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Never say these five things in a job interview

By [Ramit Sethi](#) | [Profit Minded](#) – Fri, Aug 24, 2012 3:54 PM EDT

By Ramit Sethi

We are terrible at interviewing. We walk into the interview room without preparing. We spend time worrying about "trick questions" and about what shirt we should wear, instead of the things that really matter. Worst of all, we believe an interview is intended for us to simply answer the questions that the interviewer gives us.

I say this as someone who's sat on both sides of the table: as a candidate, interviewing against some of the world's toughest companies (like Google and a multi-billion-dollar hedge fund), and as a hiring manager.

Yet once you can master the interview process, you can secure job offers against other candidates who have many years more experience than you. In today's economy, knowing how to interview is a killer skill.

That starts with knowing what to avoid doing in a job interview, or what I call "5 Interview Killers."

1. "I just sort of... and then... and like... and uh... yeah."

If you ramble, you lose.

Think back to when you last met someone and asked them a simple question ("So, what did you do at Acme Corp?"), only to hear 6 minutes of irrelevant details. How did you feel?

Now imagine this happening in a job interview. Interviewers aren't just evaluating your technical skills. They're using the "Airport Test," asking themselves, 'Could I see myself being stuck in an airport with this person?'

Like it or not, we're evaluated on our personality as well as our skills. And if you can't give a tight, concise answer in an interview, the interviewer will wonder if you'll be able to do it in your job.

2. "Yeah, I helped out with that but it wasn't just me."

Humility is a great trait, but going out of your way to be self-deprecating is an interview turn-off.

You should always be candid about your role, but your interviewer doesn't care about your team dynamics or organizational chart. He wants to know what you did. He wants to know how you think. [He wants to know about YOU.](#)

If you keep downplaying your accomplishments, how is a hiring manager supposed to value you enough to hire you?

It's okay to be proud of the work you've done. It's okay to be confident. Try it: Practice saying, "I'm glad you asked about that project. I'm really proud of the results we got, including a 13% revenue increase in 6 months." See how that makes you feel.

Does it feel uncomfortable the first time? Of course. We're not used to talking about our accomplishments without downplaying them. But the fifth time you practice your confident answers, it will start to feel natural.

3. "I left my last job because I didn't really get along with my boss."



Is the interview going well?

We've all had bosses from hell, but an interview is not the place to trade war stories.

Take the high road: "I really enjoyed working at Acme Corp. One of the things I appreciated was being able to grow my skills in email marketing, but now I'm ready to take my skills to a bigger stage. That's why I'm excited to work with you..."

4. "I work too hard."

What's your biggest weakness?

Interviewers love to ask this question because it separates the top performers from the average workers. The most common -- and worst -- responses are trite: "I work too hard" or "I have trouble saying no to responsibility."

Hiring managers aren't stupid. They can see right through these canned responses.

So what is the right answer to a question about your biggest weakness?

Look for the "question behind the question." What interviewers really want to know is that you're self-perceptive enough to acknowledge your weaknesses -- which we all have -- and that you've taken recent action to improve them.

So instead of a canned answer, explain what a real weakness you have and how you've worked to fix it. Include specifics. Point to conferences you've attended or projects you've taken on.

That's how you answer the weakness question and nail the interview.

5. "I made 40K at my last job, so I'm really looking for something more like 50K. But you know...I'll be willing to take 45K too."

Your interviewer will always want to know how much you made at your last job. But it's not your responsibility to tell them.

In fact, you put yourself at a severe disadvantage if they know your salary. For example, if you tell them you make \$50,000, and the hiring manager was prepared to offer you \$60,000, you've just lost thousands of dollars from one sentence.

Even in this economy, few companies will reject you for simply not answering the salary question. That's because it costs thousands of dollars to recruit the average candidate. If they really want you, they'll make you an offer, and you can negotiate from there.

When they ask for your salary, here's your line to use: "I'm sure we can discuss salary when the time is right, but for now I just want to see if there's a mutual fit for you and me."

Negotiating can be tough, but it can be worth thousands of dollars to you (here's [how to negotiate your salary](#) the right way).

There you have it -- 5 Interview Killers to avoid in an interview. Avoid these blunders and watch your interviewing success skyrocket.

If you're curious what you SHOULD say in an interview, I've put together a [free mini-course on improving your interview skills overnight](#).

Ramit Sethi is the author of the New York Times bestseller, [I Will Teach You To Be Rich](#). Get his free techniques and word-for-word scripts at <http://www.iwillteachyoutoberich.com>.

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