



KOHLBERG & ASSOCIATES

VOCATIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES

1255 Post Street Suite 451

San Francisco CA 94109

(415) 665-6902

fax (415) 567-5304

e-mail betty@bkohlenberg.com

Website www.bkohlenberg.com

You Have to be HEARD to be HIRED: **How to Talk about Your Skills in an Interview**

In a job interview, you want to convey your skills and experience in a concise and persuasive manner. The most common difficulties occur when you try to talk about yourself without bragging or sounding as if you are showing off, when you are too modest, disorganized or assume that your resume speaks for you.

Plan What to Say

No matter how much you pride yourself on your ability to think on your feet or "wing it," the easiest way to run into trouble in an interview is not to know what you intend to say. Even though it's your life you are talking about, you still need to plan ahead and write some notes about what you want to express.

Planning will help you decide which of your experiences will be most appropriate for the needs of the new position. Writing an answer will let you say what you intend rather than blurting out things best kept to yourself - resentments and angers, regrets and excuses.

Identify the Skills Needed for the Job

If you know something about the job or the firm, make an educated guess about what skills the employer will be seeking. For example, does the job require research or supervisory skills, writing, managing large amounts of data or specialized technical knowledge?

List the qualities you want most to sell about yourself, then match them to the skills you expect the employer to need. If you want to emphasize your marketing research skills and the employer is looking for someone who can sell, you may be telling the wrong skill story or applying for the wrong job.

List at least three skills, as many as six or eight. Use a skill story to answer "Tell me something about yourself."

You Have to be **HEARD** to be **HIRED**

How to Tell a Skill Story

Stories are a basic method of oral communication and are an excellent contribution to a job interview. Well thought-out stories can be interesting, unique and memorable. Telling a story about yourself is the best method to convey a skill you have. You reveal the skill through the story's events and the way you tell the story itself.

Don't Recite a List

Stories are an alternative to the more common but less effective method of telling skills, *the list*. I call it the "Scouts' Oath Method." Raise your middle three fingers and recite: "I'm people-oriented, organized, very dependable and flexible and, uh, easy to get along with." ZZZZZZZZZZZZ.... It's boring and doesn't set you apart from any other candidate.

You can tell if you've fallen into the Scouts' Oath trap by listening to the cadence of your voice. Are you sounding sing-song, with your voice ending on a high tone? Then you're reciting a list, not describing a skill.

Using *the list method* leaves you with no natural ending. Lists can go on forever. Without a natural ending, your thought just dribbles awkwardly to a stop. You haven't made a point and you don't sound prepared.

Learn to be **HEARD**

You can tell your story with a method that will convey your skills and be memorable. Just remember the word **HEARD**, because you have to be **HEARD to be hired**. The letters in **HEARD** will help you remember each of the major elements of the interview skill story.

First give the story a title, the name of the skill you want the interviewer to know you have. Once you have titled the story, tell the story using these essential elements:

- H** The **H**istory
- E** The **E**vent
- A** The **A**ction
- R** The **R**esult
- D** The fee**D**back

Don't leave out any part of the skill story. Each section is important.

You Have to be **HEARD** to be **HIRED**

Your Skill is the Title of your Story

Identify the topic or theme of the story you're going to tell by naming the skill:

Example

I've had a lot of experience in managing employees.

You need a topic sentence to help your interviewer focus on what you are about to say, just as a title helps to flag the subject of the story. You've thought ahead and decided that management is one of your best skills and it will be needed in the job you're interviewing for. Don't describe a skill that is not relevant for the job.

H The History

Describe the background situation, your position and what your responsibilities were.

Example

When I was head of the research department at my last job, I managed a group of ten researchers. Our task was to ...

E The Event

Describe the presenting problem:

Example

One time the director asked me to prepare the presentation package for the sales group arriving the next day.

The event can be a challenge, a problem, a difficult situation or person, a time crunch, an emergency. Remember not to criticize anyone. Do not say, "My boss gave us the work late as usual, because he is always so disorganized."

Example

We had only four hours to get out a two-day job.

A The Action

Describe what action you took specifically to resolve the problem, to intervene or to fix the situation.

Example

The major decision involved allocation of personnel resources. I met with my staff and decided that...

You Have to be **HEARD** to be **HIRED**

Avoid too much detail, but include some of your thinking to indicate how you decided what to do. Don't reveal company secrets or use specific people's names.

R The **R**esult

Describe the results with specific quantities, times, amounts of money or numbers of people.

Example

In four hours, we produced a finished job that normally takes the whole group two days to do, with no overtime costs. We saved the firm \$2000 because we did it in- house and we were able to make it really up-to-date with the latest profit figures.

D The **fee**back

Describe the response from the people who were affected - your boss, the client, the firm:

Example

My director was delighted and took me out to lunch. We kept the client and have had on-going business with them since.

This is a way to show the value of your work through others' perceptions, without bragging.

The end

Stop talking! This is the natural end of the story. Leave room for the employer to respond.

You Have to be HEARD to be HIRED

How to Find Your Stories

Everybody has good stories to tell. Choose stories in which you were successful. If you are having trouble finding your stories, ask yourself these questions:

- What was my proudest moment?
- What am I best at doing?
- What brought me the most recognition, reward or acknowledgement?
- What was the most fun?
- What was the hardest task I ever did?
- What did I do that stretched my abilities the most?
- What was the most unusual task I did?
- What did I do better than many of the other people I worked with?
- When I come home from work, what's my answer to "what did you do today?"

Tell only positive stories with good outcomes. This is not the time to confess to flaws or to blame others. Leave the horror stories of the impossible task for a coffee break once you're hired.

Do not use an event in which you broke the rules or violated policy to solve the problem, or one in which the only way to explain is to criticize your boss. If you were innovative, make sure you mention that you had authorization to proceed. Use a story that demonstrates how you worked within the structure of the job, not outside it, to do a good job.

The Power of the Skill Story

A skill story will set you apart from others and make you memorable. It will reveal something about your work style and your approach. You can use it to convey the extent of your creativity or technical knowledge and how you used them successfully.

You Have to be **HEARD** to be **HIRED**

By using the jargon of your field, you can show that you are an insider, not a newcomer. A well-told story will make you a real person to the interviewer by beginning to establish an emotional connection between you. And a skill story will allow you to present yourself as an accomplished person without bragging.

Final Hints

- Use the name of the skill as the title of the story.
- Include the title and all the **HEARD** parts of the skill story for each skill or quality you want the employer to know.
- Rehearse the skill story with friends or family several times.
- Remember to smile - this is a happy story.

and

- Remember to **stop talking** when you've finished.

You Have to be **HEARD** to be **HIRED**

HEARD to be HIRED WORKSHEET

Your skill is the title of the story *[name a skill in which you are specially good, technical knowledge you have or an ability which will be useful in the job for which you are applying. Have a skill story for each skill.]*

H The History

The History *[describe in a few sentences where you were, what your job title was, what your task was that made you responsible for the situation]*

E The Event *[describe the problem, the emergency, the difficulty, the challenge you met. Don't speak negatively about anyone else, even if they deserve it. Do not use an event in which you broke the rules or violated policy to solve the problem, or one in which the only way to explain it is to badmouth your boss.]*

A The Action *[describe the specific actions you, personally, took to solve the problem. Keep it short, but with enough detail so it is clear you used skill in doing it.]*

R The Result *[describe the consequences of your actions using quantities: money saved, time saved, relationships salvaged, numbers achieved, etc.]*

D The feeDback *[describe what the people affected thought of your action: boss, client, supervisor, company and how they showed you: promotion, certificate of appreciation, bonus, lunch, a thank you, increased responsibility, respect]*