



Communicating for Career Success

APPENDIX

CHAPTER OUTLINE

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Take a look at job descriptions in any online posting or print publication. No matter what kind of work—entry-level jobs, highly technical professional positions, and management—you’re likely to see “excellent communication skills” listed as a job requirement.

Communication skills are not just important on the job—they’re necessary to get hired in the first place. Before you receive a job offer, you’ll need to demonstrate to a potential employer that you will bring value to the organization that will be paying you.

This appendix outlines the strategies and skills that can help you identify, secure, and perform a job that fits your talents and interests. Applying the information in these pages won’t guarantee career success. But it will certainly boost the odds.

Employment Strategies

In a perfect world, the person with the best qualifications will get a job. In reality, the person who knows the most about getting hired often gets the desired position. Though job-getting skills are no substitute for qualifications after the actual work begins, they are necessary if you are going to be hired in the first place. The following guidelines will increase your chances of success.

Cultivate Personal Networks

Everybody belongs to personal networks—interlocking relationships linked by communication. Yours probably include friends, family, school, and community. Beyond the everyday value of communicating with these people, career-related **networking** is the strategic process of deliberately meeting people and maintaining contacts that result in information, advice, and leads that enhance one’s career.

Once you think about it, the potential value of networking is obvious. If you’re looking for a job, personal contacts can tell you about positions that may not even be public yet. When many candidates seek the same job, people you know can put in a good word for you with potential employers and also give you tips on how to pursue the position you’re seeking.

The number of jobs found through networking is staggering. It exceeds the number of those that come from web searches, headhunters, or other formal means.¹ Some research suggests that fewer than 10% of job seekers find employment by using the Internet.² One study of more than 150,000 jobs found that more people were hired by referrals than by any other source.³ Another survey conducted by global resources company DBM revealed that 75% of job seekers obtained their current positions through personal networking.⁴ The reverse is also true: Most employers find good employees through their personal networks.⁵

Networking Strategies Here are some tips that will enhance your networking skills.⁶

- **View everyone as a networking prospect.** Besides the people in your immediate everyday networks, you have access to a wealth of other contacts: former coworkers, neighbors, and schoolmates; people you’ve met at social and community events; professional people whose services you have used . . . the list can be quite long and diverse.
- **Seek referrals.** Each contact in your immediate network has connections to people you don’t already know and who might be able to help you. Social scientists examined the “six degrees of separation” hypothesis by studying more than 45,000 messages exchanged in more than 150 countries. They discovered that the average number of links separating any two people in the world is indeed a half dozen.⁷ You can take advantage of this principle

networking The strategic process of deliberately meeting people and maintaining contacts that results in information, advice, and leads that enhance one’s career.

by only seeking people removed from your personal network by just one degree. If you ask 10 people for referrals, and each of them knows 10 others who might be able to help, you have the potential of support from 100 information givers.

- **Show appreciation.** The best way to repay people who help you is by expressing gratitude for their help. Beyond a sincere thank-you, take the time to let your contacts know when their help has made a difference in your career advancement. Besides being the right thing to do, your expressions of thanks will distinguish you as the kind of person worth helping again in the future.

Networking Online In addition to personal networking, there are plenty of websites where job seekers can make themselves known to prospective employers. It can't hurt to join at least a few professional networking sites and set up a basic profile. Many business professionals maintain a presence on these five sites, and sometimes more.

LinkedIn has over 400 million members across the globe, and its website represents roughly 150 industries. On LinkedIn, members create their own profile page, including information about work experience and education, and then create connections to other users for professional purposes. LinkedIn's Alumni tool helps members find contacts from college and provides insights into the companies they work for, the fields they work in, and where they live. Through a network of connections that already exist, users can ask for referrals, introductions, and business opportunities.

Beyond.com calls itself "The Career Network." Since 1998 it has connected more than 45 million professionals with a wide range of companies involved in the technology, healthcare, business, and marketing industries. Its network includes over 500 organized talent communities. Job searchers can locate open positions by industry and location to help narrow down the search. There's also informative content such as industry statistics, infographics, and advice from more than 1,400 sources.

Xing reports about 14 million members, mainly in Europe and China. Although this site does not have a blogging feature, it allows members to create a profile page, join groups, send messages to other members, and learn about offline events. A free basic membership on Xing will allow you to have an online presence if someone performs an online search of your name, but you will need to pay for more advanced features on the site.

Ryze is a professional networking site with roughly 500,000 members, particularly new entrepreneurs. Similar to the sites already mentioned, a paid membership gets you more options but is not required to join or have a basic profile. Ryze boasts more than 1,000 groups you can join once you are a member. There are no blogs, but the ability to join the network groups is the highlight of this site.

Facebook is the world's largest social networking site, but it shouldn't be a primary tool for career-related communication. As you'll read elsewhere in this appendix (pp. A-20–A-22), you should be mindful of how information posted there will be regarded by people with whom you deal professionally.

Conduct Informational Interviews

Sooner or later your networking and personal research are likely to point you toward people whose knowledge, experience, and contacts could shape your career. These may be people you already know but whom you suddenly view in a new way: a successful neighbor or relative, for example. In other cases, you may casually meet someone who you realize could be a great career asset, perhaps at a social event, or even as a seatmate on the train or plane. Finally, you may read or hear about a total stranger whose perspective could transform your career.

informational interview An interview intended to collect facts and opinions from the respondent.

Goals of Informational Interviews Regardless of the source, with a little initiative and planning you can approach these contacts and request an **informational interview**: a structured meeting in which you seek answers from a source whose knowledge can help enhance your success.

The best informational interview has three goals:

1. To *conduct research* that helps you understand a job, organization, or field
2. To *be remembered favorably* by the person you are interviewing (so he or she may mention you to others who can also advance your career)
3. To *gain referrals* to other people who might also be willing to help you

Contacting Informational Interviewees Unless you know a prospective interviewee well, the best approach is usually to make your first contact in writing. A phone call might be easier, but it runs at least two risks. First, you may miss the person and be forced to leave a voice mail message that can either be too short to explain yourself or too long to hold your recipient's attention. Even if the potential interviewee answers your call, you may have caught him or her at a bad time. With an email, or even a snail mail letter, you can carefully edit your introduction until it's just right and assume that the recipient will read it whenever he or she is ready.

In your written message, you should do the following (see Figure A-1):

- Introduce yourself.
- Explain your reason for the interview (emphasizing that you're seeking information, not asking for a job).
- Identify the amount of time your questions are likely to take. (Don't ask for more than 1 hour. The shorter the amount of time you request, the better your odds of being seen.)
- State a range of dates when you are available to meet. Be as flexible as possible.

Questions to Ask in an Informational Interview More than any other factor, the questions you ask and the way you ask them will determine the success or failure of an interview. Truly good questions rarely come spontaneously, even to the best of interviewers.

The first thing to realize is that a career-related informational interview is ultimately about *you*, and not the person you're talking with. Fascinating as it might be, dwelling on the life story of the person you're interviewing isn't likely to help advance your career. Instead, probe your interviewee for information that will help you succeed. You can appreciate the difference by comparing these types of questions:

**FOCUSED ON INFORMATIONAL
INTERVIEWEE (LESS EFFECTIVE)**

Did you go to graduate school?
Where? Why?

What was your first job?

What do you think helped you
become successful in your career?

FOCUSED ON YOU (BETTER)

Do you think it would be helpful for
me to go to graduate school? Where?
Why? (Or why not?)

What kinds of jobs do you think would
be good for me in the early stages of
my career?

What lessons have you learned in your
career that you think could help me
become as successful as you are?

TO: Roland Sanchez
FROM: Andrew Kao <akao@webmail.com>
SUBJECT: Seeking your advice
DATE: February 18, 2017

Dear Mr. Sanchez:

As an aspiring entrepreneur, I was interested to read the recent article in the *Washington Post* about your success in growing NX solutions from scratch to an internationally renowned consulting firm.

My purpose in writing is to seek your advice about career paths. I am in my final year as an international business major in the University of Maryland's Robert H. Smith School of Business. I expect to receive my bachelor of science degree in December with honors.

I'm fascinated with the idea of building a career similar to yours and want to approach that goal in the best way. Several options seem attractive, including graduate school, employment with a large firm, or employment with a small but promising firm where I may be able to have a bigger impact.

I would be most grateful for the chance to meet with you and gain the benefit of your advice. All of my classes are in the morning, so I am available in the afternoon on any day when you may be available for a short informational phone call or meeting.

I look forward to hearing from you via e-mail or phone, and I hope we can set up a time to talk soon. My contact information is below.

Thanks in advance for any help you can offer.

Sincerely,

Andrew Kao

akao@webmail.com

(555) 555-4800

FIGURE A-1 Letter Seeking an Informational Interview

Don't fall into the trap of making this a journalistic interview. If you've told your interviewee up front that you're seeking career advice, it will be clear that you are the focus of this conversation.

Once you're clear about the topics you want to cover, you can design questions that will get the information you're seeking. There are a number of question types, each of which has its own uses.

1. Factual versus opinion questions: As their name implies, **factual questions** are usually straightforward requests for information: "What are the three fastest growing companies in this field?" or "What's the average entry-level salary in this field?" By contrast, **opinion questions** ask for the interviewer's evaluation: "What parts of the country do you think will offer the best chance for advancement in the next few years?" or "How important do you think it is to be bilingual?" When planning an interview, ask yourself whether you're more interested in facts or opinions and plan your questions accordingly.

2. Open versus closed questions: **Closed questions** call for a specific, usually concise answer: "Do you think I should rent or lease?" or "Is the code for that software open source or proprietary?"

By contrast, **open questions** invite the interviewee to reply in whatever way he or she chooses: "What do you think about the risks of working for an Internet start-up company?" or "Why did you say that accounting is a must-take course?"

Developing good open questions takes time and thought. Questions that are poorly worded or ones that are too broad or too narrow to get the information you seek can be a waste of time. A good list of open-ended questions can help in several ways. First, you will almost certainly have enough lengthy responses to fill the allotted time, soothing a common fear of inexperienced interviewers. Your open questions, inviting comment as they do, will also make your subject feel more comfortable. Second, the way in which your subject chooses to answer your open questions will tell you more about him or her than you could probably learn by asking only more restrictive closed questions, which can be answered in a few words.

3. Direct versus indirect questions: Most of the time the best way to get information is to ask a **direct question**. There are times, however, when a subject won't be willing to give a candid response. This sort of situation usually occurs when a straightforward reply would be embarrassing or risky. For instance, you probably wouldn't want to ask questions like, "What's your salary?" or "Do you ever have to compromise your ethical standards?"

At times like these it's wise to seek information by using **indirect questions**, which do not directly request the information you are seeking. Instead of the direct questions above, you could ask, "What kind of salary might I expect if I ever held a position like yours?" or "Are there any ethical dilemmas that come with this kind of job?"

4. Primary versus secondary questions: Sometimes you'll need to ask only an initial, primary question to get the fact or opinion you need in a given content area. But more often you will need to follow up your first question with others to give you all the information you need. These follow-ups are called secondary questions.

Primary question: "In your opinion, who are the best people for me to ask about careers in the financial planning field?"

Secondary questions: "How could I meet them?" "Do you think they'd be willing to help?" "How could each one help me?"

Sometimes an interviewer can follow up with secondary responses that aren't really questions. Simple **probes**—interjections, silences, and other

factual question An interview question that investigates matters of fact.

opinion question An interview question seeking the interviewee's opinion.

open question An interview question that requires the interviewee to respond in detail.

closed question An interview question that can be answered in a few words.

direct question An interview question that makes a straightforward request for information.

indirect question An interview question that does not directly request the information being sought.

probe An interjection, silence, or brief remark designed to open up or direct an interviewee.

brief remarks—can open up or direct an interviewee and uncover useful information.

Interviewer: "What traits are you looking for in a new employee?"

Respondent: "Flexibility is the most important thing for us."

Interviewer: "Flexibility?"

Respondent: "Yes. Things change so rapidly in our organization that we need people who can adapt to whatever happens next."

It can be smart to develop a list of secondary questions to each primary one. In many cases, however, the best follow-ups will occur to you during the interview, depending on how the respondent answers your first question. As you ask and probe, be sure each secondary question you ask helps achieve your goal. It's easy to wind up taking an interesting digression, only to discover that you didn't get the information you were after.

5. **Neutral versus leading questions:** A **neutral question** gives the interviewee a chance to respond without any influence from the interviewer. By contrast, a **leading question** is one in which the interviewer—either directly or indirectly—signals the desired answer. Unless you're a litigator or salesperson, there are almost no cases when a leading question is useful.

A few examples illustrate the difference between these two types of questions:

NEUTRAL QUESTION

What do you think about my idea?

Do you think sexism is a problem in this industry?

LEADING QUESTION

I've worked very hard on this idea, and I'm proud of it. What do you think?

What examples of sexism have you seen in this industry?

neutral question A question that gives the interviewee a chance to respond without any influence from the interviewer.

leading question A question in which the interviewer—either directly or indirectly—signals the desired answer.

hypothetical question A question that seeks a response by proposing a "what-if" situation.

selection interview An interview in which a candidate is evaluated for a new position—either initial employment, promotion, or reassignment.

6. **Hypothetical questions:** A **hypothetical question** seeks a response by proposing a "what-if" situation. "If your own son or daughter were considering the career I've asked you about, what would you say?"

Hypothetical questions can encourage interviewees to offer information they wouldn't volunteer if asked directly. For instance, your interviewee might not be comfortable criticizing specific organizations in your field, but you could get the information you're seeking by asking, "If you had to rank the top five or six nonprofits in this community, what would the list look like?"

After the Informational Interview Good manners call for sending a note of thanks to the interviewer who has taken time to give you advice and information. Such a note can also be strategically savvy: It serves as a tangible reminder of you, and it provides a written record of your name and contact information. It can be smart to keep your contact alive by sending follow-up messages letting your interviewee know how you have put his or her advice to good use. If the interviewee has referred you to other people, be sure to let him or her know the results of your conversations with those people.

The Selection Interview

For many people the short time spent facing a potential employer is the most important interview of a lifetime. A **selection interview** may occur when you are being considered for employment, but it may also occur when you are being evaluated for

cultural idiom

wind up: to bring to an end, to finish

promotion or reassignment. In an academic setting, selection interviews are often part of the process of being chosen for an award, a scholarship, or admission to a graduate program. Being chosen for the position you seek depends on making a good impression on the person or people who can hire you, and your interviewing skills can make the difference between receiving a job offer and being an also-ran.

Preparing for the Interview

A good interview begins long before you sit down to face the other person. There are several steps you can take to boost your chances for success.

Do Your Research Displaying your knowledge of an organization in an interview is a terrific way to show potential employers that you are a motivated and savvy person. Along with what you've learned from informational interviews, diligent Web browsing can reveal a wealth of information about a prospective employer and the field in which you want to work. (See the "Online Research" section on page 305 in Chapter 11 for details on searching tools and strategies.)

Most business firms, government agencies, and nonprofit agencies have websites that will help you understand their mission. If you're lucky, those websites will also contain the names of people you'll want to know about and possibly refer to during an interview.

Beyond an organization's own website, you can almost certainly find what others have published about the places where you might want to work. In your search engine, type the name of the organization and/or key people who work there. You are likely to be pleased and surprised at what you learn. Use your research to prepare a few questions that may be good to ask at the end of the interview (see "Ask Good Questions of Your Own" on page A-18).

Create or Update Your Résumé and Cover Letter No matter how extensive and supportive your network, you will need a polished résumé to provide a snapshot of your professional strengths and achievements. For guidelines on the various types of résumés, type "create résumé" into your favorite search engine. Figure A-2 illustrates a common format for this document.

A flawed résumé can do more harm than good, so be sure to proofread carefully. It's smart to have a staff member at your school's career center critique your résumé. The final document should be clear, honest, succinct, and free of typos and other errors, and ideally it should fit on one page.

You may need to upload your résumé to an employer's website when applying for a position, and you may benefit from posting your résumé to online job banks (sometimes called job boards) such as USAjobs.gov, CareerRookie.com, and Idealist.com.

When submitting your résumé for a specific position, include a cover letter that creates a positive first impression. This letter gives you a chance to make the case for why you would be a good hire. As one expert put it, a cover letter is "an introduction, a sales pitch, and a proposal for further action all in one."⁸

Cover letters should be sent to a specific individual. If you don't know the appropriate person, call the company and ask for the individual's name. Be certain that you get the spelling and title correct. Like the sample in Figure A-3, a good cover letter should include the following information:

- Within the first lines, a statement of what position you are applying for, how you know of the position, and any connection you have to the company. If you are responding to an advertisement, mention the job title, number, and publication. If you are writing at the suggestion of a mutual acquaintance or as a result of your research, say so.
- An introduction (or reintroduction) of yourself if the reader may not know (or remember) who you are.

<p>CAMILLA DORANTES</p> <p>camilla.dorantes@connectmail.net Phone: (223) 242-3554</p> <p>SUMMARY OF QUALIFICATIONS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Academic background in political and economic dimensions of environmental policy• Experience working in commercial and nonprofit organizations related to sustainability• Strong work ethic and ability to work independently as necessary <p>EDUCATION</p> <p>Current: University of Southern California</p> <p>Graduating (Bachelor of Science degree) in May 2017</p> <p>Major in Global Studies, Pacific Rim Studies Emphasis</p> <p>Fall 2016: Tokyo International Studies University (Fulbright Junior Scholar)</p> <p>Japanese language program, ethnographic study of contemporary Japanese culture</p> <p>RELATED EXPERIENCE</p> <p>December 2016–February 2017: Undergraduate Research Fellow, University of Southern California</p> <p>In Asia, analyzed the effectiveness of committees designed to create international environmental policy. Interviewed officials from municipal government, business, and nonprofit sectors in Japan, China, and Singapore.</p> <p>January 2016–present: Correspondent, Environmental Policy blog (http://greenpolicy.org)</p> <p>Published dispatches on insights gained from travels in Asia for the award-winning website.</p> <p>September 2015–October 2015: Assistant Coordinator, International Environmental Treaty</p> <p>Assisted in coordinating media and fundraising events to educate public and recruited volunteers for this campaign to promote and protect environmental rights around the world.</p> <p>March 2015–May 2015: International Green Research Intern, Southern California World Trade Center</p> <p>Conducted individualized, in-depth sales and marketing research for the Trade Center's members.</p> <p>January 2015–March 2015: Intern, Greenpeace San Diego</p> <p>Conducted research to identify immediate environmental threats across California; helped develop funding proposals for major donors.</p> <p>LANGUAGES</p> <p>Fluency in Spanish</p> <p>Competence in Japanese</p>
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FIGURE A-2 Sample Résumé

EDWARD R. ROMERO
2312 Haynes Rd.
Warren, OH 44481
(330) 164-1411 erm@ohcom.com

January 9, 2017

Ms. Alicia Hastings
Director of Human Resources
St. Bonaventure Health System
Youngstown, OH 44501

Re: Occupational Therapist Job Application (2017-01-1667)

Dear Ms. Hastings:

Having just completed six years as an Emergency Medical Technician and Occupational Therapist with the U.S. Army, I was very interested to read about the recently posted job opportunity as an Occupational Therapist with the St. Bonaventure Health System.

As the attached résumé describes in detail, my background includes extensive experience working with both inpatients in acute care settings and outpatients in rehabilitation units. Letters of recommendation and military commendations detail my success at working with patients on both the physical and emotional challenges. My experiences in adverse conditions have taught me the importance of composure under stress and working in teams.

I am looking for the opportunity to utilize my expertise on my return to the civilian world. Youngstown is my home town, and I would welcome the chance to contribute to the community and hospital that helped make me who I am.

I will be returning to the Youngstown area in mid-January and would welcome the chance to meet with you in person. In the meantime, I'm happy to provide any information you may require via phone or e-mail.

Thank you in advice for considering my application.

Sincerely,

Edward Romero

FIGURE A-3 Sample Cover Letter

- A brief description of your most impressive accomplishments that are relevant to the job at hand. Remember: Don't just say you can help the organization. Offer some specific evidence that backs up your claim.
- A demonstration of your knowledge of the company.
- A statement regarding the next step you hope to take—usually a request for an interview. If you must, mention any pertinent information about limits on your availability, but keep these to an absolute minimum.
- A final, cordial expression of appreciation to the reader for considering you.

When posting your résumé and cover letter online or emailing them, ensure that they display correctly by taking the following steps:

- Create your documents in a word processing program, but save the final versions as PDF files.
- If you are emailing a résumé and cover letter, include them as attachments. Don't paste the résumé in the body of your email, because the formatting may not transfer properly.
- Be aware that once you post or email your résumé, there is no guarantee of where it may be sent or copied. If you are posting to a publicly viewable website, you may want to protect your privacy by including your email address but not your home address or phone number.

Prepare for Likely Questions Regardless of the organization and job, most interviewers have similar concerns, which they explore with similar questions. Here are some of the most common ones, with commentary on how you can prepare to answer them.

- **Tell me something about yourself.** This broad, opening question gives you a chance to describe what qualities you possess that can help the employer (e.g., enthusiastic, motivated, entrepreneurial). Be sure to keep your answer focused on the job for which you're applying—this isn't a time to talk about your hobbies, family, or pet peeves.
- **What makes you think you're qualified to work for this company?** This question may sound like an attack, but it really is another way of asking, "How can you help us?" It gives you another chance to show how your skills and interests fit with the company's goals. Prepare for a question like this by making a table with three columns: one listing your main qualifications (e.g., demonstrated sales success), one listing specific examples of each qualification, and one explaining how these qualifications would benefit your prospective employer.
- **What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?** The accomplishments you choose needn't be directly related to former employment, but they should demonstrate qualities that would help you be successful in the job for which you're interviewing. Your accomplishments might demonstrate creativity, perseverance in the face of obstacles, self-control, or dependability.
- **Why do you want to work for us?** As the research cited in Table A-1 shows, employers are impressed by candidates who have done their homework about the organization. This question offers you the chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the employer's organization and to show how your talents fit with its goals.
- **What college subjects did you like most and least?** Whatever your answer, show how your preferences about schoolwork relate to the job for which you are applying. Sometimes the connection between college courses and a job

TABLE A.1

Communication Behaviors of Successful and Unsuccessful Interviewees

	UNSUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWEES	SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWEES
STATEMENTS ABOUT THE POSITION	Had only vague ideas of what they wanted to do; changed “ideal job” up to six times during the interview.	Were specific and consistent about the position they wanted; were able to tell why they wanted the position.
USE OF COMPANY NAME	Rarely used the company name.	Referred to the company by name four times as often as unsuccessful interviewees.
KNOWLEDGE ABOUT COMPANY AND POSITION	Made it clear that they were using the interview to learn about the company and what it offered.	Made it clear that they had researched the company; referred to specific brochures, journals, or people who had given them information.
LEVEL OF INTEREST, ENTHUSIASM	Responded neutrally to interviewer’s statements: “Okay,” “I see.” Indicated reservations about company or location.	Expressed approval of information provided by the interviewer nonverbally and verbally: “That’s great!” Explicitly indicated desire to work for this particular company.
PICKING UP ON INTERVIEWER’S CLUES	Gave vague or negative answers even when a positive answer was clearly desired (“How are your math skills?”).	Answered positively and confidently—and backed up the claim with a specific example of “problem solving” or “toughness.”
USE OF INDUSTRY TERMS AND TECHNICAL JARGON	Used almost no industry terms.	Used industry terms: “point of purchase display,” “NCR charge,” “two-column approach,” “direct mail.”
USE OF SPECIFICS IN ANSWERS	Gave short answers—10 words or fewer, sometimes only one word; did not elaborate. Gave general responses: “Fairly well.”	Supported claims with specific personal experiences, comparisons, statistics, statements of teachers and employers.
QUESTIONS ASKED BY INTERVIEWEE	Asked a small number of general questions.	Asked specific questions based on knowledge of the industry and the company. Personalized questions: “What would my duties be?”
CONTROL OF TIME AND TOPICS	Interviewee talked 37% of the interview time, initiated 36% of the comments.	Interviewee talked 55% of the total time, initiated subjects 56% of the time.

Source: Based on research reported by Einhorn, L. J. (1981, July). An inner view of the job interview: An investigation of successful communicative behaviors. *Communication Education*, 30, 217–228.

is obvious. At other times, though, you can show how apparently unrelated subjects do illustrate your readiness for a job. For example, you might say, “I really enjoyed cultural anthropology courses because they showed me the importance of understanding different cultures. I think that those courses would help me a lot in relating to your overseas customers and suppliers.”

- **Where do you see yourself in 5 years?** This familiar question is really asking, “How ambitious are you?” “How well do your plans fit with this company’s goals?” or “How realistic are you?” If you have studied the industry and the company, your answer will reflect an understanding of the workplace realities and a sense of personal planning that should impress an employer.

- **What major problems have you faced, and how have you dealt with them?** The specific problems aren't as important as the way you responded to them. What (admirable) qualities did you demonstrate as you grappled with the problems you have chosen to describe? Perseverance? Calmness? Creativity? You may even choose to describe a problem you didn't handle well, to show what you learned from the experience that can help you in the future.
- **What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?** The "strength" question offers another chance to sell yourself. As you choose an answer, identify qualities that apply to employment. "I'm a pretty good athlete" isn't a persuasive answer, unless you can show how your athletic skill is job related. For instance, you might talk about being a team player, having competitive drive, or having the ability to work hard and not quit in the face of adversity.

Whatever answer you give to the "weakness" question, try to show how your awareness of your flaws makes you a desirable person to hire. There are four ways to respond to this question:

- *Discuss a weakness that can also be viewed as a strength.*

"When I'm involved in a big project, I tend to work too hard, and I can wear myself out."

- *Discuss a weakness that is not related to the job at hand, and end your answer with a strength that is related to the job.*

(for a job in sales) "I'm not very interested in accounting. I'd much rather work with people, selling a product I believe in."

(for a job in accounting) "I'm not great at sales and marketing. I'm at my best working with numbers and talking to people about them."

- *Discuss a weakness the interviewer already knows about from your résumé, application, or the interview.*

"I don't have a lot of experience in multimedia design at this early stage of my career. But my experience in other kinds of computer programming and my internship in graphic arts have convinced me that I can learn quickly."

- *Discuss a weakness you have been working to remedy.*

"I know being bilingual is important for this job. That's why I've enrolled in a Spanish course."

- **What are your salary requirements?** Your answer should be based on knowledge of the prevailing compensation rates in the industry and geography in question. Shooting too high can knock you out of consideration, whereas shooting too low can cost you dearly. Give your answer by naming a salary range and backing up your numbers: "Based on the research I've done about compensation in this area, I'd expect to start somewhere between \$35,000 and \$38,500." As you give your answer, watch the interviewer. If he or she seems to respond favorably, you're in good shape. If you notice signs of disapproval, follow up: ". . . depending, of course, on benefits and how quickly I could expect to be promoted. However, salary isn't the most important criterion for me in choosing a job, and I won't necessarily accept the highest offer I get. I'm interested in going somewhere where I can get good experience and use my talents to make a real contribution." It's important to know your bottom line for compensation in advance so you don't end up accepting an offer at a salary you can't afford to take.

cultural idiom

bottom line: minimum requirements

Dress for Success First impressions can make or break an interview. Research shows that many interviewers form their opinions about applicants within the first 4 minutes of conversation.⁹ Physical attractiveness is a major influence on how applicants are rated, so it makes sense to do everything possible to look your best. The basic rules apply, no matter what the job or company: Be well groomed and neatly dressed, and don't overdo it with too much makeup or flashy clothes.

The proper style of clothing can vary from one type of job or organization to another. A good rule of thumb is to come dressed as you would for the first day of work. When in doubt, it's best to dress formally and conservatively. It's unlikely that an employer will think less of you for being overdressed, but looking too casual can be taken as a sign that you don't take the job or the interview seriously.

Take Copies of Your Résumé and Samples of Past Work Arrive at the interview with materials that will help the employer learn more about why you are ready, willing, and able to do the job. Take extra copies of your résumé. If appropriate, take copies of your past work: reports you've helped prepare, performance reviews by former employers, drawings or designs you have created for work or school, letters of commendation, and so on. Besides demonstrating your qualifications, items like these demonstrate that you know how to sell yourself. Take along the names, addresses, and phone numbers of any references you haven't listed in your résumé. And be prepared to take notes: you'll need something to write on and a pen or pencil.

Know When and Where to Go Don't risk sabotaging the interview before it begins by showing up late. Be sure you're clear about the time and location of the meeting. Research parking or public transportation to be sure you aren't held up by delays. There's virtually no good excuse for showing up late. Even if the interviewer is forgiving, a bad start is likely to shake your confidence and impair your performance.

Reframe Your Anxiety as Enthusiasm Feeling anxious about an employment interview is understandable. After all, the stakes are high—especially if you really want the job.

Managing your feelings in interviews calls for the same approach described in the "Managing Communication Apprehension" section of Chapter 11 (see pages 307–310). Realize that a certain amount of anxiety is understandable. If you can reframe those feelings as *excitement* about the prospect of holding a great job, the feelings can even work to your advantage.

If feelings of anxiety get out of hand, consider whether you are indulging yourself with any of the fallacies of catastrophic failure or perfection. Following the guidelines on pages 308–309 can help shrink your concerns and give you ways of managing them.

During and After the Interview

Once the time comes for your interview, keep the following tips in mind to make it a success.

Follow the Interviewer's Lead Let the interviewer set the tone of the session. Along with topics and verbal style, pay attention to the kinds of nonverbal cues described in Chapter 6: the interviewer's posture, gestures, vocal qualities, and so on. If he or she is informal, you can loosen up and be yourself, but if he or she is formal and proper, you should act the same way. A great deal depends on the personal chemistry between interviewer and applicant, so try to match the interviewer's style without becoming phony. If the tone of the interview doesn't fit well with you, this may be a signal that you won't feel comfortable with this company. It may be smart to see whether the interviewer's approach represents the whole company, by either asking for a short tour or speaking with other employees on your own. This desire to learn about the company shows that you are a thinking person who takes the job seriously, so your curiosity isn't likely to offend the interviewer.

cultural idioms

- rule of thumb:** practical plan of action
- personal chemistry:** how two people get along with or react to each other

Keep Your Answers Succinct and Specific It's easy to rattle on in an interview, either out of enthusiasm, a desire to show off your knowledge, or nervousness, but in most cases long answers are not a good idea. The interviewer probably has lots of ground to cover, and long-winded answers won't help this task. A good rule of thumb is to keep your responses under 2 minutes. While keeping your comments succinct, be sure to provide specific examples to support your statements.

Keep on the Subject It is sometimes tempting to go overboard with your answers, sidetracking the discussion into areas that won't help the interviewer. Try to keep your focus on the topic at hand. If you worry that your responses have gone off topic, it may be a good idea to ask the interviewer whether your responses are helpful and then adjust them accordingly.

Describe Relevant Challenges, Actions, and Results Most sophisticated employers realize that past performance can be the best predictor of future behavior. For that reason, there is an increasing trend toward **behavioral interviews**—sessions that explore specifics of the applicant's past performance as it relates to the job at hand. Typical behavioral questions include the following:

Describe a time you needed to work as part of a team.

Tell me about a time when you had to think on your feet to handle a challenging situation.

Describe a time when you were faced with an ethical dilemma, and discuss how you handled it.

When faced with behavioral questions, answer in a way that shows the prospective employer how your past performance demonstrates your ability to handle the job you are now seeking. One format for constructing such answers has three parts:

1. Offer specific examples of a situation, and how you handled it.
2. Show the result of your behavior.
3. Draw a connection between the incident you've described and the job you are seeking.

Here are some examples of good answers to behavioral questions:

Q: Give an example of a time when you were faced with an overwhelming amount of work.

A: Last year I was chairperson of the committee that organized a triathlon to raise money for a friend who had enormous medical bills after being in a car accident. When I took on the job, I had no idea how big it was: logistics, publicity, fundraising, legal—it was huge. And some of the people who originally offered to help backed out halfway through the planning. At first I tried to do everything myself, but after a while I realized that this was not going to work. So I wound up recruiting more people, and my job turned out to be supporting and encouraging them rather than doing it all. If I'm lucky enough to get this job, that's the approach I'd take as a manager.

Q: Tell me about a time when you had to work with someone you didn't like, or someone who didn't like you.

A: A very talented teammate in my marketing-class term project kept making somewhat sexist jokes, even after I told him they made me uncomfortable. Changing teams wasn't possible, and I figured complaining to the professor would jeopardize our success on the project. So I did my best to act professionally, even in the face of those jokes. We got the job done and received an outstanding evaluation, so I guess my discomfort was worth it. What I learned from this experience is that we don't always get to choose the people we work with, and that sometimes you have to put the job ahead of personal feelings.

behavioral interview A session that explores the specifics of the applicant's past performance as it relates to the job at hand.

cultural idioms

to rattle on: to utter responses that are excessively wordy

ground to cover: topics to discuss

long-winded: speaking for a long time

go overboard: do so much as to be

excessive

CHECKLIST ✓

Successful Interviewing

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Do your research.
- Create or update your résumé.
- Prepare for likely questions.
- Dress for success.
- Take copies of your résumé and samples of past work.
- Know when and where to go.
- Reframe your anxiety as enthusiasm.

DURING AND AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Follow the interviewer's lead.
- Keep your answers succinct and specific.
- Keep on the subject.
- Describe relevant challenges, actions, and results.
- Ask good questions of your own.
- Follow up with a thank-you note shortly after the interview.

Ask Good Questions of Your Own Besides answering the employer's questions, the selection interview is also a chance for you to learn whether the job and organization are right for you. In this sense, the potential boss and the prospective employee are interviewing each other.

Near the end of the interview, you'll probably be asked if you have any questions. You might feel as if you already know all the important facts about the job, but asking questions based on your knowledge of the industry, the company, and the position can produce some useful information, as well as show the interviewer that you are realistically assessing the fit between yourself and the organization. The following list offers examples of good questions to ask:

- Why is this position open now? How often has it been filled in the past 5 years? What have been the primary reasons people have left it in the past?
- What is the biggest problem facing your staff now? How have past and current employees dealt with this problem?
- What are the primary results you would like to see me produce?
- How would you describe the management style I could expect from my supervisors?
- Where could a person go who is successful in this position? Within what time frame?
- Important note: You should not ask about salary or benefits during a selection interview unless you have been offered the position.

Follow Up with a Thank-You Note Shortly After the Interview Follow up your interview with a prompt, sincere, and personalized note of thanks to the interviewer. Do not underestimate the importance of this step: A thoughtful and well-written thank-you note can set you apart from other candidates, and not writing a thank-you note within a day of your interview can eliminate you from the running.

A good thank-you should do the following:

- Express your appreciation for the chance to get acquainted with the company.
- Reinforce why you see a good fit between you and the job, highlighting your demonstrated skills.
- Let the interviewer know that the conversation left you excited about the chance of becoming associated with it.

Most employment advisors agree that this is one situation in which a handwritten message can be appropriate, though many interviewers expect a thank-you within 24 hours. Whether your thank-you message is handwritten or emailed, reread it carefully several times, and have a skilled proofreader review it, as a mistake here can damage your prospects. One job seeker ruined her chances of employment by mentioning the "report" (instead of "rapport") that she felt with the interviewer.

The following checklist summarizes the keys to successful interviewing just discussed.

Interviewing and the Law

Most laws governing what topics can and can't be covered in job interviews boil down to two simple principles. First, questions may not be aimed at discriminating on the basis of race, color, religion, gender,

sexual orientation, disabilities, national origin, or age. Second, questions must be related to what the U.S. government's Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) calls *bona fide occupational qualifications*. In other words, prospective employers may only ask about topics that are related to the job at hand. Another basic principle is that employers should ask the same job-related questions of all candidates. For example, if an interviewer asks whether one candidate has international experience, he or she should ask all others the same question.

These principles help distinguish between legal and illegal questions:

ILLEGAL	LEGAL
Were you born in Latin America?	Fluency in Spanish is an important part of this job. Are you fluent in that language?
If you don't mind my asking, how did you get that limp?	Being on your feet for several hours per day is part of this job. Do you have any physical conditions that would make it hard to do that?
Do you have any children at home?	Are you able to work occasional nights and weekends?
Please tell me about any political clubs or organizations to which you belong.	Tell me about any job-related organizations you belong to that you think will enhance your ability to do this job.

Despite the law, there is a good chance that interviewers will ask illegal questions. This will probably have more to do with being uninformed than with being malicious. Still, when faced with a question that's not legal, you will need to know how to respond tactfully. There are several options:

1. *Answer without objecting.* Answer the question, even though you know it is probably unlawful: "No, I'm not married. But I'm engaged." Recognize, though, that this could open the door for other illegal questions—and perhaps even discrimination in hiring decisions.
2. *Seek explanation.* Ask the interviewer firmly and respectfully to explain why this question is related to the job: "I'm having a hard time seeing how my marital status relates to my ability to do this job. Can you explain?"
3. *Redirect.* Shift the focus of the interview away from a question that isn't job related and toward the requirements of the position itself: "What you've said so far suggests that age is not as important for this position as knowledge of accounting. Can you tell me more about the kinds of accounting that are part of this job?"
4. *Refuse.* Explain politely but firmly that you will not provide the information requested: "I'd rather not talk about my religion. That's a very private and personal matter for me."
5. *Withdraw.* End the interview immediately and leave, stating your reasons firmly but professionally: "I'm very uncomfortable with these questions about my personal life, and I don't see a good fit between me and this organization. Thank you for your time."

There's no absolutely correct way to handle illegal questions. The option you choose will depend on several factors: the likely intent of the interviewer, the nature of the questions, and, of course, your desire for the job—and finally, your "gut level" of comfort with the whole situation.

Communicating for Career Advancement

Careful, strategic communication (or its absence), whether in person or through mediated channels, can enhance (or damage) your career, from before you begin looking for a job until the day you retire. In the remaining pages, you'll read tips on how to manage the way others regard you, and how to handle yourself in ways that distinguish you as the kind of capable person who is an asset to any organization.

Managing Your Online Identity

The “@Work” box in Chapter 2 (page 60) describes the importance of managing your identity on the job. That sort of identity management extends into cyberspace and deserves special consideration.

You almost certainly have an online identity. If someone plugged your name into a search engine like Google, at least a few hits would probably surface. The information that shows up about you in cyberspace is more than a curiosity or ego booster—it can either enhance or damage your career prospects.

By now you probably have been warned about the risks of posting potentially embarrassing information about yourself online, especially if you’re looking for a job. According to the *New York Times*, 70% of U.S. recruiters report having rejected job candidates because of personal information online.¹⁰

Notwithstanding these cautionary tales, it’s worth detailing the dimensions of your online identity that can either enhance or damage your chances of getting a job or getting promoted. According to a service designed to help users control their online identities, web-based information that can shape your career success falls into one of four categories.¹¹ Each calls for different management strategies.

Information by You, About Yourself This category includes social networking profiles, professional profiles, tweets, Facebook comments and photos, and personal websites you have created and intentionally posted where anybody can view them. (See the box on page A-21 for more information about constructing your own website.) It may also include a detailed résumé, or information you’ve entered into a job-search site such as LinkedIn.

Self-authored information gives you a chance to promote yourself in ways that go beyond the one- or two-page résumé you bring to a job interview. If you’ve contributed to a worthy project, participated in volunteer work, or won any awards, create a place online that features these accomplishments and interests.

When posting information about yourself online, be sure to consider how it will look to all viewers. You may be proud of your membership in the National Rifle Association or Planned Parenthood, but a prospective employer might not find your affiliations so admirable. Political philosophy, religious affiliations, and even your musical preferences may all be better kept private, or at least behind a secure firewall where only the people you know and trust will see them. You may not realize just how much of what you post on social media, for example, is viewable to anyone who does a web search for your name; Google yourself and see what comes up.

Information by Others, About You This category includes everything viewable online that anyone has ever said about you. Some websites are organized specifically to capture comments about individuals. Students can rate their professors (ratemyprofessors.com), friends can rate one another (ratemyeverything.net), and you can rate the attractiveness of strangers (hotornot.com). Commentary on these sites can be insensitive, unfair, and even blatantly false, but it can damage your reputation nonetheless. Even if your name isn’t listed on a dedicated website,

UNDERSTANDING COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

Constructing a Personal Website

Designing your own site can give you the personal, creative touches that a predesigned site can't offer. If getting a job is your goal, your personal website should be focused on maintaining a professional image. You can include hobbies and interests unrelated to your skills and industry, but they should not be the focus of your site. The best way to make sure people can find your site is to

choose a domain name that captures your complete real name (e.g., [yourname.com](#)). If your name is not available, make sure at least your complete last name is included in your domain name (e.g., [yournamedesign.com](#)). The next step is to use one of the many free services to construct your website. Popular services include Weebly, Google Sites, and Wix.

searchers may find random posts about you by typing your name into a simple search. One waitress was shocked to find that a customer's review of the restaurant where she worked mentioned her by name as having a bad attitude.

Setting up a Google alert with your name (in all its variations) can help you identify how you are portrayed online. If you discover incorrect, unfair, and potentially damaging information about yourself, and if you are unable to remove it yourself, you might consider seeking professional help to set the record straight. For example, ReputationDefender.com will monitor your online identity and contact offending websites, asking them to remove unflattering information. Other services that help people take back control of their online identity include Naymz.com, Reputation.com, and RemoveYourName.com. Of course, a far less extensive and burdensome approach is to minimize the chances of reputation damage by being on your best public behavior.

An important part of your personal website is your photo. Most employers are not allowed to request a photo with your résumé submission; however, appearance does matter to them. Help employers find out that you look like an excellent future employee by posting your photo on the homepage of your site. Make sure you don't confuse a nice appearance with being attractive. Overt attempts at appearing attractive can come across as too sexual or tacky. Physical attractiveness is not as important as looking put-together. Choose an outfit that shows you can work with clients outside the workplace and will represent the company well. Save personal photos for your password-protected social networking sites, and include only one or two professional photos on your website that is open to the public. Once you create your website, you may want to monitor its success. Google Trends ([google.com/trends](#)) is a free program that can monitor your personal and business websites. Google Trends can show you two important pieces of information: how often a set of keywords, either your name or your company's name, appears on the Web, and also how frequently people search for it. Using a tool called "Hot Searches," you can see how often people search for your company over a span of time. Information about you can also come from belonging to groups that post membership information online for unrestricted viewing. You may not have intended for inquiring minds to know that you belong to Yahoo's Mysticism and Witchcraft Interest Group or Meetup.com's Obsessive Compulsive Support Group, but unless you're careful, that information can become public. One employee learned the hard way that group membership isn't necessarily private when she sent an email to her boss from her Yahoo! account. The boss was surprised to find, underneath his reply confirmation, the message, "Shelly has just posted a comment on the Pregnant Career Women's Message Board."

Information by You, Not About You This category includes anything that you have created online that isn't self-referential. It can include text-based material, such as school projects and your reviews of music or films. It can also include non-textual information, such as your art or music portfolio. This sort of information can showcase your talents in ways that are likely to impress current or potential employers or clients.

You can steer potential readers to this sort of material by compiling it all in a single place online. You don't have to be a web designer to pull this off; resources like Squarespace and Weebly are free and easy to use.

Once your online showcase is set up, you can reference it in your résumé and other job-seeking materials. Beyond this, you can steer web surfers to your blog by including your full name in the blog's URL and title. This approach ensures that searchers will find it when they type your name into their search engine.

Along with potentially career-enhancing material, there's a risk that you may have posted material that will reflect poorly on you. Almost any griping, complaining, gossiping, or bad-mouthing can come back to haunt you, even if it was justified.

Information Not by You, Not About You You This category involves material that turns up in a search when others' names are identical or similar to yours. Nobody is likely to confuse you with the John or Jane Doe who is currently doing research in Antarctica, but sometimes mistaken identity can be less obvious. One job seeker Googled herself out of curiosity, only to find that the first hit was the Facebook page of another person with the same name. She clicked the link and was taken to a personal profile loaded with immature comments.

If a search of your name generates potentially damaging hits of people who are unrelated to you, consider distinguishing yourself by including your middle name or middle initial on your résumé and all other information you post where online seekers might find it.

Distinguishing Yourself on the Job

Once you're on the job, distinguishing yourself from the pack can be a challenge. It can be hard to figure out which behaviors cast you in a positive light, and which might give the impression you are a self-promoting "suck-up." Here are a few guidelines that will serve you well.

Communicate in a Principled Manner Communicating with integrity isn't always easy. Management can favor business practices that put the company before the customers that it serves and can even reward employees who support ethical transgressions.¹² The culture in some organizations favors bad-mouthing, competing, and "working the system." One employee recalls how her colleagues joked about ways to be the least productive while getting paid the most.

Principled communication means following your own set of ethics rather than relying on the approval of others. You don't need to explicitly state that you don't like what's being said, or chastise coworkers for bad behavior. You can simply lead by example. A good policy is to avoid any type of communication that you will not feel good about later, and try not to say anything about anyone that you would not say in his or her presence.

World-renowned leadership consultant Stephen Covey emphasizes that principled communication is not as difficult as it seems:

Correct principles are like compasses: They are always pointing the way. And if we know how to read them, we won't get lost, confused, or fooled by conflicting voices and values. Principles such as fairness, equity, justice, integrity, honesty, and trust are not invented by us: They are the laws of the universe that pertain to human relationships and organizations. They are part of the human condition, consciousness, and conscience.¹³

Taking the high road may seem to have short-term costs, but the long-term benefits justify this approach. Covey explains the long-term benefits of principled communication this way:

People instinctively trust those whose personalities are founded upon correct principles. We have evidence of this in our long-term relationships. We learn that technique is relatively unimportant compared to trust, which is the result of our trustworthiness over time. When trust is high, we communicate easily, effortlessly, instantaneously. We can make mistakes, and others will still capture our meaning. But when trust is low, communication is exhausting, time-consuming, ineffective, and inordinately difficult.¹⁴

Use Gossip Wisely Malicious gossip is another behavior that may provide short-term satisfaction but can damage your career. Besides reflecting character defects,¹⁵ gossiping can mark you as untrustworthy.

In addition to making a bad impression, gossip can be hurtful. “Gossip is high stakes,” says Sam Chapman, the CEO of Empower, the public relations agency that banned gossip. “It’s emotionally lethal. It’s leading to suicides.” He urges executives to make it clear that they don’t engage in gossip and says that their employees will follow the example.

Avoiding malicious talk doesn’t mean all gossip is bad. In fact, researchers have found that certain types of workplace gossip can help people unite during struggles, form positive alliances, and engage in healthy competition. For example, when workers gossip about someone who got fired, they learn what happens to people who break the rules, and it may motivate employees to work harder or create greater loyalties to their company.¹⁶

One key to identifying benign or even helpful gossip lies in its intention. If your juicy information is helpful to others, it may be worth sharing. Are personnel changes coming? Have you heard something important about a new policy? But be careful not to break a promise to keep the information confidential.

Along with usefulness, a second criterion for “good” gossip is its tone. One executive proposed this test: Before you start talking, stop and ask yourself, “Is it kind?”¹⁷ Stories and information spread through word of mouth don’t always have to be negative or malicious. If someone at work received an award or completed a major project, go ahead and spread the word. People who speak kindly of others get noticed.

In sum, it’s unrealistic to avoid talking about other people; just make sure, when you do, that you aren’t casting a shadow on your own character by denigrating the target of your story.

Exceed Others’ Expectations Bare-minimum performance may not get you fired, but neither will it get you noticed. One method for standing out is to do more than what’s required by your job description.¹⁸

Positively exceeding expectations may mean

- Finishing a job ahead of schedule
- Providing more information than was requested
- Doing a better job than others anticipated

The ways in which you can go above and beyond depend a lot on the type of organization in which you work. If you’re not sure what you could be doing, consider volunteering to serve on a committee, offering to help orient a new employee, showing up to work on a weekend or after hours (if it’s allowed), offering to deliver a presentation, or tackling a job that keeps getting delayed due to other work demands. The few minutes or hours jobs like this take will be well worth the reputation they earn you.

Greet People Most career-minded people have been advised to learn names as a method of standing out. Although learning names is an important networking tool, a simple hello can also have a powerful impact.¹⁹ Greet people even if you don't know their names.

If you can't remember someone's name, you can always say, "This is really embarrassing because I know who you are, but I've forgotten your name." Everyone forgets names, but few people risk their own embarrassment by asking. Making it a priority to reach out to others will in turn help them remember you.

Sweat the Small Stuff You may have heard the phrase *don't sweat the small stuff*. In fact, making a good impression requires paying attention to every detail.

Situations in which details seem unimportant are exactly the situations you can use to stand out from the average employee. A common faux pas committed by new employees is thinking that mediated messages don't require the same etiquette as face-to-face interactions. Even if you are just shooting your boss a quick reply or confirmation, make sure you have a salutation, body, and closing, and always use proper grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Using "I" instead of "i" and "you" instead of "u" is imperative to any business correspondence, no matter how casual. In a world of text messaging, we are so accustomed to shortcircuiting our communication that we rarely realize the bad impression it makes at work. Take a moment to compose emails that sound articulate, professional, and respectful.

Besides making sure the work you do is impeccable, pay attention to the way you present yourself in career-related contexts. Casual use of slang and profanity risks offending others. It's smart to heed advice from the *Wall Street Journal*: "Tiny missteps may derail your career. You appear unpolished when you talk like an adolescent, or curse at colleagues."²⁰

How you look can be just as important as what you say. No one wants to hire or promote someone they fear won't represent the company well. One executive recruiter warns, "Outdated clothes, frayed cuffs, messy hair, scuffed shoes or excess cleavage also signal poor judgment."²¹

Behaving professionally can distinguish you from the pack. A now-successful businesswoman recalls that her big break came when the boss chose her to accompany him to an important trade show. When she asked why he chose her instead of others with more experience, he replied that she was the only employee who he knew wouldn't embarrass the company.

Ask Questions Don't fake understanding. When you aren't sure about an idea, assignment, or procedure, ask for clarification. To justify your request for clarification, consider prefacing questions with something like "I really want to understand what you're saying . . ." or "I want to make sure I get this right."

SUMMARY

Beyond professional qualifications, strategic planning and effective communication can enhance your career. Developing relationships, knowing what to do in an interview, and distinguishing yourself at work can provide an edge in a competitive, demanding workplace.

Developing relationships with people who can help you is integral to success. You can develop and maintain

personal networks by viewing everyone as a networking prospect, seeking referrals, and showing appreciation whenever you receive help. Making a name for yourself online through professional websites is also important. Conducting informational interviews with those who have experience, expertise, and contacts can enhance your career prospects.

Selection interviews can be a critically important part of career advancement. Before an interview, conduct background research, create an impressive résumé, and prepare for questions that the interviewer is likely to ask. During the interview make sure to let the interviewer take the lead. Keep your answers succinct and on topic, and be prepared for the interviewer to ask you to demonstrate a skill or respond to a specific situation. Don't forget to plan questions to ask the interviewer at the end.

Managing your professional identity can create the desired impression. Online information about you speaks volumes to others. It is important to monitor and control information about yourself that others create, as well as what you create and post yourself.

Getting ahead isn't always about seeking a new place of employment. You can receive a promotion or reassignment by distinguishing yourself at your current workplace. Get noticed by communicating in a principled manner. Exceed the expectations of your superiors, get to know people at work, and pay attention to details. Asking questions instead of assuming can help you perform in a way that shows initiative. In sum, being qualified for a job or promotion isn't enough; help others help you by standing out in a way that makes you a desirable employee in whom they want to invest.

KEY TERMS

behavioral interview p. A-17

closed question p. A-8

direct question p. A-8

factual question p. A-8

hypothetical question p. A-9

indirect question p. A-8

informational interview p. A-6

leading question p. A-9

networking p. A-4

neutral question p. A-9

open question p. A-8

opinion question p. A-8

probe p. A-8

selection interview p. A-9

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