The Executive Interview
Close the Deal, Get the Offer

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HCC

HARVARD BUSINESS SCHOOL

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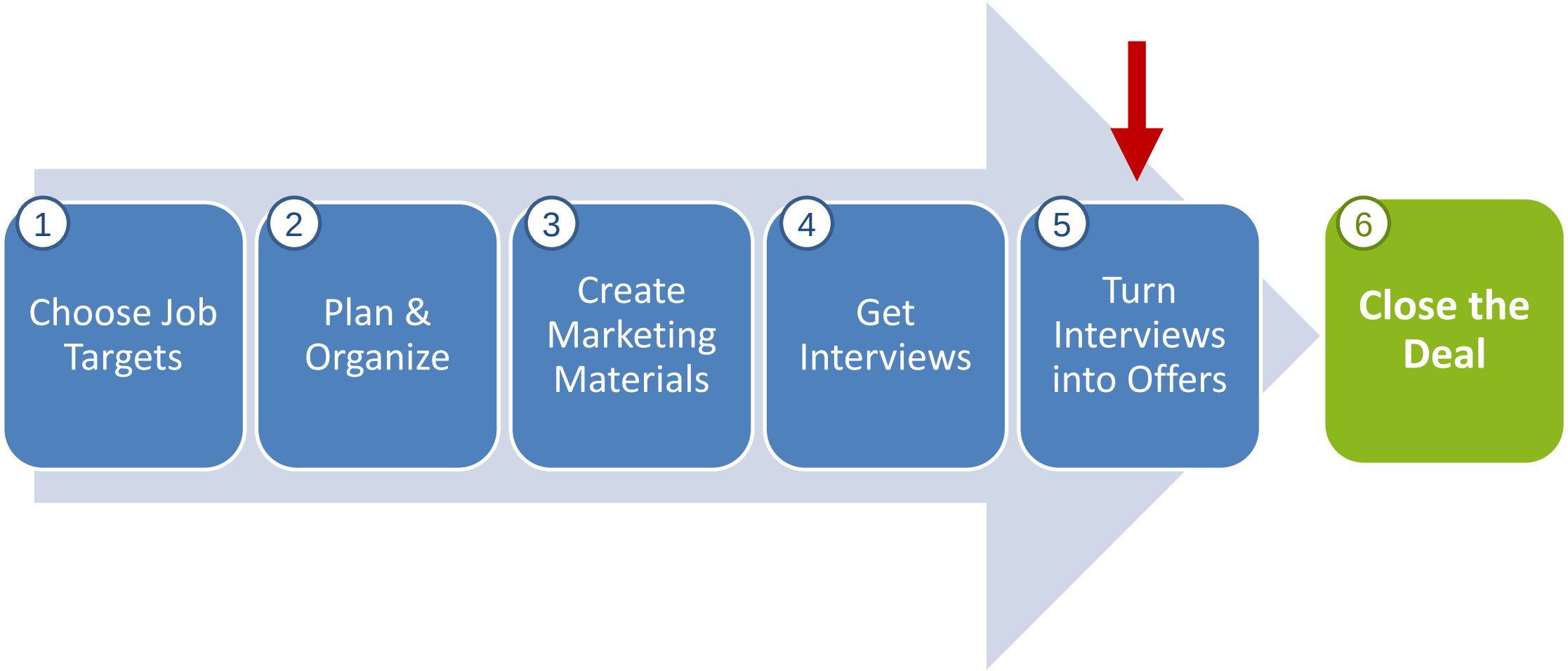
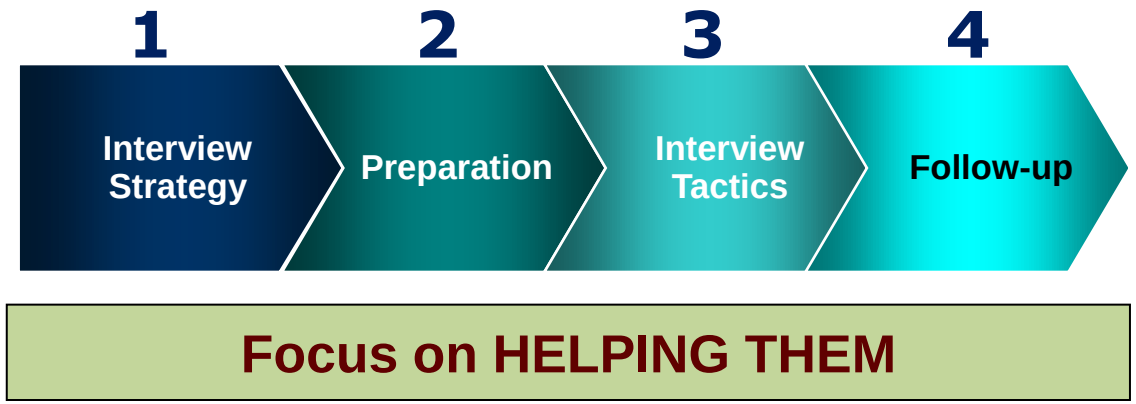
HCC'S SIX STEPS TO SUCCESS



Be the world's best consultative salesperson and marketer – for yourself

Steps to Acing the Interview



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STRATEGY

Common Strategic Mistakes:

- Memorize the answers to every possible question
- Prepare the questions for the end, to show how smart you are for the job
- Spend half of the time shooting the breeze, talking about things that may not relate to 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 "maybe" what you would do
- ✓ Follow-up with a proposal

They are only asking three questions

"How Can You Help Me?

"Why Do You Want to Work Here?

"Will You Fit In?

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

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Preparation Checklist

First, seek to **interview later in the process**. Then prepare the following:

- ✓ Why you want to **work there**
- ✓ How to handle **issues they might have** with your candidacy
- ✓ **Questions** you want to ask
- ✓ Your **Interview Pitch**
- ✓ Two to three **"success stories"**
- ✓ Sometimes – **what you would do/recommendations**

Examples of questions they may ask (directly or indirectly) that uncover issues

- Do you have experience in X?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What have you been doing?
- Why have you moved around so much?

Handling Issues They Might Have

- 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

  OR

- Proactively address

Be proactive in building your case and overcoming gaps

Missing specific experience? Take initiative to:

- ✓ *Show that you "get" them*
- ✓ *Sound like an expert*

Build Your Case

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 are your greatest challenges in the next six months?"

"What does a typical day look like?"

"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?"

Plan questions that give you an opening to show how you can help

Consider using AI to help you to prepare

- “What are key challenges for companies in the X industry?”
- “What is Y Company’s brand positioning?”
- “What are Y Company’s Key Differentiators?”
- *Less useful:* what interview questions might they ask.

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

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Make it Conversational

Do THIS…

NOT THIS!!!

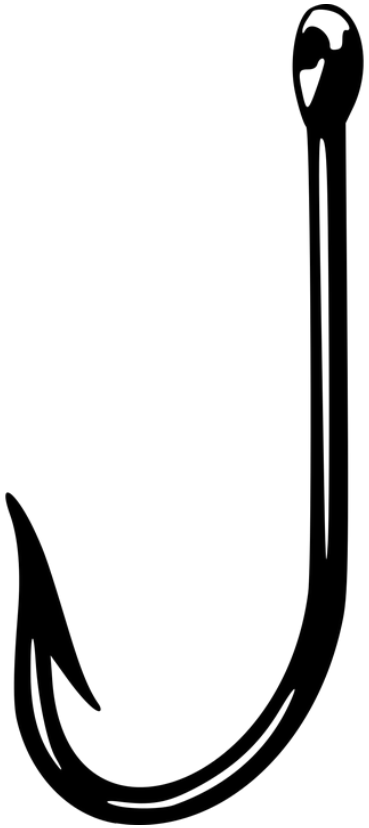
Organizing Your Interview Pitch

1. Branding / Hook (competitive differentiator)
2. How they should “categorize you”
3. What differentiates you
4. Examples to back it up
5. Conclusion or underlying your success
6. Turn it back to them

Two minute Interview Pitch

Step 1 Examples: Your brand/hook

- I’m not just an Operations Executive, I’m also a Diplomat and an Engineer (COO)
- I’ve been effective as a CFO because I know how to speak the language of investors
- Organizational Learning is a journey, and I provide the map (Chief Learning Officer)
- I’ve been told I bring order to chaos, and that’s been a big factor in my turning around three businesses (President/GM).
- I’m an energy insider (Corporate Development Exec - PE energy firms)
- As an HR Leader, I’m viewed both as a trusted advisor to the CEO and Boards and a True Business Partner



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Use Resume Summary Section for Pitch Outline

SENIOR FINANCE EXECUTIVE

CFA Charterholder with 15+ years of leadership 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
- Restructured Viacom division's business model in Europe, **growing profits from -10% to +15%**. Management team received **award for outstanding performance**.
- Developed **global strategic plan**, as key member of 5-person Executive Management team reporting into the President 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 teams of up to sixty**; saw near zero turnover of highly productive employees.

From LinkedIn Recommendations & Reviews: *"Exceptional leader and team player…delivers a top-notch work product…Commands respect…Extremely thorough and diligent…Consistently demonstrates strong technical, analytical and presentation skills…sets an excellent example"*

Box you're in

Differentiates

Greatest Hits (examples)

How viewed

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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**.

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Success Story Format
(roughly two minutes)

PAR

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

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Make the stories…

Dramatic

Engaging

Important!

Common Story Mistakes

- ☹ Too much detail - boring
- ☹ Too little detail
- ☹ Use “we” too much, no “I”
- ☹ Forget to tie Problem and Result to the “bottom line”
- ☹ Too much jargon (Curse of Knowledge)
- ☹ Too little “Action”

- ☺ take them on your journey!
- ☺ show how you approach problems strategically

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TACTICS –
Handling Difficult Interview Questions

Difficult Interview Questions

Use a strategic approach:

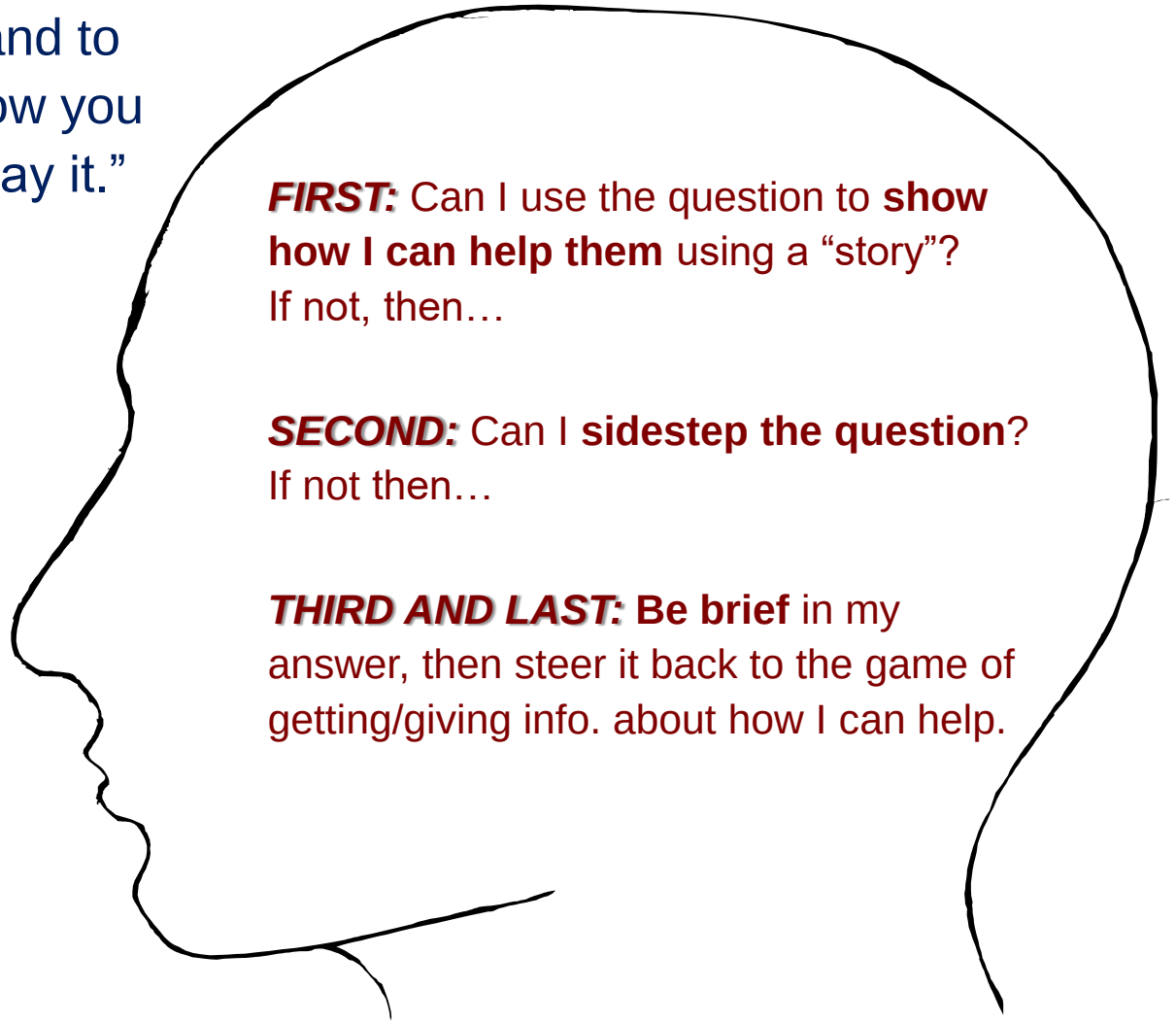
☹NO: What's the answer?

☺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."



FIRST: Can I use the question to **show how I can help them** using a "story"? If not, then…

SECOND: Can I **sidestep the question**? If not then…

THIRD AND LAST: **Be brief** in my answer, then steer it back to the game of getting/giving info. about how I can help.

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Difficult Interview Questions

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

"I need a list of specific unknown problems that we'll encounter."

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Question

What do you tell the interviewer if they ask about compensation?

Answer:

Avoid discussions about compensation until you receive an offer

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

For Comp Questions, Say in priority order:

1. Comp isn't 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, equity, incentives, 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. 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>

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Don’t Be an Interview Know-it-all

Keys to Acing an Interview Presentation

- Focus on them, not you – change your mindset from “I have to ace this presentation” to “They need my help and I’m going to help them”
- At the most senior levels – look for an opportunity to inspire with a vision
- Put your bio/qualifications/etc. at the end, don’t lead with it. Lead with their problem and how it should be solved, then say why you’re the best person.

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?"
- If not a panel: "How do you feel about moving my candidacy forward?"

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

Write an “Impact Email”

- ✓ **Personal**, cannot be used for a different interview.
- ✓ Shows **you heard them**
- ✓ **Influence** decision-making by addressing:
  - ❖ How you can **help with issues/problems**
  - ❖ Areas that you **forgot to bring up**.
  - ❖ Areas that you **didn’t do justice to**
  - ❖ **Objections** to your candidacy

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Listen for Followup Points

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

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Julie's Impact 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 ch usiness. 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 impact email to emphasize her 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."

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Julie's Impact 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 Star Chocolate 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 impact email to emphasize her unique competitive advantage-- her relevant skills that no other candidate could bring. The result? She got the job."

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Influence email following rejection generated renewed interest

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

Armando, <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>

E**MAIL 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 with whom I'm partnering.
- 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.

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Q&A

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