

Turn Job Interviews into Offers

Robert Hellmann

Hellmann Career Consulting
www.hellmannconsulting.com

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HARVARD
BUSINESS SCHOOL

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**True or False? The hiring decision is made
within the first minute of the interview.**

(enter into the chat feature)

True or False? The hiring decision is made within the first minute of the interview.

Answer: FALSE (mostly)!

You'll have opportunities to turn a "No" into a "Yes" even after the interview is over!

Steps to Acing the Interview



Goal is
to get
the next
meeting

STRATEGY

Common Strategic Mistakes:

- ✗ Memorize the answers to every possible question
- ✗ Prepare the questions to ask at the end, to show how smart you are
- ✗ Waste too much time talking about things other than the interviewer's challenges



Adopt a Consultative Sales Strategy

Think and Act Like a Consultant

Focus dialogue on the client's problems

- ✓ Research to form a hypothesis
- ✓ Ask questions to confirm or disprove the hypothesis
- ✓ Share examples of success and what you would do
- ✓ Follow-up with a proposal



Your Mindset is Key

Pretend you:

- ✓ already have the job
- ✓ are on the same side of the table as them
- ✓ Are just there to help them solve their problems



They are only asking three questions



“How Can You Help Me?”

“Why Do You Want to Work Here?”

“Will You Fit In?”

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Preparation Checklist

(Review just before you walk into the interview)

- ✓ How to handle **issues they might have** with your candidacy
- ✓ **Questions** you want to ask
- ✓ Your **Interview Pitch**
- ✓ Two to three “**success stories**”
- ✓ Why you want to **work there**



Handling Issues They Might Have

- Proactively address, or...
- Answer briefly, and as positively as possible, then pivot - change the subject back to them, e.g., why you want to work there and then ask a question



Questions you want to ask

- 1. Research to get information about who you're meeting with.**
- 2. Form a Hypothesis about each person's issues.**
- 3. Ask questions to confirm/disprove hypothesis**



Questions you might ask (go beyond this)

“What does a typical day look like?”

“What are your greatest challenges in the next six months?”

“What would you need my help with right away?”

Anything that will help you to understand what their issues are, or how to follow up and make the “sale”.

“Who will I be interacting with, and how?”

“How will my success be measured?”

“What are the characteristics of people who succeed in this role?”

Perfecting Your Interview Pitch



Your Pitch answers open-ended questions

Tell me about yourself

Tell me about your background

Tell me about your experience

Why should we hire you?

Take me through your resume

Make it Conversational

Do THIS...



NOT THIS!!!



Organizing Your Interview Pitch

1. Branding / Hook
2. How they should “categorize you”
3. What differentiates you
4. Examples to back it up
5. Underlying your success
6. Turn it back to them



**Two minute
Interview Pitch**

Step 1 Examples: your brand or hook

- I turn data into actionable knowledge (director of business analysis)
- I turn uncertainty in opportunity (insurance analyst/"risk" underwriter)
- I'm an energy insider (focusing on PE energy firms)
- Organizational Learning is a journey, and I provide the map (L&D VP)
- I make PC's dance (IT professional)
- I can catalyze anything (research chemist)

Steps 2 to 5: A subset of Resume Summary Section

FINANCE DIRECTOR

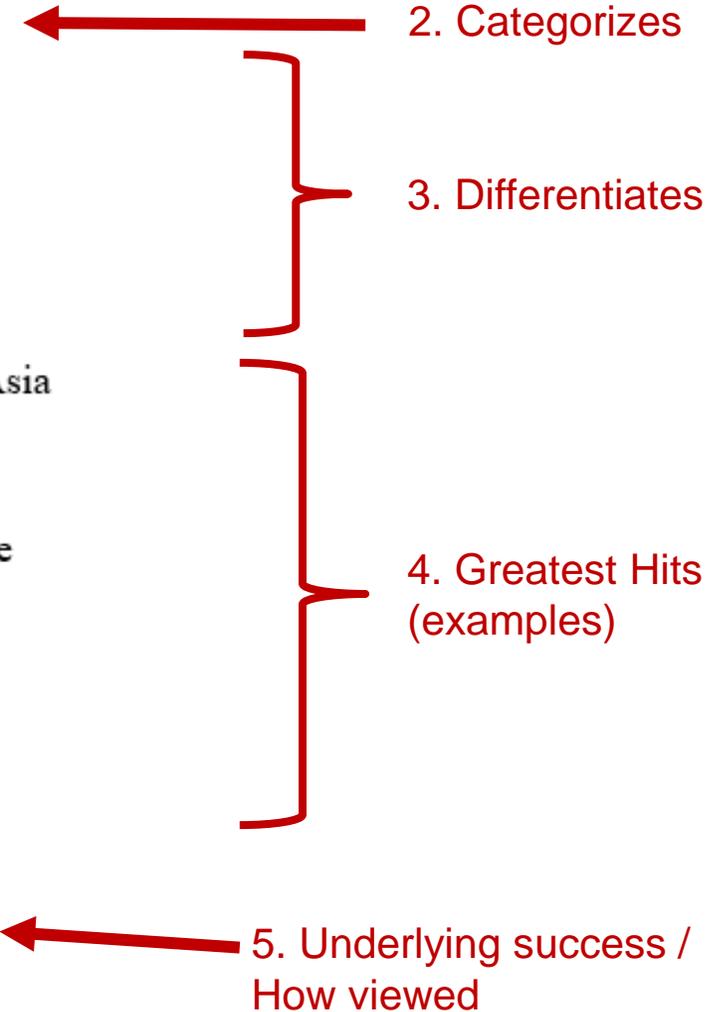
CFA Charterholder with 10+ years of progressively responsible experience in the media industry.

- Accounting
- Forecasting
- Financial Planning & Analysis
- Global Staff Leadership
- M&A
- Financial/Shareholder Reporting

◆ Viacom ◆ NBC-Universal ◆ McKinsey ◆ HarperCollins

- **Global experience** leading teams across the U.S., UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Asia
- Key role in Viacom division restructuring, supporting **profit growth from -10% to +15%**. Received **award for outstanding performance**.
- Developed **global strategic plan**, as key member of 5-person leadership team reporting into the CFO of HarperCollins International Division (\$400 million in revenues).
- **Reduced costs by as much as 25%** while protecting or enhancing revenue sources.
- Key role in dozens of **Mergers and Acquisitions**; Expertise in all facets of M&A.
- **Managed staffs of up to 7**; saw near zero turnover of highly productive professionals.

From LinkedIn Recommendations & Reviews: “Exceptional leader and team player...thought leader...delivers a top notch work product...Consistently demonstrates strong technical, analytical and presentation skills”



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STORIES



Success Stories (examples)

- Come up with **two or three** that are relevant
- Practice, practice, practice!
- Introduce them in your pitch (teaser)
- Try to use them in answer to **every question**.



Success Story Format

(roughly two minutes)

PAR

- **P**roblem or Situation
- **A**ction you took
- **R**esult



Make the stories...

Dramatic

Engaging

Important!

Common Story Mistakes

- ☹️ Too much detail - boring
- ☹️ Too much jargon (Curse of Knowledge)
- ☹️ Too little detail
- ☹️ Use “we” too much, no “I”
- ☹️ Forget to tie Problem and Result to the “bottom line”
- ☹️ Too little “Action”
- 😊 take them on your journey!
- 😊 show how you approach problems



TACTICS – Handling Difficult Interview Questions

Difficult Interview Questions

Use a strategic approach:

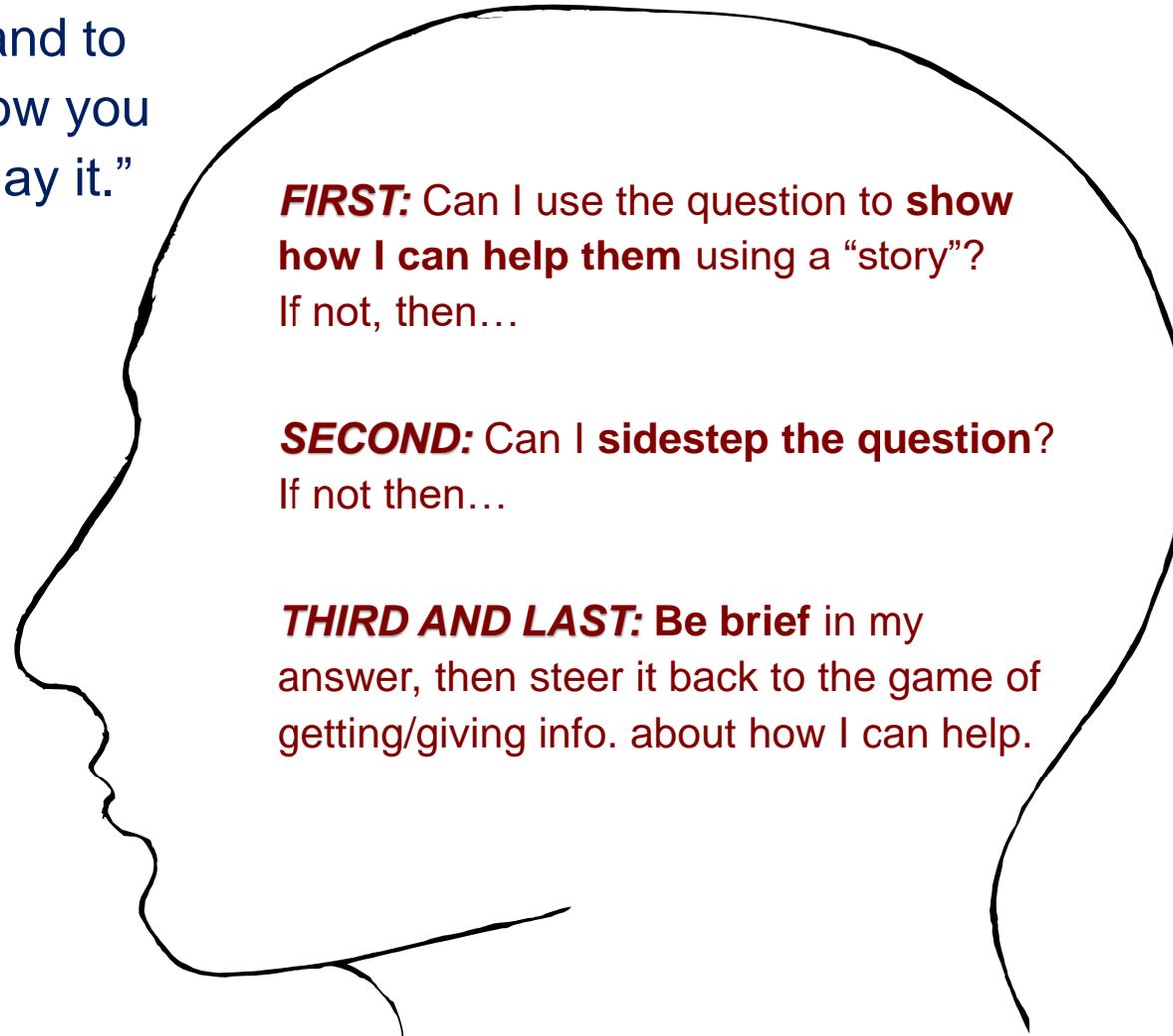
☹️ **NO: What's the answer?**

😊 **YES: How to play it.**
This is a game.



To answer questions, program your brain...

...to pause for a moment and to assess how you should “play it.”



Difficult Interview Questions

1. How would you find a needle in a haystack?
2. If you were a car, what car would you be?
3. Tell me about yourself
4. Why should we hire you?
5. What's your greatest strength?
6. Give us an example from your experience that's relevant to the problems we need you to solve.
7. Give an example of an obstacle you faced at work or in a class project.
8. Give an example of an assignment you were not proud of or didn't get outcome you wanted.
9. What is your greatest weakness?
10. Give an example of criticism you received at work or school.
11. Give me an example of a time you failed.
12. In the past, how have you dealt with a difficult boss?
13. Do you prefer a manager who's hands-on or hands-off?
14. How did you deal with a difficult employee or colleague?
15. Why did you leave your prior position?
16. Why have you moved around so much?

Question

What do you tell the interviewer if she/he asks about salary?

Answer:

Avoid discussions about salary until you receive an offer

- It destroys your negotiating leverage
- You can't talk salary when you aren't clear what the job is yet
- Salary is only one piece of total compensation
- You might arbitrarily exclude yourself



For Salary Questions, Say in priority order:

1. Salary's not going to be an issue - I know we're both fair and we'll be able to work something out.
2. There are so many aspects to compensation, for example base, bonus, 401K matching, amount of raises, frequency of raises, profit sharing... If you don't mind, I'd like to postpone this discussion until I understand thoroughly all aspects of both the job and compensation.

OR

I'm looking to get paid the market rate for this role. I haven't completed my due diligence yet, but I'm assuming you have. What are you thinking about? *Then* We'll be able to work something out

3. I'm looking for a (salary or total comp) range of <absolute bottom> to <way high>

Don't Be an Interview Know-it-all



Towards the end of the interview, you **MUST** ask:

- Just so I'm clear on what you're looking for, how do I compare with the other candidates?
- How do you feel about moving my candidacy forward?



The sale begins after the customer tells you what their objections are.

FOLLOW-UP

After the Interview

Write an Influence Letter

- Do not write a thank you letter unless they did you a favor.
- Often as or more important than the interview itself.
- An influence letter:
 - ✓ **Is personal**, that is, cannot be used for a different interview.
 - ✓ addresses areas that you **forgot to bring up**.
 - ✓ Addresses areas that you **didn't do justice to** in the interview.
 - ✓ addresses **objections they raised** to your candidacy in your questioning.
 - ✓ Shows how **you heard them**; addresses how you can help with issues/problems
 - ✓ conveys your **intention to follow up**.

Listen for Followup Points

- Needs – so you can demonstrate value
- Challenges/Issues – so you can offer solutions
- Objections – so you can address
- Competition – so you can outshine and outlast



Julie's Influence e-mail #1

Dear George,

Thank you for setting up the meetings with Dan, Robert, and Cathy. It was a pleasure to meet them all.

I left yesterday with a clearer picture of the position's requirements. I understand that the Admissions Director motivates and brings out the best in the Admissions staff, and relies on measurement techniques to support the sales strategy and identify gaps and opportunities. With this understanding in mind, I would like to reiterate what I bring to the position that others may not.

I offer a superior analytical ability when working with people, which has enabled me to successfully motivate, negotiate, build relationships and sell. I have a keen ability to listen to what is being both said and not said, articulate the key issues, and remain clear-eyed in both high-pressure and highly charged situations. A common trait of strong leaders is the ability to communicate effectively, and this is my competitive advantage.

I know from my own experience that you only succeed at what you measure, so I understand the importance of data analysis to the success of this position. I have previously analyzed sales and revenue numbers, particularly in my business. I realize, however, this was not brought out in my resume. Therefore, I would like to demonstrate my ability in this area.

If you are amenable, I propose that I analyze some of the department's spreadsheets containing sales data and I will present my findings to you. I am happy to sign any confidentiality agreement, or feel free to alter the numbers if necessary.

Looking forward to setting us both up for success.

From [Robert Hellmann](#):
“Julie was a client of mine. At the end of the first interview, Julie found out what their objections were. We wrote his influence letter to emphasize his analytic skills. She included a proposal that they send him data and she would analyze it.. Her proposal was accepted, she analyzed the data they sent him, then requested another meeting to discuss it.”

Julie's Influence e-mail #2

Dear George,

I thoroughly enjoyed meeting with you on Thursday to discuss the findings of my analysis.

I'd like to expand further on our discussion of management approaches. I recently read a book based on the Gallup Organization's study of managers (entitled *First, Break All the Rules*), and felt that their findings reflect the strengths I would bring to this position. As the book states, "Great managers look inward. They look inside the company, into each individual, into the differences in style, goals, needs, and motivation of each person... These subtle differences guide them toward the right way to release each person's unique talents into performance."

This ability to "release each person's unique talents into performance" is a natural talent that I have honed throughout my professional career. As a Behavioral Change Counselor and Coach, I work with each person's temperament and learning style to guide them toward their goals. Numerous testimonials (available upon request) attest to my ability to help people reach their goals and even increase people's performance beyond what they initially thought was possible.

I also have a successful record with sales. I currently sell my counseling/coaching services with an over 80% close rate with phone inquiries. I have broken sales records at two different locations of the nationwide chain, Diet Center, selling 4 week, 8 week and 12 week programs (not unlike selling educational programs). In my business, which I conceptualized, developed and ran, I successfully sold to both wholesale and retail customers, including Fortune 500 companies. This strong sales background combined with my managerial ability makes me uniquely qualified to deliver outstanding results to BCA.

I look forward to bringing my talents to BCA and making a substantial contribution to the bottom-line.

I hope you and your family had a wonderful time in D.C.

From [Robert Hellmann](#):
"Now Julie went from being rejected outright to being one of the top two candidates. But by again asking the "followup" questions at the end of the interview, she found that the President preferred the other candidate because he'd done this job before. So we wrote Julie's next influence letter to emphasize his unique competitive advantage-- his relevant skills that no other candidate could bring. The result? she got the job."

Another Influence Letter Example

It was a pleasure meeting you all on Friday to discuss the corporate sales openings. I left our meeting feeling enthused about the open positions, and believe I could add substantial value. I would like to expand on how my background would enable me to excel in several of the areas we discussed, that you indicated would be key to success in these positions.

Being Proactive and Generating Incremental Revenue

I have a track record of excellence in consultative sales-- meaning I have generated strong incremental returns from clients by 1) understanding their issues and needs, and 2) developing profitable solutions to their business problems that they might not have thought of. Just one of many examples of how this approach has worked for me and can support your goals; I sold \$240,000 worth of enterprise software to a leading Fortune 500 finance company, which represented incremental revenue that was five times what the customer originally budgeted for.

Underlying this and my other successes has been a proactive approach to generating revenue-- including a large number of outbound calls every day. Importantly, I believe that you only succeed in what you measure, and therefore ensure that I pay significant attention to metrics around forecasting and pipeline management.

Attaining Quota

My track record speaks for itself. I have surpassed quota every year for five years, while many of my sales colleagues were struggling. I believe that my proactive work ethic, strong relationship skills, and focus on metrics has combined to support my success.

Getting things Done in a Large Newly-Merged Organization

Having been through two mergers myself, I understand the potential for frustration as a newly merged company seeks to integrate it's operations. I have been very successful, however, at getting things done in this type of challenging environment. My strong relationship-building skills, patience, tenacity, and an ability to focus on the end-result without getting caught up in the "process", have all been key to my being able to generate stellar sales revenues in this type of environment.

Strategic vs, Commercial Accounts

I've been successful with both of these client bases, because of my strength in both acquiring "new logos" and developing incrementally profitable relationships with large, established clients. In fact, my track record of exceeding quotas, mentioned previously, was split 50/50 between acquiring new accounts and generating incremental revenue from existing accounts.

I look forward to continuing the conversation.

From [Robert Hellmann](#):

“Armando, another client, sent this influence email after his first set of interviews for a Tech Sales position. The hiring manager credited this email with helping him to land the position.”

Influence email following rejection generated renewed interest

INITIAL EMAIL from the HIRING MANAGER TO MY CLIENT, REJECTING HER

Susan <MY CLIENT>,

We are moving quickly toward finalizing the process. Our recruiter has recently given us a substantial number of folks who are either in, or recently in, XYZ positions with key competitors. Many of these folks are coming to us with substantial contacts at firms like BigCo Annuities and other key firms we work with. My point is that we're narrowing our search down to folks who have done this exact job, with recent experience and current contacts. Pat or I will be back in touch in the event we end up expanding the scope of our search with a wider net. Thanks.

Anne <THE HIRING MANAGER>

EMAIL RESPONSE FROM MY CLIENT TO THE HIRING MANAGERS

Anne and Pat,

I appreciate your candor. From your note, it sounds like you are identifying some highly qualified candidates.

I would like to note, however, my blend of experience that uniquely differentiates me from the competition and that makes me very well positioned to be able to deliver outstanding results. In particular, please consider the following in your decision-making:

- I bring the client perspective: Coming from the client side, I understand more than others who have done the XYZ job what the client is looking for. When pitching a prospect at, for example, BigCo Annuities or a similar prospect, I would be able to leverage my insider knowledge of their budget, presentation and marketing needs to help close the deal.
- I get the difference between retail & sub-advisory wholesaling: Knowing how critical each meeting is for sub-advisory adds to my understanding of the partners' needs, and enhances my ability to sell to them.
- I bring a network of former colleagues: For example, at BigCo Annuities, the wholesaler relationships from my former retail wholesaling role would automatically instill confidence in others at BigCo to whom I'm partnering with.
- I am a low risk candidate-choice: My 24 years in the business, my proven track record, and my diversity of channel experience throughout my career (having worked in all three channels) should instill confidence that I will be able to perform above expectations for you, as I have for others.

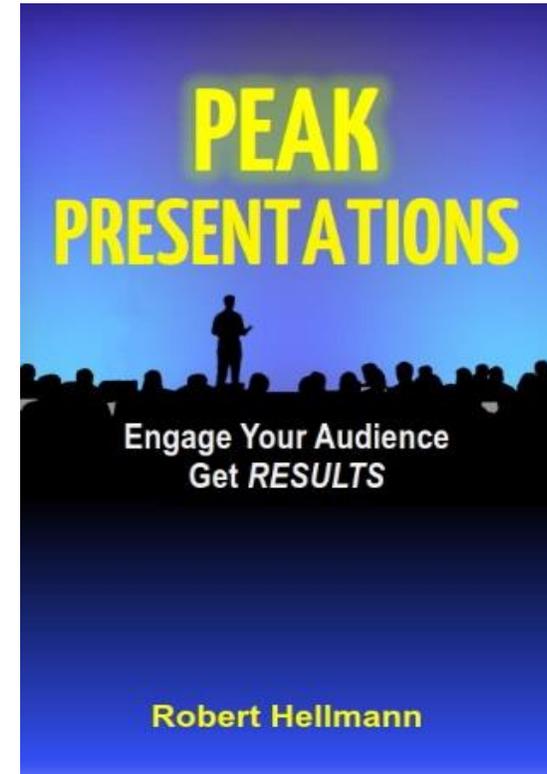
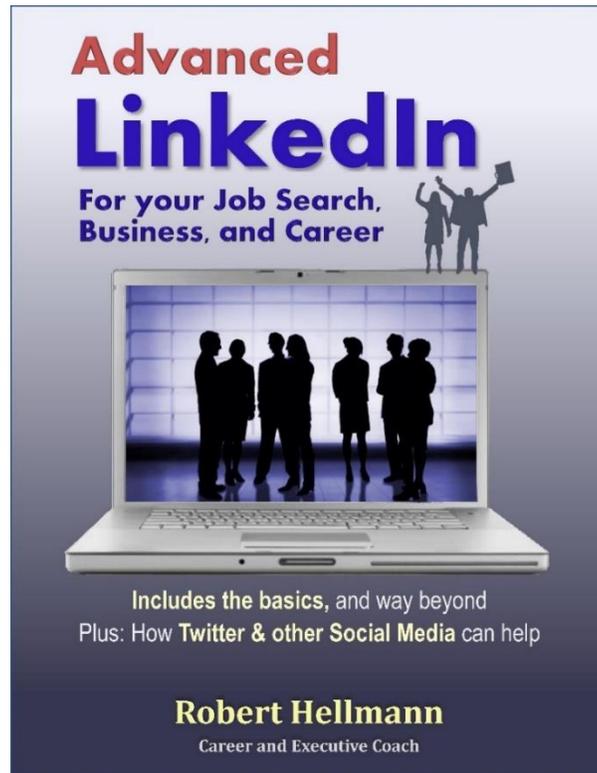
I've appreciated our conversations over the last few months, and would be thrilled to work with such a top-quality company, for leaders that I hold in such high regard. I look forward to the possibility of continuing the conversation.

BONUS: LinkedIn Profile Best Practices

Additional Resources: www.hellmannconsulting.com

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MY EMAIL: rob@hellmannconsulting.com