for incoming graphic designers and content creators. Before I joined, there was a simple onboarding process and on-the-job training but it wasn’t enough. It took a lot of time and trial and error to build the new hires’ understanding of our brand style.”

At the end of the day, the best way to prove during the interview that you’re well suited for the job is to:

1. Include the skills they’re looking for in your answer.
2. Match your answers to the scale of the company.
3. Highlight soft skills that demonstrate a strong cultural fit.

Throughout the entire hiring process, it is crucial to demonstrate that you are suitable for the job. Here are some common inquiries made by companies and the key qualities you should prioritize in your responses:

Organizations that...	Talk about...
...value teamwork.	...collective successes, including how you helped a demoralized team or turned around a team’s performance. Focus on collaboration by using terms like “we” and “us”.
...prioritize AI, data-based decision-making, automation, team growth, and revenue growth.	...related successes from your career history.
...value innovation and creativity.	...your creative successes and unique solutions to problems.
...value getting things done and high-performance.	...the kinds of problems you helped solve and how you navigated bureaucracy to get things done. Be careful not to accidentally trash talk while discussing the hurdles faced and overcome.