



ACE THAT JOB INTERVIEW! TELL STORIES!

by **Paula Lyons**

Interviewers today, especially those interviewing candidates for the most senior positions, are using the “tell me about” approach more and more: “Tell me about yourself.” “Tell me about a success you’re proud of.” “Tell me about a time you failed, how you recovered and what you learned from that.”

Their goal is to get you to talk about your most memorable accomplishments, biggest challenges, the ways you deal with conflict, how you recover from a stumbles. Why? Because past performance is the single greatest predictor of future success.

Interviewers are trying to get to know you....the kind of person you are, how you approach problems, your style of leading or managing.

And make no mistake...in addition to learning whether your skills and experience are a match for the job, they are also trying to determine if they like you, if you’d “fit in”, if you’d be good to work for and with.

The best way to engage an interviewer and provide answers that are memorable and compelling is to use stories. People love stories; they have since the beginning of time!

Well-told stories are a great way to connect with any audience. In job interviews, they make your accomplishments real. They make you memorable and they enable you to talk about yourself without sounding arrogant or egotistical.

What’s more, employers don’t want “just the facts” about what you’ve done. That’s what resumes are for! They want examples, anecdotes, illustrations, stories so they can literally “see” how you operate and how you would fit in to their organization.

So where do you find the stories to use in interviews? Set aside some quiet time and look for them in:

- Personal challenges, difficult decisions, choices, hurdles, obstacles, athletic contests, wins and losses



- Startling events, major changes, new experiences, anything that you had to work hard to achieve
- Embarrassments, awkward situations, dumb ideas, lost opportunities, failed attempts, turnarounds, last-minute saves
- Inspiring people, remarkable achievements, memorable events
- Travel stories, interesting people you meet, places you've been, discoveries, the unexpected

Identifying your stories is just step one. Next, you have to invest time in shaping and practicing them. Write your stories down, tell them to friends, get some feedback, edit them down to their essential elements. Practice them out loud, over and over, until they literally "flow" from your mouth naturally and convincingly.

Do not skip this step thinking you can just wing it! People who wing it tend to over-talk and ramble. Writing, editing and practicing your stories will make them concise and powerful and help you feel confident telling them.

Stories can demonstrate your:

- dedication
- leadership
- independence
- researching ability
- creativity
- problem solving
- negotiation skills
- attention to detail

Literally anything you want to highlight and makes sense to share at each interview.

Start with a problem you faced and make sure you lay it out in enough detail for a listener to know it was serious, important or difficult to resolve. Then describe what you did to solve it. Not everything! Just the key actions! Describe the result in specific terms, dollar and cents if possible. And make it sound good! Tell what you learned from the process and how you use what you learned today. But again, keep your stories short and to the point. You don't get 5 minutes in a job interview to tell a single story!



Once you are comfortable telling a variety of stories, give some thoughts to which make the most sense to include in each interview, based on the particular job you are seeking.

Here are some typical interview questions to help you get started crafting the stories of your life, stories that will help you ace that job interview!

Tell me about:

- A time you failed and what you learned from it.
- A time when you felt it was you against everyone else. You thought you were right and everyone else was wrong. What did you do?
- A time when you worked with someone who wasn't pulling their weight and had a different value system from yours. How did you deal with this person?
- A success you are particularly proud of.
- A situation at work that required sensitive negotiation.
- The most difficult challenge you faced in your last job? What did you learn about yourself?
- A work experience where you might have stumbled and how you dealt with it?
- A time when you had to influence others. How did you do it?
- A time when you have had to manage conflict at work. How did you do it?
- What were some early career challenges? What did you learn from those? How do you use them now?
- Have you worked on a project with a difficult obstacle, or achieved something great? How did it happen? Why did it matter? What value or principle does it illustrate that you want to demonstrate to others?