

The Interview Club

helping
people
achieve
success
in the job
search



info@theinterviewclub.com

OVERVIEW

Tired of practicing your interview skills with your pet?

Are you looking for intelligent, supportive group feedback on your interview answers and a place to network, as well as share job search ideas?

The Interview Club gives you a chance to build confidence in these key job search skills and get constructive feedback. **The Interview Club is a non-profit organization that offers a unique and effective way for individuals to hone their interview answers and interview skills.** The bulk of job seekers typically practice their interview skills in front of a mirror or spouse and rarely have instant, interactive feedback – the Interview Club provides a **forum for constructive verbal job hunting skills practice and feedback.**

Key Benefits include:

- **Networking** - meet with professionals in areas ranging from financial services to brand management to IT; also learn effective techniques for getting the most out of your network.
- **Personal Pitches and Interview Questions** - learn how to sell your accomplishments and skills to potential employers; find out how to know what the employer does and doesn't want to hear on the telephone or in an interview.

The Interview Club is a non-profit organization **dedicated to helping people succeed in the job search.**

MISSION/VISION

As the economy becomes ever more volatile, as competition among business school graduates for jobs has become even more increasingly competitive and as a growing number of professionals seek to advance their careers and make career transitions, it is increasingly more important to be able to communicate and position yourself properly and effectively in networking situations and during interviews.

Our **mission** is to prepare **undergraduate and graduate students, alumni and professionals** for this competitive market by providing a **forum** for constructive verbal job hunting skills practice and feedback.

Our **vision** is to create an environment that develops the student's, the alumni's and the professional's confidence in their ability to understand prospects and opportunities, and **effectively present their personal selling points to prospective employers, networking contacts, etc.**

BENEFITS TO STUDENTS AND ALUMNI

One of the primary benefits for The Interview Club forum participants is exposure to a heightened pressure environment, instant positive strategic feedback and a variety of feedback from other participants and a moderator. Instead of “performing” for one person they have to perform for a room full of their peers, a mock hiring manager and a small evaluation/feedback team. This dramatically increases participants’ preparedness by repetition of messages and themes in their selling message and the depth and breadth of feedback.

In addition to this sharpening of skills through a heightened pressure practice, participants will receive the following benefits from the forum:

- How to create concise and effective messages and delivery
- Build confidence
- Determine which verbal job hunting skills need work and develop effective improvement strategies
- Develop “thinking on your feet” skills
- Understand that no comment or question is innocent in the job process; how to “read between the lines”
- Learn how to manage an interview, phone call or conversation
- Get more meetings (interviews)
- Get more offers

HISTORY

The Interview Club, an all-volunteer organization, was started in February 2001 by **John Murphy** (NYU Stern MBA '00) and **Martin Vonderheiden** as a way to practice their interview skills. **Hamilton Lin** (NYU Stern '00) joined the Interview Club shortly thereafter to help expand its reach and services. Although there are many books, videos, seminars and career counselors for job hunters, one area they noticed that was lacking is intense interview practice. They felt that this very critical step in the process was being overlooked. Preparation is the key to any good sales presentation especially for job hunters and there was a clear need for more opportunities to practice with real feedback.

Since that start, there have been over 40 meetings with over 300 attendees and 100 mock interviews conducted. Numerous guest speakers have come including Allison Hemming from The Hired Guns, Ruth Robbins from The Five O’Clock Club, the founders of the Resume Deli, etc. John, Martin and Hamilton have also conducted full day seminars covering all aspects of the job search with outside career coaches and sales professionals, as well as spoken on job search seminar panels and guest speaking engagements.

The real reward for the club founders has been the success of the participants. From increased confidence to dramatic improvement in prospecting and gaining leads, participants are finding the ability to proactively approach employers and organizations. Finally, dozens of attendees have received job offers (one received five offers over a two month period).

STRUCTURE/HOW IT WORKS

• The Moderator

Each meeting is run by a moderator. This person begins by giving a brief description of how the club runs for new comers. The moderator then directs the meeting, conducts the impromptu interview questioning, sets up the mock interviews and collects group feedback on the meeting.

• The Personal Pitch

This is your 30 – 60 second commercial. It includes what you are doing (or want to do), what are your skills or accomplishments, and what position are you looking for. At the meeting, people can just give a generic pitch. But, members are encouraged to think about the context and find out more about whom he or she is talking to before you go into pitch. This way they will be able to change it or tweak it to really fit the situation.

Participants should be prepared to present their personal pitch of no more than 30 to 60 seconds using the following as a guideline:

- who you are
- what you do
- what you are looking for
- something that stands out about you
- one sentence major accomplishment (tripled sales, doubled portfolio size)
- try to tailor the pitch to the specific person whenever possible

• Impromptu Interview Questions

First, a moderator gets up and starts going around the group and asking impromptu random questions. This gets people warmed up and gives them a chance to answer some typical and some off the wall questions. One member keeps track of the time of the answers and warns people if they go over one minute and thirty seconds. Another member watches for grammar and verbal distractions (umms and ahhs, etc.).

• Mock Interviews

Next, the meeting breaks up into smaller role-playing groups and one or more person(s) volunteer to be a hiring manager and another is the interviewee. We try to tailor the questions to that person's goal and the other members provide instant written and verbal feedback. Other meeting participants become observers and take notes and give ratings to the interviewee on a feedback chart.

Participants should bring copies of their resume.

• Feedback

Another aspect that is important for improving personal selling skills is feedback. Feedback is provided to each attendee following the impromptu interview session and if they are a mock interviewee. The group also gives feedback on the meeting and possible areas of interest/discussion for future meetings.

OFFICERS

John Murphy, Founder
Martin Vonderheiden, Founder
Hamilton Lin, CFA, Founder & Strategist (www.hammi.net)
Lea Brandenburg (www.creatingstrategies.com)
Jens Hewerer
Lynda Carpenter

ARTICLES/BOOK

Attached please articles about The Interview Club from *NY Newsday* and *CareerJournal.com* (The Wall Street Journal Executive Career Site) in addition to a sidebar from *Work It! How to Get Ahead, Save Your Ass, and Land a Job in Any Economy*, a job-searching book by Allison Hemming and published by Fireside (ISBN 0743235495).

TESTIMONIALS

The following are selected testimonials and success stories from The Interview Club attendees:

"Thank you so very much! Being a member of the Interview Club was an inspiration to me. I have never been one to join clubs/support groups. This time I was willing to try anything, and it was extremely worthwhile. Although, I didn't try every idea presented, I tried many. I believe the focus I gained from the Interview Club produced success. Your presentations always had the Focus theme, which helped to keep me on track. Specifically, what I found most worthwhile was:

- * Elevator Pitch*
- * Interview questions with scrutiny on the answers*
- * Especially listening to the answers other gave*
- * Plotting our course for finding jobs*
- * Focus on Networking. Great idea to keep these contacts always*
- * Narrowing our search to be more specific*
- * Scrutinizing our resume*

I am not sure I can ever thank you enough. In any event know that you have a friend at this end of Carol Gardens. Know that I believe in giving back so if you ever need a helping hand, I'll be there. Thanks again!"

*Sincerely,
Lynda C.*

"I think your interview club is really great; I know it takes time to reach out to people. I attended one of your sessions around March, and a few weeks later I got a job. After two years of unemployment, I've been working for 10 weeks. And I got so good at networking recently, that I approached everyone I met about jobs!"

Elissa N.

"Guess what, I am rehired by JPMChase. I am now a Loan Officer and I love this job a lot more than the last one. Thanks for helping me out! ... my boss hired me after a 20 minute interview...He wanted me to start asap so I was in the job in a week and a half ... and they are flying me to California for training next month. Forget about the requirement, MBA, etc... attitude / confidence will do the trick ... I applied for this job 5 times with HR and only once they called and said that I need to be a loan processor first because I have to have 3 years of loan officer experience to be a Chase Loan officer. Guess what, I had only one month of experience and what do you know, I am the dedicated loan officer for 3 branches. Best of luck to everyone and please keep me on your email list."

*Sincerely,
Mary L.*

"I just wanted to thank you for the seminar on Saturday. I really enjoyed it ... I think what you have done is a wonderful thing. It's completely organic and a great community service for the NYC job seekers. I hope that you will be able to expand on this concept in the future and even make a little more than good karma off of it. Please let me know if there is anything I can do. I have already told at least 3 of my friends about it."

Very best regards,
Sally K.

"Well, it looks like you can add another "success story" to your list; after nearly a month of interviews which is probably fairly short in the grand scheme of things), I landed a job as an International Student Advisor with Kaplan Test Prep, a subsidiary (though probably the best-known one) of Kaplan, Inc. I will be assisting students from other countries seeking F-1 visa status in order to study at Kaplan (usually for professional and pre-professional standardized tests), which will hopefully make as much of a positive difference in their lives as all your advice and support have made in mine. Your interview tips were extremely helpful in my (albeit limited) experience, and the practice helped drive home how important it is to just be yourself while giving me the confidence to do so. I wish all of you the best of luck in your job searches – you are among a select few who have the courage to dream and the wherewithal and personal gumption necessary to see yourselves through. A world of opportunity stands open to you, as you have shown me, and I thank you again for your support."

*God bless,
Renate*

"I just wanted to let you that I am starting a new job on Monday at Merrill Lynch. Thank you for all your help – the Interview Club is an extremely valuable information, networking and interview practice resource, and it helped me a lot in my job search. Keep up the great work!"

Best,
Katy

Newsday

A Place to Sharpen Interviewing Skills

By Patricia Kitchen

March 14, 2002, page A42

The job interview was going great.

Mike Schloff, who's looking for work as a project manager or business analyst, sounded confident and at ease as he answered the perennial hiring manager's request: "Tell me about yourself."

Schloff, of Brooklyn, was telling how, on his previous job - back before he opted to go full time for his MBA - he had really enjoyed solving bigger, more complex problems.

And then, out of the blue, it came: The interviewer asked, "So, how old are you?"

Shocked, Schloff answered back in a you're-not-supposed-to-ask-me-that tone, "Age doesn't matter." And, of course, it is an illegal question. Still, his response could have been smoother.

Not to worry, though; this interview wasn't for real. It was role-playing at a new group that has formed to help job hunters in the metropolitan area practice answering just such probing, pesky and, yes, even unlawful questions. Called the Interview Club, it's the brainchild of John Murphy, a laid-off marketing professional, and his friend Martin Vonderheiden, a project manager/trainer/sales consultant, newly moved to New York from Germany.

Based on the thinking behind Toastmasters International, where professionals get together to hone their speaking skills, this group is zeroing in on job search communications. Among them: delivering that short pitch or commercial about yourself; giving brief presentations on job hunt subjects; and answering those zinger questions, like the one that unsettled Schloff one recent evening before the group of about 12 job-hunters in the Zion Lutheran Church basement in Brooklyn Heights.

The idea is - in a supportive environment - to "throw you for a loop, make you sweat a little," so you'll perform better during the real thing, Murphy said. These are the crucial skills, he said, "that are normally only practiced in front of a mirror."

The evening started with participants delivering their pitch. Several mentioned having been laid off and Murphy suggested they stick with skills, accomplishments, position being sought - but no layoff reference.

Vonderheiden then tossed each person an interview question to answer, some straightforward, some curve balls: What are your strengths and weaknesses? What would your former boss have to say about you? Why did you choose your career? Why is your salary so low?

And then came the role play. In an informal debriefing afterward, group members agreed the best approach to the question about age is to dodge. Probe a little to get at the underlying question, Murphy said, "Say something like, 'Are you asking how much experience I have?'"



Endless Interviews Offer Opportunities to Impress

By Kris Maher

If at first you don't succeed, keep interviewing.

That is what Mike Schloff has been telling himself. Since April 2001, he has been through three series of interviews at a major pharmaceutical company, without getting hired. But he is still hopeful.

"At first I took it really personally," says Mr. Schloff, a 34-year-old Brooklyn, N.Y., resident, who has been consulting for a health-care advertising agency for nearly a year. "But I've come to realize it's not necessarily that I botched the interview. There are these other things external to the dialogue that you're having with the hiring manager. That means keep trying, because you still have a chance."

Given that job searches are taking longer than they have in a decade, with more job seekers fighting for fewer openings, many hiring managers are in no hurry to make a decision. Tied down by budget constraints or bad corporate news, worried about blundering with a hire yet flooded with candidates, many managers put applicants through layers of interviews and seek greater consensus from their peers and employees than they might have during the economy's boom years.

In the past two years, companies "have lost some of the discipline of the interview process," says Dan Kaplan, director of recruiting for Fannie Mae in Washington. Mr. Kaplan says Fannie Mae has bucked the extended-interview trend and kept the process streamlined. Most candidates meet with between five and 12 employees, including one or more group interviews and the company's goal is to fill most positions in less than 90 days. "We don't want to abuse our candidates and force them to answer the same questions over and over," says Mr. Kaplan.

Such drawn-out interviews aren't likely to go away anytime soon. And remember that while they can be frustrating, they can lead you somewhere eventually -- if not to a current position, then down the road when hiring picks up. So take a deep breath, cultivate patience and remember some of these tips the next time you get called in for yet another round of meetings:

Take good notes. As the number of interviews at a company multiplies, it becomes increasingly important to jot down notes during and after each meeting, says Brad Karsh, president of JobBound, a Chicago career counseling firm. You need to be able to keep track of what you said to which employee. And detailed notes are also a key to sending a personalized thank-you note after each interview. "You don't want to be reiterating things you've already said," says Mr. Karsh.

That doesn't mean it is bad to make the same pitch to different staffers. "A lot of people say, 'Oh, I can't use the same stories,' but I don't think that's true," says John Murphy, co-founder of the Interview Club, a workshop in New York where job seekers meet twice a month to hone their interviewing skills. It is better to polish the same few persuasive anecdotes about yourself with only slight variations than trying to paint a new picture each time. When interviewers compare notes about you, they will be more apt to identify those key themes you want them to remember.

When an interview process takes months, it is crucial to follow up with several people who interviewed you. Meeting more people gives you more avenues to pursue. Keep track of news about the company and the industry. Without asking for a reply, send articles related to a topic you touched on during an interview. "It tells the person without being terribly intrusive that you're thinking about them," says Taunee Besson, a career coach based in Dallas.

Keeping in touch will also make it easier to call if you get an offer from another company and want to use it as leverage to speed up the process at the first company. Mr. Karsh recommends being creative with follow-up notes, and has even advised clients to send a postcard now and then. He also cautions job seekers not to call and hang up repeatedly if they get someone's voice mail, since many companies have caller-ID phones and it looks "weird" if your number shows up eight times a day on their phone.

Remember that the more interviews you go on, the more opportunities there are to bomb. If that happens once, you can try to correct any negative impressions by sending a polite follow-up letter, detailing any strengths you weren't able to convey face to face. But it may be better to let a bad interview slide, especially if it wasn't with a person with hiring authority.

Networking contacts within a company can often ease your fears in such situations. An inside contact who isn't part of the interviewing process can also tell you how long the process typically takes at the company and who ultimately has the authority to decide who to hire -- a key piece of information to help you push the process forward.



WORK IT!



How to Get Ahead,
Save Your Ass, and Land
a Job in Any Economy

Allison Hemming





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Designed by Diane Hobbing of SNAP-HAUS GRAPHICS

Manufactured in the United States of America

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
Hemming, Allison.

Work it! : how to get ahead, save your ass, and land a job in any
economy / Allison Hemming.

p. cm.

"A Fireside book."

Includes index.

1. Job hunting. 2. Career changes. 3. Résumés (Employment).
4. Employment interviewing. I. Title.

HF5382.7 .H45 2003

650.14—dc21

2002035797

ISBN 0-7432-3549-5

How to Start Your Own Interview Club

Contributed by John Murphy and Martin Vonderheiden

Practically everyone has had a bad interview experience and wishes they could have practiced more. But where can you practice and get constructive feedback? That's what we asked ourselves one night after a tough day of pounding the pavement. Over a few beers at a local pub, we hatched an idea to start an interview club that would help fine-tune our verbal job-hunting skills and those of members we could enlist. Our club meets regularly to practice our interviewing skills, focusing on three major areas: The Personal Pitch, Networking, and The Practice Interview.

- 1. The Personal Pitch.** Think of this as your thirty- to sixty-second commercial. It includes what you are doing (or want to do), what your skills or accomplishments are, and what position you are looking for. We encourage people to plan their pitches ahead of time. Think about whom you'll be talking to before you go into your pitch. This way you'll learn how to tweak your pitch on the fly to fit any situation.
- 2. Networking.** We practice introductions and what to say to a new networking contact, how to ask a colleague or a friend for a contact name or introduction, how to make small talk at an industry function, and how to ask questions without becoming an interrogator.
- 3. The Practice Interview.** Improving one-on-one interviewing skills is the focus of our meetings. To get people warmed up, we toss out random, impromptu questions, giving members the chance to answer both typical ones and off-the-wall ones. We ask a volunteer to keep track of time and warn people if their response goes over one minute and thirty seconds. Another volunteer watches for grammar and verbal distractions (umms and ahhs, etc.). Next, we break the group up into smaller role-playing groups and have one person volunteer to be

a hiring manager and another play the interviewee. We try to tailor the questions to that person's goal and the other members provide instant written and verbal feedback.

Need to hone your interview skills? Start your own interview club—it's a great way to network as well as sharpen your skills—or just try these techniques at home with a friend or two.

John and Martin are co-founders of The Interview Club. John has worked in advertising and marketing for ten years and has delivered presentations in boardrooms and auditoriums. Martin was a consultant for an SAP subsidiary and delivered seminars to over 1,400 professionals. Visit them at: theinterviewclub.com.

CAN YOU PLAY IN THE SANDBOX?

If you're the most qualified person for the position, shouldn't you get the job? Not always. Put yourself in a manager's shoes for a second. Whom would you pick: a candidate with ideal work experience who has dubious interpersonal skills, or a candidate with slightly less experience who has a good attitude and an exemplary ability to work in teams? The latter will win out every time. The right work experience will get you in the door and probably put you in the finalist category, but most managers will agree that landing an employee with fantastic qualifications is not worth destabilizing a well-oiled department. Because it's so important to a manager that all his or her team members work together productively, the people with whom you interview will be looking for insight into the "inner you." Organizational fit, enthusiasm for doing the job, and other wild-card attributes will have a lot to do with whether or not you get an offer.

When you ask a hiring manager why they chose one candidate over