



Executive Guide to Acing Video & Phone Interviews

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Part One: *Preparation*

From our over 30 years in executive search and hundreds of debriefs with hiring authorities, we know that one of the biggest mistakes candidates make is failing to do enough homework before interviewing.



In-depth preparation for your interview will help you make your responses more effective and relevant to your potential employer.

To thoroughly prepare, focus on these three key areas:

1. The Organization

Your interviewer expects basic understanding of their organization. Frequently they'll ask questions like these to gauge what you know about them:

- What interests you most about this organization?
- How do your values fit with our mission?
- How do you believe you can help the organization become more profitable / deliver better service / become more innovative?
- Why would you choose to work for our organization over our competitors?

In order to be able to clearly articulate answers to questions like these, make sure you research and understand the organization's:

- Core services and products
- Main competitors
- Point(s) of differentiation
- Plans for expansion and growth
- Values and mission
- Culture
- Profitability and financial health
- Executive team

2. The Industry

If you're interviewing in an industry that's new to you, make sure you are well versed in current challenges and trends, as well as where the industry is headed.

Try these types of internet searches for industry research:

- Healthcare industry outlook
- Cybersecurity industry overview
- IT trends
- Cybersecurity industry analysis
- Future of healthcare in the U.S.
- Healthcare sector outlook

3. Your Interviewer(s)

Make sure you find a bio or LinkedIn profile for each person on your interview agenda.

In addition to determining their title, years of service with the company, and job history, you should look for commonalities you can use to build rapport.

Resources:

In addition to reviewing the organization's website, LinkedIn page and other social media profiles, check-out:

[Indeed Company Pages](#)

[Glassdoor](#)

[990 Finder](#)

Also, check LinkedIn to see if you have connections working at your target company. They can be a great source of "insider information" on the company's culture.



Your interview success hinges on how well you highlight your skills, share your values, and show you want the job.

Ultimately, you need to convince the interviewer you have the skills (and desire) to deliver results from day one, while fitting in with their unique culture.

Highlight your skills and share your values:

- Carefully review the official position description and draft a list of the skills, attributes, and work experiences your interviewer will be seeking in their ideal candidate.
- For each item on the list, develop specific examples (with quantified results) highlighting your experiences relative to what the company is seeking.

- Identify the top 3-5 points (or key themes) you need to share throughout your interview to demonstrate you're a good fit for the organization and position.

Show you want the job:

As mentioned previously, showing you've done your homework is a key part of conveying your interest. Everyone believes their organization is special, so demonstrate a genuine interest in the company and position, and ask questions that show your knowledge and convey sincere interest in the opportunity.

If you're interested in the position after the interview, make sure you clearly communicate your desire to continue in the process. As part of your "close," ensure you recap your strengths and ask if the interviewer needs additional information from you.

Keep Your Answers to a Maximum of 90 Seconds.



Failing to be concise in your answers can cost you the job. This is the second biggest reason, just behind lack of preparation, that hiring authorities cite for cutting candidates.

While it's important to fully answer the question, if your response goes on more than about a minute it's usually too long.

Ensure you're monitoring the body language of your interviewer as well; they'll usually start giving you clues if you're rambling or speaking too quickly.

Use the PAR technique for answering behavioral interview questions.

Many interview questions will focus on experiences from your past; to answer common “behavioral interview questions” you’ll need to be able to provide specific examples of ways you’ve solved problems, overcome hardships or dealt with difficult situations.

While there may not be a “right” answer for behavioral interview questions, one of the aspects your interviewer will evaluate is how well you structure your answer.

The PAR technique provides an easy structure for answering behavioral interview questions. PAR stands for Problem, Action, Result.

- Start by describing the Problem or situation was that you had to handle.
- Next explain the Action you took to address the problem.
- Finally, describe the Result of your actions and decisions. Make sure to quantify the results.

The following are some sample questions in several of the most common categories of behavioral interview questions. Think through how you’d answer them using the PAR method. Or even better, answer them aloud in front of a mirror.

Business Relationships

- How have you handled a situation where you clashed with another senior leader?
- Describe a time when you struggled to develop a relationship with a team member.
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with a defiant subordinate.

Client / Customer Service

- Tell me about a time you failed to meet a client’s expectations.
- How do you handle difficult clients?
- Tell me about the best stakeholder you’ve ever worked with and why the relationship worked so well.
- Tell me about a time when you missed a deadline.

Adaptability

- Describe a time when you had to lead a team through a major change in your organization.
- Tell me about a time when you failed. How did you handle the situation and what did you learn from it?
- What are the biggest challenges you face when starting a new job?



Communication

- Describe a time when you had to explain a complicated situation to your superior.
- Tell me about a successful presentation that you gave. What made it successful and how did you know that it went well?
- Describe a time when you had to give bad news to a client. How did you tell them and what did you do to make the situation better for them?

Motivation and Values

- Tell me about the greatest accomplishment of your career.
- What ways have you found in your current or previous roles to best motivate your team?
- Describe the best boss you've ever had. What qualities did he or she have that you admired the most?

Reminder:

When you're using examples in your answers, always quantify them if possible.

You can tell your interviewer you're a "fast runner" (for example) but it paints a different picture about your dedication and skill level if you tell them you "run a 4 minute mile."

Practice your answers to these frequently encountered interview questions.

Walk me through your resume.

This request is a classic and one you can definitely anticipate having to address. Make sure to frame your overall answer strategically, focusing on emphasizing skills and values the employer will value most. Spend the most time on areas of your career where you had significant responsibilities and major accomplishments. As you progress through your work history, explain your transitions, emphasizing expanding responsibilities, promotions, and ways you deepened your skills.

Why do you want to work here?

This is your opportunity to show off how much research you did before the interview. Be specific about certain aspects of the company that you really like and respect. For example maybe you admire the organization's "Most Wired" status and advances in telemedicine. Or perhaps you value a company's community involvement and you noticed on their Facebook page that employees dedicate one Saturday a month to serving breakfast at a local homeless shelter. Whatever it is that you like about the organization, be sincere and specific; focus on the value you'll bring to the organization rather than what's in it for you.

Describe your management style.

Highlight your best leadership qualities and the value your experience and knowledge will bring to a team. Provide examples of how you've coached team members to help them accomplish their goals and reach new levels in their careers. To give a more dynamic view of your management style, describe a difficult situation with a subordinate that you were able to overcome. Demonstrating your problem-solving abilities and that you're willing to go above and beyond for your employees will show that you are a team player and a strong leader.

What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

When discussing your strengths, tailor them to the responsibilities outlined in the job description. When it comes to your weaknesses, don't mention anything that would reflect poorly on your ability to handle the job. Also, be sure to include what you're doing to strengthen these skills to show that you understand your weaknesses and will work to improve them. For instance, if you struggled earlier in your career with public speaking, talk about how you've enrolled in a Toastmasters group and the ways that's made you more comfortable speaking in front of a group.



Why do you want to leave your current job?

Tread carefully here. It probably goes without saying, but this is not an opportunity to bash your current employer, team members or position. A negative attitude will make you look unprofessional or immature. Stay positive and explain that you really enjoy your current company and position, however, you're looking for new challenges and new opportunities for growth that you believe this organization and position can provide. Be specific about how you think this job will help you accomplish your goal of adding value for their organization.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

This can be tricky for executive interviews, particularly if you're interviewing for a job that is already at the top of the department. Keep in mind that companies look for longevity in their executives. Turnover in the C-suite can mean chaos for the rest of the company. Rather than focusing your answer solely on yourself and your own goals, focus

more on how you want to help an organization accomplish its goals. For example, you could say that in five years, you want to be part of a leadership team that has helped an organization achieve unprecedented growth and levels of innovation.

Why should we hire you?

Put on your "salesperson hat" to answer this question. Based on what you've gathered from your research into the organization, the executive team, the job descriptions and the interview process, what is it that you know you can provide to the organization? How can your unique skillset bring about positive change within the organization? Explain how your qualifications and experience make you the absolute best fit for this position.

Have 3-5 good questions prepared to ask your interviewers.

Questions you may want to consider include:

The Position & Expectations

- Why is the position open?
- What is the history of the position?
- How will you judge success for someone in this position?
- What are some key projects this position will be leading?
- How does this position fit in with the goals of the organization as a whole?
- What are you looking for in an ideal candidate?
- What are the dynamics of the team this position will be leading?
- What are the relationships like with the key stakeholders I'd be working with?
- What are the top priorities for someone coming into this position?
- What do you expect the person coming into this position to accomplish in the next six months?
What resources are available to accomplish these projects?
- What opportunities might I have to contribute to the organization?
- How do you see the position evolving in the future?
- What does career progression look like at your organization?

The Organization

- What are the organization's top strategic priorities for the next five years?
- How does the work of the department fit with the most important organizational goals at this time?
- What do you feel is the organization's most important asset and why?
- What is the organization's mission as you see it and to what extent has the organization realized that mission?
- How would you describe the culture of the organization?
- What do you like about working here / what makes you stay here?
- How does the company plan for (or react to) change?

Next Steps

- What are next steps in the hiring process?

Plan ahead if you have potential “red-flags” in your background.

If you’ve been let go or fired from a position, or have large gaps in your employment history, think through how you’ll address these ahead of time. You’ll want to be honest and upfront, and positive in your responses.

If you’ve moved jobs often or stayed with employers for a short time, expect to be asked about it. Your potential employer wants reassurance that you’re a stable, reliable employee who can deliver results so you’ll need to offer convincing rationale for your job changes.

This should go without saying, but it’s come up enough that we need to say it. Don’t be tempted to bluff your way through an interview question. Honesty and integrity are two of the most important values that hiring managers are looking for in their executives.





Part Two: *Remote Interviews*

Your goal for phone and video interviews is to convey the value you can add to the organization and forge a connection with your interviewers so you're invited in for a face-to-face interview.



You only get one chance to make a first impression, so prepare carefully and pay careful attention to your technology set-up.



It can be nerve racking to come up with anecdotes for behavioral interview questions and other responses on the spot, so write some notes about the company, your background, and questions you'll likely encounter to help you succeed during the first rounds of your interview.

Learn to ace video interviews to give yourself a huge advantage—few job candidates excel at video interviewing. We have seen just about every possible

mistake made from candidates sitting in front of highly distracting backgrounds (like a table piled with kids' toys) to surprise appearances by family members.

Also, make sure you prevent technical issues during video interviews by setting up your equipment properly and testing everything ahead of time—that way you can focus solely on your performance.

Treat phone interviews like an open book test, keeping your resume and notes nearby.

Prepare your phone interview “cheat sheet” ahead of time with information including:

- The interviewer’s name, title, job responsibilities and years of service (check out their LinkedIn profile, if available, to gather this information).
- A few major facts about the organization that you learned in your research, such as years in business, the names of the products and services they offer, state of the industry, etc.
- Your elevator pitch, which is a short summary of your work history, qualifications and why you are right for this position. Try to word it more like an intriguing story than just a recitation of the bullet points on your resume. Practice until you can recite it naturally as you will likely be giving a version of this pitch multiple times throughout the interview process.
- You will likely be asked some of the behavioral based questions shared in the previous section, so prepare a few stories or anecdotes about how your unique skills helped you accomplish a major feat in your career or overcome an obstacle.
- At least 3-5 questions to ask the interviewer based on your research. Note, this is not the time to ask questions about benefits or compensation.

Tip:

Even though the interviewer can’t see you, make sure you stand and smile during the phone call. It comes through on the phone and does wonders for making you seem more confident, friendly, and capable.





Mastering your technology and set-up is key to interviewing effectively on video.

- Choose a location in front of a blank wall or bookcase so your background is clean and free of clutter or distractions. **Do not sit in front of a window as this will cast a shadow on your face.**
- Place your laptop or camera at least an arm's length away and positioned so the camera is slightly higher than your head (use can use a stack of books if needed). Your camera should be at the height of the top of your head and pointed down into your eyes.
- Set a tall lamp next to your computer on the side of your face that you feel is your better side. Adjust the lamp so it is in line with and slightly behind your computer and the light falls nicely on your face.
- To add some fill light on your face, put a piece of white posterboard or a white tablecloth on the table you are sitting at (ideally making sure it can't be seen in the frame).

- If your connection speed is too slow, there's a high chance your video is going to look pixelated and you'll experience audio delays. If you type "internet speed test" into Google and then click "run speed test" you can make sure your connection is fast enough.
- If your connection is slow, you may need to use your cell phone as an internet hot spot to ensure adequate speed. Another option is to invest in a mesh Wi-Fi system like Google Wifi or Amazon's Eero that lets you connect multiple wireless access points together to ensure you have a strong connection throughout your home.
- Test the video-conference platform ahead of time. Frequently you will have to download a driver or app to run the video-conference program.
Do this before your scheduled interview time so you are not late.
- Most built-in microphones on laptops have poor audio quality, you'll likely need to wear a noise-cancelling headset with a built-in microphone or use an external microphone. Have a test call with a friend to make sure your audio sounds good and make adjustments to your set-up if needed.

Reminders:

- First impressions matter, so always wear a suit for your interview.
- Lock the door to the room to make sure no roommates, family members, children, or pets enter during the interview.
- Make sure you smile.
- Enthusiasm is key; ensure you can easily articulate why you are excited about the company and the position.
- Try to address each person in the conference.
- Turn off or silence your cell phone, tablet and any other devices in the room.
- Keep in mind that connections can be delayed, so pause for a few seconds when the interviewer finishes speaking to avoid talking over them.
- If using a mobile phone app, be sure to use a tripod or stand to avoid shakiness that occurs when hand holding your phone.

Showcase your soft skills

A video interview is an opportunity to showcase the other skills that make you not only an effective leader, but also the type of leader people in the organization will want to work with. These “soft” skills can mean the difference between getting the position or not getting it. Consider your video interview to be the perfect time to demonstrate that you have these abilities:

Listening

When the interviewer describes an aspect of the position or a problem the company needs to solve, can you actively listen, comprehend the issue, and show that you understand it?

Communication

How effective a communicator are you? Are you able to speak and write in concise, easy to understand sentences? These types of traits are often conveyed during an interview. When you're interviewing, you'll want to speak clearly and slowly so your interviewer understands you.

Body language

Do you have confident, professional body language? During video interviews, it also helps to adopt a positive demeanor and smile when appropriate. Sit up straight and nod to show recognition.

Adaptability

Your video conferencing app may not work when you need it to. Don't get flustered by these types of issues. If something does happen, adopt an unflappable attitude that will show your interviewers how you're able to “roll with it” even when things don't turn out as expected, turning a negative into a positive.

Leadership

If a company is looking at you for an executive role, they want to know that you can assess the organization's capabilities at a high level, and either keep it steering on the right course or prescribe how to get it there. That's why you'll want to show up to the interview with some sort of strategic plan in place for your position. It might not be fleshed out until you understand more about the role, but companies will want someone who's forward-thinking.

These types of skills can help give you an edge, showing that you're well-equipped to succeed in the role.



1485 International Parkway | Suite 2051
Lake Mary, Florida 32746
407.788.7308
kirbypartners.com