



The following is an excerpt from chapter 8 of Angela Lussier's book, *"The Anti-Résumé Revolution: The Innovative & Forward Thinking Guide for Job Seekers and Aspiring Entrepreneurs"*.

## **The Top 10 Rules Most Commonly Broken In the Interview**

True or false?

It's good to show up 20 minutes early to show you are punctual.  
FALSE

You don't have to wear a suit to your second interview.  
FALSE

You should send a follow up thank you letter within 24 hours.  
TRUE

If you don't hear anything after 5 days (or whatever date they told you), its okay to call and check in.  
TRUE

You shouldn't ask what they think of you at the end.  
FALSE

It's not okay to ask to speak with the people you would be working alongside in the department.  
FALSE

Okay, now that we're warmed up, I'll tell you why those questions are true or false in this chapter.

In my opinion, interviewing is a lot like dating, only you don't kiss at the end if it goes well.

You get a job instead.

I draw a lot of parallels between interviewing and dating so you can look at the exchange from a different point of view. An interview isn't just about answering a lot of questions, it's about figuring out if the company/position is the right match for **you** as well! Below is a list of what NOT to do on an interview and how you can get what you want: a new career.

## **The Interview (Blind Date)**

### **Mistake #1: Making a bad first impression**

Arrive 10 minutes early. Any earlier is an inconvenience. Any later and you may not be allowing enough time to fill out forms or get checked in.

Always always always always wear a suit or equivalent. You want to put your best foot forward don't you? Looking less than your best could leave you single again! Did I mention you should always wear a suit?

YES, Even if this is your 8<sup>th</sup> interview with the company and the person who is interviewing you is in jeans. They have the job. You don't.

Why overlook something so simple? It's like getting points for putting your name on the SATs. Don't miss this opportunity to shine by doing something so easy.

Okay, if they specifically say "don't wear a suit", don't. If your interview happens to be on a golf course, ask about proper attire. Anything else, play it safe with the suit or something like it. The idea is to look put together, like you actually care.

I know, I know...we all want to express ourselves through the clothes we wear. I'm with you on this! I don't like being told what to wear and the rebellious teenager inside me has a hard time writing this part of the book, but the other more logical side of me says it's a smart move. You don't know who you are going to be meeting with, so just play this part of the interview safe and get your monkey suit on.

One more thing, don't be afraid to add your own personality to the outfit. If you want to wear an interesting tie or unique earrings, go ahead and do that. There's no reason to look like you work for the government (unless you are trying to), so once again, pay attention to your audience and plan accordingly.

### **MISTAKE #2: Putting it all out there too early**

Ask the interviewer questions to start as an ice breaker and also to gauge how warm this person is. You can tailor your answers to match the person you are talking to.

Look for things in the lobby or around the room to engage your interviewer in small talk. Whether there is an award on the wall, a picture of his kids, an autographed picture...anything.

Find a reason to comment and throw the ball back. See how he reacts.

Take his answer and use that as your gauge for answering questions. Is he open to conversation? Is he all business? Is he pleasant and open, or reserved and blunt?

So, if you ask your interviewer, "Is that your wife and kids at the beach?" and you hear "yes, that was our family vacation back in 2004. Suzie is now 8 and Mikey is 6. Time goes so fast, doesn't it?" Chances are, he is open, cares about family, and is open to talking about personal motivation over strictly professional topics.

If he answers with, "Yes, that's them. Let's stay on topic." Then you know you are dealing with someone who is very focused on business and it's best to respond to him that way.

Here's an example:

Interviewer: Why do you want to work for this organization?

You (if he is pleasant and open): I feel a strong connection to your company's mission. As an organization that caters to the model airplane market, I can see great potential for my talents given the fact that my father and grandfather were both model airplane enthusiasts. I want to carry the torch!

You (if reserved and blunt): After researching several industry publications and talking with reputable professionals in this field, I've been told your company is the best to work for. I'm here to learn more and see if we're a good match for each other.

I'm not saying you should lie. Just pick certain aspects of your personality to focus on while responding. Your interview is an opportunity for you to learn, but also sell yourself. You want to make sure you're getting the right information out there and in the right way. Good communicators get ahead because they understand the importance of knowing their audience and use it to influence others.

Sidebar: That sounds sneaky, doesn't it? It's not. It's one of the fundamentals of good communication and it's important no matter what forum you're in. If you don't believe me and thinks this sounds weird, try it and see what happens.

### **MISTAKE #3: Acting like someone you're not**

Reality check: You're not Tom Cruise or Sandra Bullock.

"Acting the part" may get you a second date...but are you being true to yourself? If you have to be the person you were in the interview instead of who you really are, are you really going to be happy?

Big Question: Would you rather act in your own horror movie, or live out your dream?

I made this mistake #3 because it goes hand in hand with #2. What you say and how you say it is important, just don't go so far as to fabricate an entirely new persona just to match the company's.

### **MISTAKE #4: Playing it cool**

Reality check: Acting aloof and disinterested to avoid appearing vulnerable or desperate is not a good idea.

How does this really come off? Like you don't care, you're indifferent; you could take it or leave it.

Result: No warm and fuzzies for the interviewer, figures why waste my time with someone who doesn't want me?

I once interviewed a Sales Manager who made it clear in the first 30 seconds that he was interviewing with many other companies and that he was interviewing me to figure out if this job made sense for him. After 2 minutes of demeaning questions and shocking statements from his

side of the table, I told him that the interview was over. He responded with, "Good, I have to get to another appointment anyway".

I'm not sure if he was trying to show how in demand he was to look cool, but I was not impressed. If you are thinking about using this approach, I highly discourage you from doing this! If you are going to spend the time going to the interview, make the time and put some real effort into it. Let the company know it's important to you (even if you do have 10 other interviews).

## **MISTAKE #5: Answering a question with "This is a hard question!"**

If you're asked how you feel about marriage, or how a past relationship ended, giggling and saying "this is a hard question" is going to send up a red flag to the person you're on the date with. You wouldn't do it on a date, so why would you do it in an interview? The question was asked because they want to learn something about you, not experience an awkward laugh with you and the silence that follows!

This is especially necessary for questions about you. If you can't answer the question about why you love the industry you work in, you can just show yourself the door right then and there.

**Important:** Have 4 or 5 good examples and know the details about each job! This is called doing your homework and having good stories to share.

QUESTION: Do you know the most commonly asked interview question?

ANSWER: The "Tell me about yourself" question.

Do you know the best way to answer?

It's a 3 part answer. They're not looking to hear about your divorce and horoscope for that day. They want to hear about your professional background.

Professional answer:

1. Give an example of an accomplishment
2. State why you want this job
3. What you can bring to the position

In sentence form:

Part 1: I have 15 years of experience selling business to business. My most successful year was in 2007 when I brought in over \$2 million dollars in sales for the company, which was 50% more than forecasted for the year.

Part 2 & 3: I'm here today because I want to bring positive change to your company and teach my successful sales strategy to the team.

This is a basic example that anyone can understand. If your story is more personal, that's fine to use, just make sure your audience understands how it benefits them. For example, if you are applying for a job at a non-profit that is trying to raise money for the environment, it's okay to talk about growing up on a farm and being concerned about the future of the planet, just tie it all together in a neat little bow and don't go on and on for an hour (like this sentence).

YOU BETTER HAVE GOOD ANSWERS FOR THE NEXT QUESTIONS!

Handling the strengths and weaknesses questions – Not knowing these is like not knowing your name. Unfortunately, more often than not a company will ask you these questions. They are quite telling of a personality, and they are always almost asked. Again, this is another freebie for you. You can actually memorize what you're going to say here because there's a big chance it will be asked. Here are some tricks to craft a great answer.

Meaningful & REAL examples THAT APPLY TO THE OBJECTIVES OF THE POSITION are important here.

Let's start with an example for the strengths question: You're a teacher interviewing with a principal. You wouldn't want to focus on the success stories from the Monster Truck Rallies you ran in the '80s. You want to talk about standardized testing results and creative ways of teaching to achieve success.

Example for the weaknesses question:

I'm going to use a personal example for this one. I have always had a fear of public speaking. It was so bad that I never took credit for my own ideas, I was silent in every staff meeting, and I looked for reasons to be absent when I knew I may have to be the center of attention. My fear was deep and it was holding me back from being successful. In the summer of 2006, I joined Toastmasters ([www.toastmasters.org](http://www.toastmasters.org)) and started facing my fear of public speaking. I have been a member ever since and continually focus on building my communication and leadership skills.

This answer is a good one because it says that I recognized I had a weakness, was willing to change, and found ways to improve myself. The whole point of the weaknesses question is to see if you focus on personal growth, how serious you are about it, and what you're doing to improve. If you answer with "I'm horrible with time management" and leave it at that, you will probably not be getting the call for the second interview.

Try to pick something along the lines of:

Communication/Leadership/Time Management/Networking

This goes back to thinking like a CEO! These are the elements that every professional can work on to be better at business. If your weakness is "poor fashion sense" you're not doing yourself any favors there either.

If you would be lying by saying you're working on a weakness, change that today by finding ways to improve the areas that aren't as strong as they could be.

### **BONUS POINTS!**

If you have a video camera (and you're brave), sit with someone and have them ask you 20 interview questions. Video tape yourself answering them and then watch it. Critique, and then do it again. Are your arms flailing? Did you say "um" 300 times? Are you playing with your hair the whole time? Do you sound confident or hesitant?

Have you ever done this? It's horrifying, but so useful! Rather than have no clue what you look like across the table from the person who could change your life, set yourself up for success by practicing before you get in there.

This quote from Suze Orman may help you:

*"Do what is right, not what is easy."*

## **MISTAKE #6: Not doing anything to stand out.**

Some companies date a lot. They might have 30 dates per week. How will you be different from all the other suitors?

### **Here's a BIG idea I really want you to consider:**

A technique I used to use when I was hiring interns and event staff was to have them bring something in that represents them. You should try it when you get interviewed! You'll impress people, I promise. Especially if they don't ask you to do this. You can whip it out during the questions that refer to character.

Here's the background and full story:

When scheduling the interview, I would ask the candidate to bring in something that represents him/herself. And then I'd shut up. I would leave it completely open ended. Most of the time, I would get silence, or a "can you clarify what you mean by that??" This usually came from the people who were never asked to be creative - and now they're freaking out. My answer to that question is: "It's whatever it means to you". And then I would shut up again. I didn't give them anything to work with, and waited to see what they came up with.

It has been BEYOND fascinating to see what people bring in. I've had some awkward moments with a few people bringing in their guitar and singing to me in the conference room (picture being serenaded by a stranger in a suit).

Here are a few others I've had:

An entire pizza (food represents life)

An "In Touch" magazine (she was aware of what was going on in the world)

A lucky penny from a grandparent (symbolized the importance of remembering the past to prepare for the future)

And then I got the people who forgot....

Car keys (gets them where they need to go)

Their favorite CD (music inspires them)

(good try...)

The people who brought nothing were immediately dismissed and no interview took place. No second chances. This was a clear indicator that they either couldn't follow directions, the interview wasn't important enough to put thought into it, or they were not willing to be creative.

Here's your challenge - What would YOU bring? What represents you?

A few other examples:

A clipboard and game sheets from the basketball team a gentleman coached, because great teamwork beats individual stars every time.

Hiking shoes, because it's the journey more than the destination that makes life and work enjoyable.

If you bring something in, I am 99.9% sure you will be the only one who does this, and they WILL remember you.

Other things you can bring:

Your resume/portfolio/a handout you created. Give them something to remember you by. If it's your resume, PLEASE do something to make it look different in the huge stack.

Portfolios and examples of your work are CRUCIAL to differentiate yourself! If you can demonstrate something you made or created, you will win huge bonus points. This ONLY works if it directly applies to what they're looking for though. Again, if you're trying to get a job as an English Teacher, showing them pictures from the monster truck rally probably won't help you (unless you can relate it to teaching somehow).

If you have awards, letters of recommendation, a portfolio, or anything from the past that would be helpful, BRING IT! Oh, and show it. I've had clients bring impressive things to their interviews and never pull it out because the interviewer never asked to see it. They don't ask because no one does it! Take the initiative to bring it up at the appropriate time and be proud of it. It's cool and memorable, believe me.

***KEY: Visuals are important; especially if they help you tell a compelling story.***

## **MISTAKE #7: No Spin**

I left my last girlfriend because she had STDs is just like saying "I left because I didn't like my boss". If what you are about to say is not going to help you, you better figure out a better way to say it.

Each answer should be positive, even the weakness question!

What this says about you: You find opportunity in difficult situations – time to learn rather than time to run!

For example, I left my job at the radio station because funds were drying up, resources were minimal, and the outlook wasn't bright. Rather than hang onto a future that wasn't there, I decided to continue my journey in an industry that would allow me to grow and flourish.

This may sound negative, like I was running away from something, but I was actually taking a proactive step in moving towards something better. If I said I hated my boss and couldn't work with him for one more second, this would show that I was unwilling to overcome a personal obstacle. The fact that the radio industry as a whole was losing money and the things I needed to continue growing would no longer be available is something I could not change, no matter how long I stayed.

## **MISTAKE #8: Not asking important questions.**

Would you go on a date and just answer questions without finding out what the other person is like? An interview may not be as free flowing as a date, but you need to take advantage of the opportunity to ask questions!

Your questions should be coming from the list you made to determine what kind of job you want, not some random website that says which questions to ask. Ask the questions that are real deal breakers for you, and don't be afraid to probe for more specific answers if you're not getting what you're looking for.

Your questions should be specific and researched. Demonstrating that you did your homework does wonders! This is also important because you are collecting more information that will help YOU decide if this is a good match for you. If you decided that the #1 most important element you are looking for is autonomy, you better be asking questions about the management structure and what kind of reporting relationship you will have with your superiors!

BONUS: Ask to meet potential co-workers and ask them questions too! They are usually unbiased and will be truthful with the conditions and expectations. You can also get a better feel for the culture of the department if you meet them face to face.

## **MISTAKE #9: No kiss at the end (not sealing the deal)**

You have to close the interview correctly!

Want to guess the best thing to say at the very end? Here are the last and hardest questions you will ask.

1. Is there anything else you need to know to make sure I am the right person for this job?
2. When can I expect to hear from you?
3. If I don't hear from you by (date), who should I contact?

When presenting these questions at my seminars, the most common question I would get is, "Doesn't this look pushy?"

The answer: No!

Not if you do it right. Of course you're not going to be demanding and overbearing when it comes to these questions, but you are going to phrase them in a way that shows you care and want to make sure everything is covered before you walk out the door. The people who are willing to ask these questions are thought of as are assertive, confident, and focused on what's next.

Besides what *they* will think of you, you will leave there with a feeling of completeness. Instead of waking up in the middle of the night wondering if you said everything you needed to and being afraid to leave your house in fear of missing their call, you can be confident you did what was necessary to secure the next steps. Whether or not they are honest with you is another story, but you can't control what they say and what they will do!

## **MISTAKE #10: Not calling for a second date**

Whether you are happy with what you learned and you want to be invited back, or you disliked everyone you met and don't want the job, you need to get thank you letters in the mail within 24 hours. No, not email. Send an actual card or postcard and really blow them away. In order to do this correctly:

1. Get business cards from everyone you meet so you have correct spelling of their names, titles, and contact information.

First logical question you're asking yourself: What if everyone I meet with doesn't have a card? That's okay; ask them for the spelling of their name, title, and mailing address. You can flat out tell them that you will be sending them a thank you card in the mail! It's okay to be upfront with them if you are going to ask for their information. In fact, if you *don't* tell them it's for a thank

you card, they may label you as creepy or continue wondering throughout the interview why you asked that. Eliminate doubt and be honest!

2. If you don't have personalized cards, get professional thank you greeting cards. **No form letters. Let me say that again. No form letters. We're not selling insurance; we're sending a friendly thank you letter. Again, no form letters.**

Why no form letters? Because those are going to come in those long thin envelopes that look like every other piece of mail they receive. It also looks generic and impersonal. You are trying to create a relationship and show them that you are spending the time to prove yourself. Write out every single note and handwrite their name & address on the envelope. If you are trying to develop a system for this, like typing the letter and making copies, stop doing that. That's not the point of this exercise!

3. Note something specific in the card that happened during the interview that will trigger something in their mind about you (like what you brought that represents you!).

You are probably not going to be the only person sending the follow up thank you card (although in my 10 years of interviewing, I received 3 thank you cards TOTAL), so make sure you point out SPECIFIC things that happened either during your conversation, company tour, or in one of your visuals.

4. Handwrite the entire thing and thank them for their time, information, advice, tips...whatever you found useful.

If you can offer something that might help them, this makes you more valuable and memorable, so include that too. Like what? Like a name of someone in their industry who runs a networking group for people with their title, or a website that gives great information for people in their field, etc.

Have fun with this and don't stress out too much about all the rules. Create a list of things to focus on if you have weaknesses in any of the areas mentioned above. Don't make your interview the time to practice, set yourself up for success by planning your answers, bringing visuals, and presenting yourself in a positive way. The rest will come!



Angela Lussier is an award winning speaker, author of *"The Anti-Resume Revolution: The Innovative & Forward Thinking Guide for Job Seekers and Aspiring Entrepreneurs"* (due out Nov '09), and owner of 365 Degrees Consulting based in Feeding Hills, MA. Ms. Lussier works with job seekers, small businesses, and non-profits on their branding and marketing efforts. She sets out to help her clients achieve their goals by integrating today's technology & business practices with the belief that all people are meant to have what they want: a fulfilling & happy life.