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Winning the Job

**If at first you do succeed,
try something harder.**

Ann Landers

This is probably an all-too-familiar story. A couple of years ago, a buddy, whom I'll call Zachary, was feeling intensely frustrated that he wasn't getting the recognition at work he felt he deserved.

But let me backtrack a little. When I first met him at university, Zachary was a looming, burly guy with an unruly shock of muddy-blond hair and a tendency to deliver the most witheringly sarcastic put-downs I'd ever heard. Upon graduating in the mid-1990s, he started his career by taking a job as an accountant with a medium-sized accountancy firm. He specialized in the provision of tax advice and over the next decade was promoted a handful of times.

He occasionally felt discouraged by the fact that a few of his colleagues were promoted more rapidly. But he was otherwise happy with his life: he got married, bought a house with his wife and now has two energetic, wide-eyed daughters. And at least he was still making headway in his career, so he stuck with the job.

He was promoted to become a senior manager about six years ago. But then his career stalled. Many of his fellow senior managers were offered a further promotion to become partners with the firm. But not Zachary. The first year, the executive board in charge of electing new partners told him that they didn't think he was quite ready.

He was told that he needed to build stronger relationships with clients. So he worked on his client relationships. Only to be informed the next year that he hadn't done enough.

He worked harder over the following 12 months, putting in longer and longer hours. But guess what? Again, the executive board told him that he hadn't quite done enough.

Zachary eventually decided to look for a new job. He got in touch with recruiters and alerted contacts within his network that he was actively seeking a move. Within eight months he landed himself a bigger job as an associate partner in a competing firm. He got a whopping 26 per cent pay rise. And a year later, when he was promoted to become a full partner, his pay package more than *doubled*.

So let's think about your situation for a moment. Would *you* like a pay rise?

Silly question probably. You probably feel you are ready for a promotion. You may know that you have the skills and talents that would allow you to take on more responsibility – to manage a bigger budget, team or project. But perhaps you feel hacked off that your current boss is unable to recognize your value and give you what you want.

If so, it's time to wake up. The unfortunate reality is that the quickest way to get a pay rise and more responsibility is invariably to get a new job. Bosses often get stuck in the past: they may have got used to having you around. Maybe they still see you as the office junior. Bosses are risk-averse when it comes to promoting employees they already have. It's usually much easier to get a pay rise by taking a bigger role elsewhere than by waiting, waiting, hoping for your bosses to notice that you're better than the person you used to be.

Maybe you're already on the hunt for a job elsewhere or just thinking about one in the months or even years to come. Whatever the case, in this chapter I'll take you through what science – as well as my own deep experience of working with both employers and candidates – can share about finding a lovely new job.

Rather than telling you stuff that you already know, though, I'll share with you some peculiar but useful findings about the interview tactics that get people hired. We'll debunk myths about body language during job interviews. We'll uncover the real power of informal networks when it comes to landing a job. And, once you've been offered that new job, we'll discuss a sneaky but proven tactic for negotiating a bigger salary.

The quickest way to get a pay rise and more responsibility is invariably to get a new job.

Impressing at interview

Ever heard the saying that it's not *what* you say, it's *how* you say it that counts? In support of this idea, there's a widespread claim in many pop psychology books stating that:

- 55 per cent of what we communicate is done through body language – our posture, movements and facial expressions
- 38 per cent is through tone of voice
- and a mere 7 per cent through words.

This 55–38–7 rule is based on a classic piece of research which many life coaches and trainers have misinterpreted.¹ If we were to believe the claim, it suggests that 93 per cent of the impact we have on others is nothing to do with the words we choose. But if you stop to think about the claim, it can only be utter rubbish.

Imagine that two candidates, Peter and Patricia, are interviewed for the same job. Patricia talks about her relevant skills and experience but does so in a quiet, somewhat uncertain tone. She makes little eye contact and clears her throat a few too many times. She sits in a slightly hunched fashion and, by the way she keeps shifting in her seat and running her hands down the sides of her skirt, comes across as a little nervous.

On the other hand, Peter speaks with a loud, assertive voice. He makes unflinching eye contact and sits with a confident, upright posture in his chair. He makes expansive gestures with his hands when he talks. He smiles frequently, flaunting a mouthful of movie star white teeth. Unfortunately, in answer to every interview question, he replies: “I’m a fraud and a liar as I have no relevant skills or experience for this job.”

The misquoted 55–38–7 rule would suggest that Peter would get the job based on his strong body language and tone of voice. But obviously his words would have quite a powerful impact on us – certainly more than the meagre 7 per cent they are supposed to have on the interviewer.

But we don’t have to rely only on intellectual games to debunk the 55–38–7 rule. A study by University of Southern Mississippi psychologist James Hollandsworth and colleagues used a statistical technique, known as discriminant analysis, to examine the relative importance of seven different factors on interview performance. The researchers looked at:

- Eye contact.
- Body posture.
- Loudness of voice.
- Fluency of speech.
- Appropriateness of content.
- Personal appearance.
- Composure.

Looking at that list, which do *you* think would matter most and least?

Hollandsworth's results showed that the single-most-prominent factor was the appropriateness of content (i.e. the answers that candidates gave), the stories and explanations they used to elaborate on their skills and experience. The next two most important factors were fluency of speech (i.e. speaking without too much hesitation) and composure (i.e. coming across as calm and confident). All of the other variables were of much less importance.²

Hopefully, none of that should shock you much. But the larger point is this: your answers matter the most. Body language matters far less than you may think. So putting time into preparing your interview answers would be your best investment rather than obsessing unduly about how you come across.

Body language matters far less than you may think.

Answering tough interview questions

If you think back to the job interviews you've attended, what's the strangest, most unnerving question you've ever been asked?

I've heard interviewers ask all manner of questions, including: "If you could have dinner with any six people living or dead, who would they be and why?" and "What's the most crushing experience you've ever faced in your life?"

Thankfully, such odd questions are actually pretty rare. The vast majority of interviewers stick to the same kinds of questions time and time again. In fact, researchers have argued that most employers are actually looking for just eight broad skills – sometimes called the "great eight" competencies.³

Of course, some roles may require special technical skills, but most of these “great eight” skills are simply human abilities that should be as relevant to office workers and managers as to shop assistants, teachers, scientists or even workers on an oilrig. So if you can prepare stories to tell about these eight skills, or competencies, you could feel pretty confident about making a good impression.

Briefly, the eight broad skills are:

- **Deciding and leading:** taking control of situations and exercising leadership. The “deciding” bit involves taking responsibility (rather than waiting for others to decide what to do), calculating the risks associated with different courses of action, making decisions and initiating action. The “leading” bit means giving direction and guidance to others and then coaching and supervising them to get things done.
- **Supporting and cooperating:** helping others and showing respect for people, whether they are colleagues or customers. This means becoming a good team player by listening to others, trying to understand how different folks may be motivated by particular things and adapting to the team. Cooperation entails communicating relevant information to others and consulting them, as well as behaving ethically and showing empathy, tolerance and consideration.
- **Interacting and presenting:** communicating in a confident and credible manner, whether on a one-to-one basis, in groups or when giving presentations. This also includes being able to build rapport, persuade, influence and negotiate effectively with people.
- **Analyzing and interpreting:** evaluating both qualitative and quantitative data to get to the crux of complex problems and issues. This means being able to test assumptions, make appropriate judgements and come up with solutions.

- **Learning and conceptualizing:** researching and gathering information, learning knowledge and then applying it. The “conceptualizing” part includes being able to come up with ideas or innovative products (or services or new ways of working) and successfully introducing change.
- **Organizing and executing:** setting objectives, planning and then managing time and resources in order to accomplish those objectives. This also requires being able to monitor progress, prioritize and take corrective action if things aren’t going to plan.
- **Adapting and coping:** being flexible and accommodating when things change. This also means being able to cope with pressure, handle criticism and bounce back after setbacks.
- **Enterprising and performing:** being able to work with energy and enthusiasm until the work is completed. Enterprising individuals have ambition and look for ways to improve themselves too. Enterprising people also have an awareness of business, commerce and the need to control costs.

As you can see, the “great eight” is a slight misnomer. Some of the competencies – for example “deciding and leading” – actually include a couple of sub-skills. But the broader idea is that most organizations want to hire people who have at least a basic level of proficiency across all of these competencies. So it’s a good idea to have stories at the ready to illustrate that you have each of these skills.

Telling stories that sell your skills

Hopefully you’ll be thinking that we already covered story construction in Chapter 3: Winning the Pitch. And the good news is

that we can apply the “SOAR vividly” technique we encountered in that chapter to the “great eight” competencies too.

I recommend flicking back to that earlier chapter for a reminder of the components of the “SOAR vividly” technique. But briefly, you may recall that the idea is to tell stories that cover the situation you encountered, the obstacles you faced, the actions you took and the resolution that occurred. The “vividly” bit means having at least one or two visual, memorable details to bring the story to life.

In order to prepare effective stories for each of the “great eight” competencies, you could try answering the following questions:

“Great eight” competency	Questions for which you may want to have stories ready
Deciding and leading	<p>“Tell us about a time you had to make a difficult decision.”</p> <p>“Give me an example of a situation in which you demonstrated leadership over others.”</p>
Supporting and cooperating	<p>“Tell us about a time you made a significant contribution to a team.”</p> <p>“Talk us through a situation in which you helped a colleague or customer.”</p> <p>“Think about an occasion your ethics or values were challenged at work. How did you respond to the situation?”</p>
Interacting and presenting	<p>“Please tell us about an occasion you changed someone’s mind.”</p> <p>“Tell us about a presentation you gave. How did you prepare and what reaction did you get?”</p>

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“Great eight” competency	Questions for which you may want to have stories ready
Analyzing and interpreting	“Can you think of a time you faced a complex problem? Talk us through how you analyzed and dealt with the problem.”
Learning and conceptualizing	“Please tell us about a skill or technical topic you had to learn about. How did you learn about it and then apply it?” “Give us an example of something that you created, introduced or changed at work.”
Organizing and executing	“Tell us about a project that you managed. Talk us through how you decided what needed to be done and how you made everything happen.”
Adapting and coping	“Give us an example of a project you were involved with that changed direction. What did you do in response to the change?” “Tell us about a time you experienced a setback or failure. How did you respond?”
Enterprising and performing	“Tell us about a particularly challenging or tough project that you worked on. How did it make you feel and how did you deal with it?”

So what “SOAR vividly” stories would you use to illustrate each of the “great eight” skills? Clearly, your examples should showcase your abilities in the best possible light, so you may want to spend a little time thinking about situations in which you took the initiative and achieved a successful result. Take a glance back at the short bullet-point descriptions of each competency in the section just above this one to guide your thinking.

Once you have stories for these eight skills, you can use them as the core of your interview approach. Say an interviewer asks you

“What are your strengths?” or opens with “Tell me about yourself”, you could list a couple of the skills you believe you have and go on to give an example, “I know I’m very good at planning and organizing projects, for example there was this one time when I . . .”

Go into an interview with good stories to tell and you can feel confident that you’ll acquit yourself well.

Or if an interviewer asked you why you thought you would be suited to the job, you could answer by talking about how your talents perfectly matched the requirements of the job: “Your advertisement said that you’re looking for someone with exceptional analytical and decision-making skills. That’s definitely me because I once . . .” – and then go on to give your “SOAR vividly” story as an example.

I’ve introduced this technique to dozens and dozens of job hunters, from graduates to senior managers, with terrific results. For instance, I recently coached a warm but soft-spoken 22-year-old graduate called Ameena who was preparing for a decisive interview. She had applied to the top veterinary school in the country the year before but had been turned down. Having waited 12 months for a second chance, she desperately wanted to get it right this time.

When I met her and took her through a mock interview, I quickly grasped that she wasn’t articulating her experience well. She had been working as a veterinary volunteer for several months, so on paper had tremendous experience of working with not only animals but also their owners and veterinary staff. But in speaking about her achievements, she spent far too long explaining the situations, the backgrounds to what she had done. And then she pretty much jumped to the resolution, the conclusion of each story. She wasn’t giving me a proper indication of what *her* role had been.

I introduced Ameena to the “SOAR vividly” principle and we worked through a couple of her stories together. She had the experience so it

was just a case of drawing it out of her and helping her to order her thoughts. I kept asking her, “What was the first difficulty you encountered?” and “Exactly what did you do next?” and then, “What was the next difficulty you encountered?” and so on.

It only took her a single 90-minute coaching session to get the hang of the method. We worked on less than a half-dozen stories together, figuring out the best ways to present her experiences. She went away to write up her other stories herself.

A few months later, I got an email from Ameena. She passed the interview and got on the course. She was en route to her dream career.

Having even top-notch skills and the right experience isn’t the same as being able to *articulate* your skills and experience. Figuring out how best to tell your stories may take you a handful of hours. But go into an interview with good stories to tell and you can feel confident that you’ll acquit yourself well.

Beguiling interviewers with words

When psychologists first began researching job interviews as far back as the 1940s, they were mostly interested in exploring how interviewers could ask more penetrating questions in order to separate genuinely superior candidates from weaker ones. For example, these studies suggest that structured interviews (in which interviewers formulate their questions beforehand and ask the same questions of different candidates) are generally more useful for spotting good candidates than unstructured interviews (in which interviewers chat to candidates and rely more on their intuition). How employers can interview more effectively isn’t the focus of this chapter, but I have written a book on the topic if you’re interested – *Successful Interviewing and Recruitment* (Kogan Page).⁴

In the last decade or so, psychologists have shown greater interest in tactics deployed by candidates that help them to get hired. In order to explain how some of these tactics work, I'd encourage you to complete the four short quizzes below. As with any psychological questionnaires, work through the statements in each quiz fairly quickly and answer as honestly as you can.

Quiz A

For each of the four quizzes, think back to the last set of job interviews you had. Please rate the extent to which you agree or disagree with each of the following five statements. Please use a five-point scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
1. I played up the value of positive events that I took credit for.					
2. I described my skills and abilities in an attractive way.					
3. I took charge during the interview to get my main points across.					

(Continued)

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
4. I took credit for positive events even if I was not solely responsible.					
5. I made positive events I was responsible for appear better than they actually were.					

This first quiz measures a candidate interview tactic known as “self-promotion”, which involves emphasizing your skills and achievements and perhaps avoiding or downplaying the negative aspects of your career history. It means picking examples and stories to talk about that showcase your successes rather than ones that expose your faults. After all, why tell interviewers anything that’s wrong with your application unless they specifically ask?

Surveys have found that *the majority* of job hunters admit to using self-promotion to buoy their chances at interview.⁵ And, more importantly, many groups of researchers – including a team led by the influential academic Brian Swider at Mays Business School in Texas – have found that candidates who engage in self-promotion are usually rated more highly by interviewers than those who don’t.⁶ By carefully choosing the experiences they talk about, self-promoting candidates are typically judged to be the strongest candidates.

How did you rate yourself on self-promotion in the quiz? The more you agreed with the questions in Quiz A, the more you self-promote. And the more you self-promote, the more likely you will be to make a good impression and get offered the job.

If you're wondering how to self-promote more effectively, take a look back at the five statements in Quiz A. Self-promotion is about taking control of what you wish to talk about rather than being subjected to the whims of the interviewer. It's about being assertive about what you've achieved rather than hoping that an interviewer may ask you the right question.

The more you self-promote, the more likely you will be to make a good impression and get offered the job.

How can you do that? Prepare "SOAR vividly" stories, of course. And then find every opportunity to swerve onto those stories during the course of an interview to highlight your best side.

Quiz B

As with the last quiz, rate your agreement or disagreement with each statement in relation to the last employment interviews you attended. Please use a five-point scale where 1 = "strongly disagree" and 5 = "strongly agree".

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
1. I exaggerated the impact of my performance in my past jobs.					

(Continued)

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	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
2. I exaggerated my future goals.					
3. During the interview, I distorted my answers to emphasize what the interviewer was looking for.					
4. I distorted my work experience to fit the interviewer's view of the position.					
5. I enhanced my fit with the job in terms of my attitudes, values or beliefs.					
6. During the interview, I distorted my answers based on the comments or reactions of the interviewer.					

Quizzes B and C measure similar candidate tactics, so have a look at Quiz C and then I'll explain about both afterwards.

Quiz C

Again, rate your agreement or disagreement with each statement in relation to the last employment interviews you attended. Please

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use a five-point scale where 1 = “strongly disagree” and 5 = “strongly agree”.

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
1. I fabricated examples to show my fit with the organization.					
2. I told stories that contained both real and fictional work experiences.					
3. I stretched the truth to give a good answer.					
4. I invented some work situations or accomplishments that did not really occur.					
5. I used other people’s experiences to create answers when I did not have good experiences of my own.					
6. I described team accomplishments as primarily my own.					

Quiz B measures an interview tactic known as “slight image creation”, which is a more aggressive tactic than self-promotion. Look back at Quiz B and you’ll see verbs such as “exaggerated”,

“distorted” and “enhanced”. Slight image creation therefore involves overstating, embellishing or adapting answers beyond a reasonable description of the truth in order to fit the job. So candidates may deviate slightly but purposely from the truth to either emphasize desirable characteristics or foster a better impression.

Quiz C measures a stronger version of the tactic known as “extensive image creation”. Look back at the wording of the statements in Quiz C and you’ll see more aggressive verbs such as “fabricated”, “invented” and “used other people’s experiences to create answers”. Extensive image creation involves intentionally constructing stories about non-existent experiences, inventing accomplishments that never occurred and stealing other people’s stories. If slight image creation is a mild form of deception or dishonesty, then extensive image creation could be viewed as blatant lying or deceit.

The more you agreed with the statements in either Quiz B or Quiz C, the more you are likely to have engaged in either slight image creation or extensive image creation, respectively.⁷ But is that good or bad when it comes to trying to get a job?

The same study by Brian Swider and his colleagues at Texas A&M University found that both slight image creation *and* extensive image creation led to *worse* interview scores. In other words, misrepresent your experience or suitability for the job and you may *reduce* your chances of getting hired.

Swider and his team suggest that self-promotion (as covered in Quiz A) leads to better interview ratings because it merely involves highlighting actual skills and experiences. It’s about talking about what you genuinely did, but doing so by framing it in the best way.

On the other hand, both of the image creation tactics may backfire because they are forms of lying. As such, interviewees have to work much harder to control not only what they are saying but also their emotions and other behaviours, such as facial tics, tone of voice and so on in an attempt to make their lies seem believable.

It's possible that candidates who engage in either form of image creation may struggle to keep their emotions or behaviours in check and therefore come across as less personable and less confident because they have to work harder cognitively to keep their stories straight. Or maybe they get rated poorly because they are simply more likely to get caught out.

Misrepresent your experience or suitability for the job and you may reduce your chances of getting hired.

The clear moral then: even though it may occasionally be tempting to exaggerate or lie, we may end up harming our own chances rather than enhancing them.

Quiz D

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
1. I praised the organization.					
2. I complimented the interviewer or organization.					

(Continued)

HOW TO WIN

	1: strongly disagree	2: slightly disagree	3: neither agree nor disagree	4: slightly agree	5: strongly agree
3. I discussed non-job-related topics about which the interviewer and I shared similar opinions.					
4. I discussed interests I shared in common with the interviewer.					
5. I indicated my interest for the position and the company.					
6. I found out what kind of person the organization was seeking and I explained how I would fit in.					
7. I indicated my enthusiasm for working for this organization.					
8. I smiled a lot or used other friendly non-verbal behaviours.					

The eight statements that make up Quiz D measure a tactic known as “ingratiation”, which involves flattering the organization and expressing beliefs or attitudes held by the interviewer or the organization. For example, if an interviewer mentions in passing a personal dislike for the game of football, a savvy candidate who decides to engage in ingratiation could say, “Oh yes, I can’t stand it either.” Or a candidate may say something positive about the organization such as, “Well, you’re definitely the top law firm in the country” or “I’ve applied to six other firms, but yours is the one I aspire to work for most because . . .”

So if you agreed with the statements in Quiz D, you are likely to engage in more ingratiation than people who disagreed with the statements. But is that good or bad? What do you think?

When I first came across ingratiation as a candidate tactic for manipulating interviewers, I thought that surely interviewers would be able to see through such transparent attempts on the part of candidates to flatter and sweet-talk them. But I was wrong.

Researchers such as Chad Higgins at the University of Washington and Timothy Judge at the University of Florida have found that ingratiation actually has not only a positive effect but also a powerful one. Candidates who engaged in ingratiation were judged to be significantly stronger candidates and therefore were more likely to get offered the job than those who didn’t.⁸ Making an effort to appear interested and upbeat pays off.

Making an effort to appear interested and upbeat pays off.

Now you may be wondering: isn’t ingratiation just another, perhaps milder, form of deception? For example, some would say that it’s

wrong to pretend that you like or dislike something simply because an interviewer expresses an opinion.

But isn't at least some of success at work about pretending? In dealing with customers, clients and even bosses, many people report portraying a role rather than being entirely themselves.

Employees ranging from shop assistants and restaurant waiting staff to airline cabin crew and hairdressers frequently have to hide their true emotions and project a more upbeat image than they may actually be feeling. Financial advisers, lawyers, doctors, psychotherapists and teachers may at times feel frustrated or bored with their clients, patients or students and need to put on a professional demeanour.

Many of us have at least occasionally wanted to scream at our bosses and tell them how unreasonable they're being. However, we know that it's generally a better idea to keep our true thoughts and feelings to ourselves.

In fact, business school professors have even found evidence suggesting that people who adopt self-serving interview tactics such as self-promotion or ingratiation don't just get more job offers; *they may actually be more successful on the job too.*⁹ These academics suggest that being able to follow an interviewer's lead and showcase your best side during an interview means being able to put on a show with customers, clients and colleagues too.

Taking all of this research together, we know with some certainty that both self-promotion (Quiz A) and ingratiation (Quiz D) pay off. Of course, I'm not saying that you *should* or *must* engage in such tactics. All I'm doing is reporting on what research tells us. Whether you feel comfortable engaging in such manoeuvres is ultimately and entirely up to you.

Tweaking your interview persona

You could think of self-promotion as putting forward the best aspects of yourself and ingratiation as being positive and complimentary. If you're looking to get hired more quickly, how could you change your behaviour in your next interview?

Take a look back at the individual statements in both Quiz A and Quiz D to see exactly what each tactic consists of. What specific behaviours could you adopt in your next interview?

Using body language to best effect

Earlier on I recounted a study by James Hollandsworth and colleagues which found that our words and fluency are the two biggest factors in determining interview success. But that doesn't mean that body language doesn't matter at all.

To reiterate, the most important step in preparing for an interview is to ensure that you've got killer "SOAR vividly" stories to tell. That looks after what you could say. Next comes practising them by rehearsing them out loud enough times so that you tell your stories in a composed and fluent fashion. Only then should you think about your body language.

I'll cover body language only briefly, because you'll probably be surprised by none of the findings in the research:

- Candidates who offer firm handshakes tend to get better interview ratings than those who don't. This is equally true for men

and women candidates. Candidates who offer weak handshakes tend to be viewed as more shy and neurotic.¹⁰

- In a different study, candidates received higher interview ratings when they exhibited certain non-verbal behaviours such as more eye contact, smiling, hand gestures and head nodding – but *only* when the verbal content of their answers was good. When candidates' interview responses were judged to be poor, it didn't matter how much eye contact, smiling and so on they displayed.¹¹ So eye contact, smiling and other body language cues do make a difference – but yet again this study shows that *what* you say still matters most.
- Contrary to popular opinion, it does *not* matter whether you sit with your arms folded in front of you or even behind you and hooked over the back of the chair. Even though we're often told that sitting with crossed arms may be a sign of defensiveness, it seems that interviewers don't notice. British researchers Ray Forbes and Paul Jackson also found that interviewers don't notice candidates' legs either – whether you sit with your legs in a crossed or uncrossed position or whether you sit still or move your legs about.¹²
- The same study by Forbes and Jackson also found that body posture doesn't influence interviewers' ratings either. Whether candidates sat back, sat forward or sat upright made no difference.

When I'm coaching job hunters on how to sell themselves effectively during interviews, they sometimes say that they are worried about having to choose the right words *and* control their body language at the same time. But the good news is that you may not have to for very long.

Several studies show that interviewers tend to be unduly swayed by their first impressions. In one investigation, for example, an elite

squad of researchers led by business school professor Murray Barrick asked interviewers to chat informally to candidates for three minutes before interviewing them more formally for between 30 to 45 minutes using a set of agreed questions. The academics found that interviewers' first impressions at the three-minute mark were strongly related to the scores that they gave candidates after the full interview. In other words, those swashbuckling candidates who made a strong impact during those first few minutes generally received higher interview rating scores; candidates who fumbled those crucial first three minutes tended to receive much lower interview ratings.¹³

The lesson: work extra hard during those first few minutes. Offer a firm handshake. Make strong eye contact. Flash your teeth in a big smile and find something positive to say about the organization. Work at being particularly eloquent and effusive for a mere three minutes and you set yourself up for the rest of your interview.

Studies show that interviewers tend to be unduly influenced by their first impressions.

Getting invited to more interviews

What can you do if it's not the interview stage that's frustrating you but the fact that you wished you could get invited to more interviews?

You've probably heard the adage that it's not *what* you know but *who* you know. But is it true? Does science support what we're all being told about the power of networking and informal word of mouth as a way of getting hired?

Before we ponder the evidence, let me ask you a question about *your* present employment: by what means were *you* first informed about your current job?

Here are the six options you can choose from:

- By applying to the employer directly.
- By inserting or answering adverts in newspapers, TV, radio, or online.
- Through employment or vocational guidance agencies.
- Through family, friends or other contacts.
- Started own business or joined family business.
- Other.

More or less that same question has been asked of tens of thousands of people in more than a dozen European countries in a major survey called the European Community Household Panel. Analyzing the data, Michele Pellizzari, a world-leading professor of economics at Bocconi University in Italy, published a paper in 2010 finding that 22 per cent of people in the UK said that they found jobs through personal contacts. So that's more than one in five Brits finding work through family, friends or other contacts.

In many other European countries, the proportion was even higher: 24 per cent of individuals in Ireland, Belgium and Austria said that they got hired through informal contacts – nearly one in four people. And a staggering 32 per cent of the French – nearly one in three – said that they got hired through unofficial rather than formal job channels.¹⁴

You can read into the data whatever you like about employers' attitudes about mentoring, sponsorship and outright nepotism across Europe. But you can't escape the fact that networking really is a phenomenally important part of our job seeking toolkit.

When I mention the importance of exploiting personal contacts to job seekers, they sometimes say, “I don’t know anyone important!” But Pellizzari’s study suggests that personal contacts benefit just about everyone. His analysis found that relative youngsters at the start of their careers in their late teens or early 20s were equally likely to gain advantage from personal contacts as seasoned workers in their 50s and 60s. And informal networking was as indispensable for low-earning manual workers as high-flying managers and professionals.

So there’s no excuse not to network. A school leaver looking for a first job on an assembly line is as likely to find work through personal contacts as a chief executive casting around for one last job before retirement. In fact, refusing to network – to ask friends and family for help and recommendations in finding that next job – would be like running a race but deciding not to use your left leg.

Study after study tells us that personal contacts, informal networks and recommendations matter. We know categorically that job seekers who network tend to receive more job offers than job seekers who respond solely to advertisements they found online, in the press or via recruitment agencies.¹⁵

It makes sense that networking should work when you think about it. Companies can get hundreds of applications for every vacancy. And the best way for you as a candidate to get an edge over the competition is to have friends who can point you to job openings, recommend you for interview and advise you on your best route forward. If you’re looking for your next job, can you afford *not* to network?

Refusing to network would be like running a race but deciding not to use your left leg.

Thinking about “reaching out” rather than “networking”

I hope that I’ve debunked some of the mystique around networking. Your network is nothing more than your collection of friends, colleagues and acquaintances. And networking is nothing more than getting in touch with people you know to ask for advice and recommendations.

In fact, I don’t like the verb “to network” – it sounds like something cold and mechanical. Rather than speaking about “networking”, I prefer to call it “reaching out”.

Because all you need to do is reach out to the people you already know – and ask them for a few minutes of their time. If you don’t like the idea of networking, drop the word from your vocabulary and think in terms of reaching out instead.

Think of it this way. Your friends – your mates, pals, buddies – like you, love you and *want* to help you out. If you had to approach just three friends for advice and support in your job hunt, who would they be?

Getting help from a network

Many folks don’t like the idea of networking. But when they try it, they often find that it’s both incredibly worthwhile and easier than they first suspected.

I just finished working with a job hunter I’ll call Veronica. An experienced but timid accountant in her mid-40s with wavy

chestnut-brown hair, she lost her job as part of a company-wide restructuring about a year before we met. She had some savings and so took a few months off to travel the world, going scuba diving off the coast of Thailand and then meandering around galleries and museums in Italy. When she eventually got home, she started looking for work. But after more than six months and zero interviews, she came to me for help.

One of the problems she faced was that she was trying to move from the publishing industry into the technology sector. She felt that publishing was a declining industry and she wanted to give herself more options by moving into the world of online commerce. Unfortunately, she had no experience of working for a tech firm.

Veronica had been relatively passive in her job search so far. She had contacted a couple of recruitment consultants and waited (in vain) for them to put her forward for jobs. And she had responded to dozens of online advertisements without success. But she had done almost no active networking or reaching out to the people she knew.

When I suggested that she would almost certainly benefit from using her network more, she was reluctant. Like many people, she felt that she didn't have a network. Plus, she imagined that networking would involve attending conferences and cocktail parties and having to schmooze and strike up conversations with endless strangers.

But I explained that a network is nothing more than a group of friends who occasionally help each other out professionally. And then I asked her: "Do you have any friends?"

Of course, she replied that she did.

HOW TO WIN

So I told Veronica that we were going to think about how her existing friends could help her out. I began by turning to a new page in my notebook and drawing up a table.

Name	Relationship	Usefulness	Action

I then invited Veronica to bring to mind the names of five people she knew – not just colleagues who may be useful but friends, family, the first names that popped into her head. We wrote these names into the left-hand “Name” column of the table.

To fill the “Relationship” and “Usefulness” columns, I then asked her to rate each person based on how well she knew them and how useful each person could be. I proposed using between one and three stars in the “Relationship” column and between one to three ticks for “Usefulness”.

So three stars in the “Relationship” column meant that she knew someone extremely well – she was great friends with that person. Two stars meant she knew that individual fairly well. And one star meant she knew him or her only passingly.

Likewise, a name received three ticks if that person was fairly senior and worked in the right industry. In contrast, one tick meant that the person was perhaps either more junior or didn’t work in the right industry.

And so our table looked as follows:

Name	Relationship	Usefulness	Action
Mark Brewer	***	✓✓	
Timothy Chang	**	✓✓	
Evan Spence	***	✓	
Nasreen Khan	**	✓✓✓	
Jake Cavendish	*	✓✓✓	

Next, I asked Veronica to tell me a little about each person and then to think about what specific help each individual could be able to give her. What introductions would they be able to make on her behalf? What advice or practical support could each person offer?

Talking through the names she had written down, she explained that Mark was one of her best friends from her university days. She had known him for more than 20 years. He was also an accountant, so Veronica decided that he could help her by critiquing her CV and helping her to rewrite it in as appealing a fashion as possible.

Timothy was a close confidant and an accountant at the publishing company she had left. She felt that he would be more than willing to run through a mock interview with her, perhaps over a couple of glasses of wine one evening.

Evan was another university friend of long standing that Veronica cherished and trusted deeply. However, Evan received only one tick in the “Usefulness” column because he wasn’t an accountant and

he didn't work in the technology sector either. But as he was such a close friend, Veronica decided that she could simply tell him about her situation and ask for referrals to anyone who could be useful, for example friends or colleagues of Evan's who worked in finance or technology.

Nasreen was a friend of Veronica's from an earlier job when they had both worked at a magazine company. Nasreen worked in sales but had successfully made the leap into a senior sales role working at a software company (i.e. in the tech industry). So Veronica decided that she could talk to Nasreen in order to learn about the tech world in general. Veronica felt that Nasreen could potentially be willing to introduce her to the accountants within Nasreen's current tech employer too.

And Jake was Veronica's ex-boss. She had left the company on good terms with him. She said that he wasn't exactly a close friend but could be instrumental in giving her advice and potentially referring her to senior accountants within other organizations.

So finally, we populated the table to look as follows:

Name	Relationship	Usefulness	Action
Mark Brewer	***	✓✓	Help with CV
Timothy Chang	**	✓✓	Practice interview
Evan Spence	***	✓	Referrals to other people?
Nasreen Khan	**	✓✓✓	Ask about tech industry
Jake Cavendish	*	✓✓✓	Advice, recommendations

Doing that took perhaps 10 to 15 minutes. But I suggested to Veronica that she might want to work on her own to write down the names of 50 people in total and then to go through the same exercise, ranking each person in terms of her relationship with them, their usefulness to her, and so on.

Veronica wasn't entirely convinced about reaching out to her network for help, but I gave her a final piece of advice to help her build her confidence and skill in networking. I told her to begin by getting in touch with the people with whom she had the strongest relationships but who were the weakest in terms of usefulness. That way, she could ease herself into the task fairly gently – she only needed to pick up the phone or meet up with her closest friends, the people she already felt most comfortable with.

So Evan (three stars but one tick) should be Veronica's first contact, followed by Mark. Next would be Timothy, then Nasreen. Only when she had practised her networking patten and built up her confidence would she need to get in touch with more challenging contacts, such as Jake.

Tapping your own network

So if you need to reach out to your network for help in landing your next job, start by drawing up the same kind of table:

Name	Relationship	Usefulness	Action

Next, write down the names of *at least 50* people. Go through your address book or emails. Don't leave names off your list because you think someone won't be useful or because you don't think they will help. Just get names down.

Then, as Veronica did, think about the strength of your relationship with them. Close friends, who support and love you, get three stars; acquaintances get one.

Consider how useful each person could be too. Someone who is senior, knowledgeable or well connected may warrant three ticks. Someone less helpful may be two ticks or even just one.

Finally, go back through your list thinking about what specific request you could make of each individual. And then you're ready to start reaching out, to pick up the telephone or ping off emails with the aim of meeting up in person.

This isn't by any means a definitive list, but here are some of the commonest ways that my clients have sometimes decided to tap their networks for help:

- Practice with mock interviews – either by allowing friends to ask you whatever questions they like or by suggesting questions to your friends that you'd like to practise answering.
- Help with your written applications. If you're not getting invited to as many interviews as you would like, it may be worth asking sensible friends (especially those who either work in human resources or may have interviewed in the past) for advice on your CV or résumé and covering letters.
- Information about a role, company or industry. Say you're wanting to switch careers to become a teacher. A sensible first step would be to ask friends who were teachers for insight and advice. Or say you would like to work for a particular company or within a different industry, again you might wish to ask friends who worked there for guidance.
- Introductions to other people. Suppose you aspired to work with a company called Atticus Engineering and needed to find out more about the company and a possible route in. Even if

you didn't know anyone who worked at Atticus, you could ask friends if they knew anyone who worked at the firm or even within the same industry.

OK. That's listing and categorizing your network done. Time now to actually pick up the phone, ping off a few emails and start meeting people.

Reaching out for real

So far we've covered listing and categorizing your network. Now what?

Yes, it's time to actually pick up the phone, fire off a few emails and start meeting people.

Many of my clients agree that it's a good idea to begin by approaching your closest buddies (those three-star contacts) first. Your best mates won't mind if you haven't formulated your career objectives clearly. They will forgive you if you don't come across as perfectly confident or competent.

Only then can you reach out to two-star people and finally your more distant one-star acquaintances. That way, you get to build your confidence and finesse at reaching out one meeting at a time. You discover how to phrase your requests better. You learn how to ask for introductions or recommendations without coming across as too needy. You get better and better while practising on closer friends so that you're a finely honed networker when it becomes time to approach the one-star acquaintances who may have less time for you.

So who will you start with? Look back at your list and pick out three people. Make a pledge to reach out to them within the next 24 hours. That may involve sending out an email or making a quick phone call. But whatever you choose to do, *just get started*.

I'm not saying that you have to work your way through *all* of your three-star contacts before moving on. If you feel after a couple of conversations that you've got your patter worked out and that you're sure you come across as professional and focused, move on to your lower-starred but more useful friends (i.e. those with more ticks). The point here is to practise on low-risk friends until you feel ready to contact more distant acquaintances. That may take only a handful or perhaps a few more attempts at reaching out to different people. Go at your own pace.

Practise on low-risk friends until you feel ready to contact more distant acquaintances.

Finally, remember that between 20 and 40 per cent of people get jobs through informal channels, personal contacts and reaching out to their networks. Give it a go.

Building up your network

OK, so perhaps you're not looking for a new job right now. But that doesn't mean that you may not need to in the near future. More and more people are investing in their networks as a career insurance policy for when they may need to look for that bigger, sexier role.

Networking researchers Monica Forret and Sherry Sullivan suggest that we should all be engaging in 30 separate networking behaviours.¹⁶ Yes, 30!

But who can keep track of so many different activities? Instead, I've gone through their list and selected the 10 simplest, most effective activities.

So if you want to bulk up your network a little, try to:

- Volunteer for committee assignments.
- Send cards, newspaper clippings, emails, etc. to keep in touch with colleagues.
- Attend meetings of professional or trade organizations.
- Assist colleagues who ask for your help.
- Socialize with peers in your profession or trade.
- Volunteer for community groups.
- Offer your special talents or expertise without requiring payment.
- Become involved in promoting a personal cause, e.g. increasing literacy, preventing breast cancer, helping the elderly.
- Attend and participate in community events.
- Meet people who share your interest in a hobby or athletic activity.

Making a commitment to reach out

Nothing on that list of ten networking activities should surprise you. But then the point about networking isn't that it is intellectually challenging. There are no secrets to be revealed that magically allow people to become better networkers.

You've probably suspected all along the kinds of activities you need to do in order to build up your network. It's just a case of putting it into practice.

So here's your opportunity. From that list of ten, pick out at least *three* actions you pledge to take. What actions strike you

(Continued)

as being easy or perhaps enjoyable? Aim to find things you'd *like* to do as opposed to choosing things you feel you *must* do.

Once you've got an idea, turn it into a specific commitment. Decide *what* you will do and *when* you will do it. Go on, jot them down here:

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I work as a business psychologist but I know that I sometimes get a bit lax about maintaining and extending my network. So my three actions would be to:

- Attend the next annual conference of the Association of Business Psychologists, a two-day event.
- Spend a half-hour every Monday afternoon emailing friends and business acquaintances with some snippet of news, enquiring about projects I know they're working on or making helpful suggestions and recommendations.
- Make it a priority to meet at least two contacts weekly – prospective clients, current clients or past clients – over lunch, coffee, breakfast, whatever, to chat and listen to what they're working on.

What would your three actions be?

Asking for a bigger salary (and receiving it)

To finish off this chapter, let's look ahead to the moment you receive the job offer that you've been chasing. You should rightly

feel proud of yourself, but it isn't *quite* time to celebrate yet. You still need to wring out the best possible pay package before signing on the dotted line. And now – when an employer wants you but doesn't yet have you – is the unreservedly best time to ask for more money.

Before I explain about an easy – and, again, scientifically proven – technique for securing a better deal for yourself, imagine for a moment that you are not a candidate looking for a job but an employer seeking to hire someone. Suppose you run a business and have been looking to recruit an administrative assistant. After interviewing a half-dozen candidates, you've decided to offer the job to a professional, friendly and competent woman named Lydia.

You invite Lydia back for a final meeting to discuss how much you will pay her. You already know from your initial interview that she is currently earning £29,000. After exchanging pleasantries, you broach the topic by asking: “So, Lydia, how much will it cost for you to leave your job and come work for us?”

She laughs and replies: “Well, you already know I like your company but I'm only willing to leave if you pay me £100,000 a year!”

She winks and you both chuckle about the preposterous sum. You know it's a joke. You're not going to let her ridiculous number affect your judgement, right?

Wrong. Because research suggests that you will probably end up paying her a salary of around £3,000 more than she would otherwise have got.

Why?

It all comes down to a psychological phenomenon known as “anchoring”. Research tells us that people who are presented with

a number – *any* number, even if it's a totally irrelevant number – tend to be influenced by that number in their decision-making.

American researcher Todd Thorsteinson presented exactly the same recruitment scenario to university students in a 2011 experiment. Just as I did, he asked his participants to imagine that they were employers looking to hire an administrative assistant.

To begin with, all of the participants were told that the candidate – a woman – had been invited back for a salary negotiation. And they were all told that she was currently earning \$29,000.

But here's the intriguing part. Without their knowledge, the participants were randomly allocated into one of three groups.

The first group were then told that the candidate had been asked what salary she wanted and responded by saying: "Would like \$100,000, but really I am just looking for something that is fair."

A second group of participants were told that, in response to a question about her salary expectations, she said: "Would work for \$1, but really I am just looking for something that is fair."

The third group of participants were given no additional information. Remember, though, that they had been told the candidate's current salary was \$29,000.

The researcher then asked the participants in each group to say how much they would offer her to work for them. So what happened?

When the candidate joked that she wanted \$100,000, the participants offered her in excess of \$35,000. But when she self-deprecatingly said that she would work for a single dollar, the participants punished her by offering her in the region of \$31,000.

When participants were given no further information, they offered her around \$32,000.¹⁷

Spelling it out then, the additional sums of money mentioned by the candidate acted as anchors, affecting the participants' decisions without their conscious knowledge. A high anchor of \$100,000 – even though it was an implausibly high salary and mentioned only in passing as a joke – anchored participants' decisions at one end of the scale and pushed their offers higher. Similarly, a low anchor of \$1 – again, it was rhetoric rather than a serious comment – anchored participants' judgement at the other end of the scale and pulled their offers lower.

Anchoring is one of the strangest and most robust phenomena in psychology, and has been demonstrated in scores of studies.¹⁸ But the point I want to make is that anchoring *works*. Mention a high figure or a low sum early on in any negotiation or sales transaction and people end up changing their behaviour – and quite without realizing it.

So what's the lesson for job hunters from Todd Thorsteinson's study? In a salary discussion, it pays to mention a really high salary figure first. That way, you anchor the employer's expectations to a higher figure. And when you ultimately agree to something more reasonable, you will probably end up with a salary that's a good deal higher than you would otherwise have got.

But make sure that you get in a mention of that super-high figure first. If the employer mentions a disappointingly low figure first, the discussion could get anchored in the other direction and drag your final salary down.

And remember to state your request as a joke! You don't want an employer to think that your implausibly high figure is a deadly serious request and storm out of the discussion.¹⁹

In a salary discussion, it pays to mention a really high salary figure first.

To sum up then, Thorsteinson's research suggests that you could potentially earn an additional 10 per cent more simply by making a seemingly frivolous, jokey comment about how much you want. Think about that: *10 per cent*. Would that be worth trying?

Onwards and upwards

- Despite myths about the importance of body language, remember that it's actually *what* you say that matters most during job interviews. Work out "SOAR vividly" stories you can tell about the so-called great eight competencies and you will be able to talk assertively and confidently about your skills and experience.
- Research suggests that candidates who engage in the interview tactics of self-promotion and ingratiation tend to get rated more highly by interviewers. Research also tells us that candidates who distort the truth or tell brazen lies get poorer interview ratings – perhaps because interviewers can detect that something's not quite right. So think carefully about how you present yourself during interviews.
- First impressions really do count when it comes to interviews. Think about those all-important first few minutes. Offer a strong handshake, smile and have something positive or complimentary to say about the organization.
- Research by top economists also tells us that networking works. Many jobs are filled by word of mouth, recommendations and other informal channels. But remember that networking is nothing more than reaching out to ask friends and acquaintances for information, advice and referrals. Reach out

a little more and you may significantly ratchet up your chances of getting your next job.

- Remember that all of these skills can be developed and honed, no matter how good you are at them right now. Recall the research on the gifts versus growth mind-sets (from Chapter 1: Developing a Winning Outlook) telling us that we can all learn and get better so long as we work hard and persist.
- Finally, make the most of salary discussions by harnessing the anchoring effect. Get in a jokey mention of an implausibly high salary expectation and you may well end up extracting a higher salary from an employer than you would otherwise have got.