

# HALDANE'S

BEST

# Answers to Tough Interview Questions



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BERNARD HALDANE ASSOCIATES

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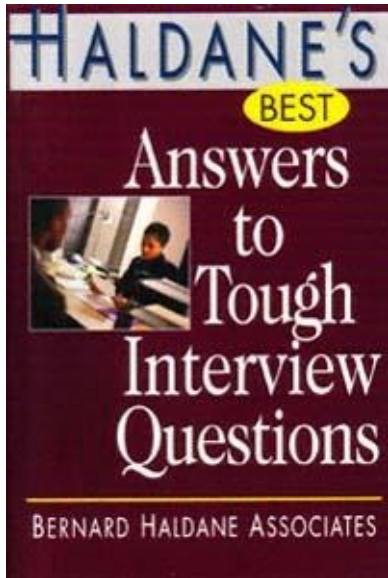
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**1—****Job Interviews Get Jobs**

If you think resumes, letters, and Internet job searching get jobs, think again. These job search activities are prerequisites to getting a job interview. Indeed, the job interview is the single most important step in the job search process. No interview, no job offer. Do well during the job interview, and you may be offered the job. Do poorly during the job interview, and the door may permanently close behind you.

So how can you best prepare for interviews that lead to job offers? What types of interviews will you encounter? What questions are you most likely to be asked? Do you know how to best respond to different types of questions? What questions are you prepared to ask? How well do you communicate nonverbally? How can you best influence the hiring decision after the job interview? Can you negotiate a higher salary?

**Lessons From Experience**

Since a job interview is the single most important prerequisite to a job offer, you simply must do well in the interview. Fortunately, a great deal has been written about the "do's" and "don'ts" of job interviews. Not surprisingly, most books focus on sample questions and answers to the most frequently asked interview questions. Others include examples of questions the interviewee also should ask. Overall, few books include interview strategies that relate to other stages in the job search, especially self-assessment, research, networking, and resume and letter writing.

This is a very different interview book. It combines interview strategies with examples of interview questions that should be both answered and asked during two different types of job search interviews—referral



interviews and job interviews. Based on more than 50 years of experience in working with more than 600,000 clients, we at Bernard Haldane Associates have learned a great deal about what works and doesn't work for job seekers. In the following pages we share with you the many lessons and secrets of conducting interviews that result in job offers and renewed career success for hundreds of our clients each day. We present interview strategies, as well as examples of interview questions and answers, that truly reflect the job search experiences of our clients. While our clients disproportionately represent professionals earning in excess of \$50,000 a year, with many being executives earning well into six figures, the interview strategies and examples we present here are applicable to most job search situations. Indeed, individuals first entering the job market should find valuable advice to assist them in preparing for both referral and job interviews.

## Interviews in Your Job Search

Interviews play a critical role at various stages of your job search. They help determine whether or not you are "qualified" for the position in question. But being "qualified" means different things to different people, including interviewees and interviewers.

At Bernard Haldane Associates, our clients always do first things first by following a well-developed sequential set of job search activities that function as prerequisites for landing job interviews:

- Conduct a thorough self-assessment using the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Success Factor Analysis
- Formulate a targeted objective
- Conduct research
- Write resumes and letters
- Network

These job search steps are outlined in our companion volume, *Haldane's Best Resumes For Professionals*. While many of these steps are relatively passive activities—conducted alone or with the assistance of a career professional—networking and interviewing are the

or not you will be offered the job. Knowing this, you should pay particular attention to the nonverbal messages you are likely to send during the job interview. The very first messages occur during the first five seconds when an interviewer sees how you dress and groom for the interview and how you greet the interviewer. Do you look, feel, and sound great for both the position and the organization?

While the job interview is the ultimate goal of such job search activities, it is not the only interview that should take place during the job search. As part of the networking process, our clients also develop powerful **referral interviewing skills** which aim at eliciting important job information, advice, and referrals that ultimately lead to job interviews and offers. Referral interviews play a central role in determining whether or not an individual is the perfect "fit" for a job. In many respects, referral interviews may be more important to landing a job than actual job interviews! As you will see in the remainder of this book, both referral and job interviews go hand in hand. You must be skilled in handling both types of interviews.

### **Prepare for the Perfect Interview**

You've probably heard the maxim oft repeated by realtors that the three things that count the most when selling a house are location, location, and location. Haldane Advisors share a similar maxim with their clients. Indeed, the three things that count the most when selling yourself in a job interview is preparation, preparation, and more preparation. The homeowner can't change the location of his or her house to make it more marketable, but you can do everything to make yourself more marketable in a job interview.

Preparing for job interviews is some of the hardest work you will ever do. But the payoff—not just a job offer—but the right job for you, is your reward. And what happens if you don't prepare adequately for your job interviews? You don't get the job offer? Probably not getting the job offer is one result, but that's just for starters. The negative ramifications are far more numerous and pervasive than just not being offered the job. In addition:

- You waste your time going to the interview
- You waste the interviewer's time.

- You nullify any likelihood of being considered for any other position at a later time by this interviewer or this company.
- You create a situation in which negative comments about your interview (translate: negative comments about your skills, knowledge and abilities) are networked to other employers who may be of interest to you in the future.

So the truth is that you cannot afford to take shortcuts on any of the steps necessary to prepare for each and every job interview. If the interview is not worth enough to you to put in the necessary time to prepare adequately, then the job is not worth getting. If the job is not worth getting, why waste your time and the interviewer's?

Preparation will be a frequent theme running through this entire book. For if you are well prepared in every aspect of "interview readiness" you are at least 90 percent of the way to getting a job offer before you even leave home! Even though it is the actual interview that most people are apprehensive about, your hardest work is done prior to the interview. From preparing examples of effectiveness, anticipating questions the interviewer is likely to ask you, preparing questions you want to ask the interviewer, to preparing your interview image—these are just a few of the areas in which you need to be well prepared. If you have prepared thoroughly, you can walk into your interview relatively calm and completely confident. Just as the most important work a basketball player does is before he runs onto the court or a concert violinist's hardest work is prior to walking onto the stage, the most important part of your winning the job offer is done **before** you walk into the interview!

### **Do You Work to Live or Live to Work?**

T.G.I.F.—"Thank goodness it's Friday!" How many times have you heard it? How many times have you said it? How often do you hear T.G.I.M.—"Thank goodness it's Monday?" For most people, going to work is a chore, but we look forward to the weekend when we can do what we want. What does this say about our attitudes toward our jobs? What if you could look forward to going to work each day with the same zest and anticipation you feel for the weekend? Yes, we know some people do. But we think they are the exception. Steven Spielberg

This cycle of misemployment should not and need not happen to you. The Haldane approach to career building is to coach each individual to identify his or her strengths and then help those individuals to identify and find jobs that are fulfilling to them. Genuine motivation comes from within you—not from your mother's aspirations for you or your employer's admonitions to do better work. If you have work that is fulfilling, work that you enjoy, work that allows you to use your strengths, you will be motivated. You can wake up on Monday morning looking forward to the weekdays ahead.

### **Benefit from the Haldane Approach and Network**

While the information in this book will help you conduct referral and job interviews on your own, at the same time, you may want to take advantage of the Bernard Haldane Associates network of support services which consists of hundreds of career professionals, called Career Advisors, in more than 80 offices in the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom (see the Appendix for a complete listing of this network of offices). Anyone can conduct a job search on his or her own and find a job. But we assume you don't want to find just any job. You want a high quality job that is the right "fit" for both you and the employer—one you really enjoy doing and one that benefits both you and the employer. Unfortunately, the novice do-it-yourself approach often results in taking shortcuts rather than doing first things first. For example, most job seekers begin their job search by first writing their resume rather than doing the necessary foundation work that should be the basis for their resume and other key job search activities, such as networking, interviewing, and negotiating. After all, they say, isn't that what you're supposed to do first, because that's what others always do? Some, as indicated by the popularity of resume example books, even go so far as to creatively plagiarize others' resumes. By following the crowd, they literally put the horse before the cart and thereby immediately handicap their job search with an ill-fitting resume that may communicate all the wrong messages!

You owe it to yourself to present your very best self to employers. That means taking the time and spending some money to do first things first when conducting a job search. The prerequisite foundation work involves self-assessment and goal setting—two activities that may be best done with the assistance of a professional career advisor or career

thing possible to ensure success. Individuals use their time efficiently, remain focused, and handle well the psychological ups and downs of finding a job. Without such a long-term commitment and structure to move through the process expeditiously, individuals tend to conduct a haphazard job search, experience lots of psychological downs, and short-change their future by conducting a relatively ineffective job search.

Unfortunately, some career operations also are fraudulent. They take your money in exchange for broken promises. The promises usually come in the form of finding you a job. Many of these firms promise to do all the work for you—write your resume, broadcast it to hundreds of employers, and schedule interviews. All you have to do is write a check for this service and then sit back for the phone to ring. While this may sound good, because it appears to be a quick and easy way to find a job, such an approach is antithetical to the more than 50 years of Haldane experience.

At Bernard Haldane Associates we believe in doing first things first and coaching job seekers to do their very best. You team up with an experienced Career Advisor who literally takes you step-by-step through the complete career planning and job search process, from assessment, goal setting, researching, and resume and letter writing to networking, interviewing, and negotiating salary. Our clients also have access to Haldane's new Career Strategy 2000 electronic program. Designed specifically for Haldane's clients, this rich and powerful electronic program uses the Internet for conducting research, networking, distributing resumes, and targeting employers. We do not find you a job. That's not what we do nor should be doing for you. Instead, we help you find your own job through a well-structured process. This is an important distinction often lost in the job search business. It's a distinction that is central to writing a Haldane resume and conducting Haldane referral and job interviews that should ultimately represent the "unique you" to employers.

### **Communicate Your Likability**

As you prepare for interviews, keep in mind what employers are looking for in today's job market. They first and foremost want to hire competent individuals who are qualified to take charge and produce results. Hopefully, you know what you do well and enjoy doing, you have specific goals, and you have produced Haldane-principled resumes

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## Determine Your Interview Readiness

Preparation is the key to interview effectiveness. If you go to an interview without thorough preparation, don't expect to do well. You will literally cheat yourself and those involved in the interview by selling yourself short. To market yourself effectively, you simply must prepare well for the interview. To make a decision that is right for you as to whether you want to invest part of your life working for this organization depends in large measure on how well you have prepared before you go to the interview. How well you market yourself for the position—and sell yourself—depends on your advance preparation.

### Being Prepared

Most people head off for their job interviews ill-prepared. In some cases, it is because they did not know how to prepare; in other instances, they thought they could shortcut the process. Relying on their perceived people skills and cleverness—"I have always been good at talking with people; I can bluff my way through this too"—is a mistake some make. As a result, they present themselves poorly. After a frustrating period of going for interviews and not getting job offers, they may accept the first job they are offered—even though they have a nagging feeling that this isn't a job where they want to spend their time or one that will advance their long-term career goals.

Throughout this book we will examine many areas requiring thorough preparation. Before we begin, it should be useful for you to take stock of how far along you are toward being ready for an interview. The list of statements that follows comprises what we call your "Job Interview Readiness I.Q." You should review these statements prior to each interview you have scheduled, since preparation for one interview does

not guarantee readiness for another interview. The work you did to fully prepare you for one interview may only partially prepare you for the next one. After all, both the participants and the situation will change. As these elements change, additional preparation will be necessary to meet the new situation.

### Check Your Interview Readiness I.Q.

If you can respond in the affirmative to each of the following statements, you should be well prepared to face the job interview. A solid, unequivocal "yes" to each statement should give you confidence that you will interview well.

- |  |     |    |
|--|-----|----|
| 1. I know what I do well and enjoy doing   | Yes | No |
| 2. I can describe to another person in a concise statement what work I want to do  | Yes | No |
| 3. I have prepared a minimum of 50 examples of my effectiveness (past accomplishments.)  | Yes | No |
| 4. I can talk specifically about what I can do for this employer by selecting the appropriate example(s) of my past accomplishments (Taken from my examples of effectiveness.) | Yes | No |
| 5. I have kept abreast of developments in the industry in which the job I want exists by reading:  |     |    |
| • general news magazines (Time, U.S. News & World Report, Newsweek)  | Yes | No |
| • business publications (Fortune, Forbes)  | Yes | No |
| • industry publications specific to my targeted job  | Yes | No |
| 6. I have gathered information about the company/government agency where I will be interviewing by:  |     |    |
| • investigating the company/agency Website   | Yes | No |
| • talking with people who work there   | Yes | No |

## 3—

## Interview Myths

Over our lifetimes most of us have heard a lot about the job search in general and the job interview in particular. Some of the advice is useful. However, much of it is now outdated and some may never have been productive for the job seeker. For example, many questions that might commonly have been asked in a job interview 25 years ago may be considered illegal, discriminatory, or inappropriate today. Limiting one's search to the reactive mode of responding to help wanted ads and sitting back hoping to be called for an interview was never a good job search strategy!

Let's look at several commonly held job interview myths and realities to get a better understanding of what works best. We will look in greater depth at the realities in later chapters.

**MYTH #1: Every interview in my job search will be a job interview.**

**REALITY:** Some of the most fruitful interviews you can engage in are referral interviews. These are interviews which you set up and conduct to gain information, advice, referrals and to be favorably remembered. Referral interviews often lead to job interviews and provide invaluable information for your later job interviews—including the process of negotiating your salary.

**MYTH #2: My resume will get me the job. If I write an excellent resume, I don't have to worry about anything else.**



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## Types of Interviews

Job seekers who are unprepared may assume there is only one type of interview and one interview format. It is to your advantage to recognize and be prepared for different interview encounters. For in the end, each type of interview plays an important role in your job search.

### Two Different Types of Interviews

At Bernard Haldane Associates, we prepare our clients for two different types of interviews: referral and job. The **referral interview** is usually initiated by the job seeker who is actively involved in a networking campaign; this interview primarily focuses on acquiring information, advice, and referrals and is aimed at key decision-makers. The **job interview** is initiated by the employer and primarily focuses on screening candidates for a job offer.

While most job seekers only focus on preparing for the job interview, Bernard Haldane Associates know the importance of referral interviews and their clients actively seek them as part of their proactive job search campaign. Indeed, the referral interview often plays a key role in landing the perfect job. Neglect the referral interview and you may miss out on some of the most important job opportunities of a lifetime! As our clients remind us again and again, it's often the referral interview that resulted in by-passing the competition and landing the job.

### Interviewers and Interviewees

Many interviewers are seasoned professionals who are well prepared to conduct each interview. Most Human Resource personnel you en-

counter will probably fit this description. You may however, encounter an interviewer who conducts interviews infrequently, seems uncomfortable in that role or perhaps seems unprepared for your particular interview. A line manager, who interviews infrequently, might fall into the second category.

*Neglect the referral interviews and you may miss out on some of the most important job opportunities of a lifetime!*

The two most important things are that you ask questions to gain the information you need and that you convey information to the interviewer that emphasizes your accomplishments. You must convey that you can do the job and that you are a good fit for the position. Unless, of course, you and the job are a misfit. If you are certain there is not a good fit, share this with the interviewer and ask to be referred on to someone who might have need of your skills. But be careful about ending your relationship with the interviewer prematurely. Perhaps you are not a good fit for this job, but as you engage the interviewer and focus on your strengths and accomplishments, he/she might be so impressed he will find another position for you within the firm where you are interviewing. It has happened to many Haldane clients.

## **Referral Interviews**

Referral interviews are not the same as job interviews. You, the job applicant, ask for, set up, and conduct referral interviews as part of your networking activities. Often overlooked by job seekers, referral interviews are an important step toward the ultimate goal of landing a job. Once you have identified your success factors and have a targeted job objective, you should talk with people who work in your area of interest.

You have five basic goals in a referral interview:

- establish rapport
- get information
- get advice and reaction to how you are conducting your job search

- extend your network of contacts
- be remembered favorably and actively by those you interview

The value of referral interviews cannot be overstated because these interviews will impact on every other aspect of your job search. Someone with whom you conducted a referral interview may hear of a job opening that fits your accomplishments and your goals. He or she passes your name on to the hiring manager who calls you for an interview and you are later offered the job. You conduct a referral interview with a firm that has no openings in your line of work at that time, but later the interviewer remembers you when a vacancy occurs and you are called in, interviewed, and eventually offered the position. During your informational interviews you ask about salary ranges for the position you are targeting. Later, when offered your targeted position at another firm, you use the salary information you gathered during referral interviews to negotiate a higher salary than the employer initially offered.

*The key to referral interviews is to never ask for a job. Ask instead for information, advice and referrals.*

Conducting referral interviews can be one of the most powerful job search strategies you employ. Sometimes referred to as informational or networking interviews, because they offer an opportunity to gain so much information useful to your job search, they often result in referrals as well. Your goal is not to get a job with these people—only useful information, advice, and contacts for more information, advice, and referrals. Chapter 5 will focus on referral interviews.

## **Job Interviews**

Expect to encounter several types of job interviews. Most job seekers will experience some combination of these six types of job interviews:

- Screening
- One-on-one

- Sequential
- Series
- Panel
- Group

Questioning techniques within each of these interviews can run the gamut—from standard questions about your education, work history, and personality to behavior-based questions which attempt to probe your capabilities to make decisions, handle people, solve problems, and take important initiatives in the future. Some employers also like to ask stress questions. In the end, all of these interviews and questions are aimed at determining whether or not you are a good "fit" for the organization.

### **Screening Interviews**

The screening interview may be the first of several job interviews you have with an employer. Whereas the referral interview is sought and conducted by you, the interviewee, the various job interviews—every interview other than the referral interview—are scheduled and conducted by the employer. The purpose of a screening interview, as the term implies, is to screen people in or out of further consideration.

Employers choose to use screening interviews because they save time and money. They save time because they can be conducted more quickly than other types of job interviews. Since they only attempt to decide whether a candidate is worth the time of a full interview, marginal candidates can be dispensed with more quickly. Screening interviews are less costly in part because they take less time and time is money. Screening interviews are especially frugal interviews to conduct when several of the candidates are from out of town. Rather than bring in ten candidates, if the employer can narrow the list to three by conducting screening interviews by telephone, both time and money have been saved.

Although screening interviews can be conducted face-to-face, especially in the case of job fairs, most screening interviews are conducted by telephone. If you receive a telephone call from an employer—no matter what the ostensible reason for the call, assume that you are being screened and take this call as seriously as you would any job interview.

*Studies in communication indicate that much of our message is communicated nonverbally—as much as 90% by some estimates.*

Studies in communication indicate that much of our message is communicated nonverbally—as much as 90% by some estimates. This is divided between visual aspects, which will not be available in most telephone interviews, and paralanguage—the vocal cues. The most important thing your voice can convey is your enthusiasm. Keep an appropriate level of dynamism in your delivery!

### **One-on-One Interviews**

Face-to-face, one-on-one interviews are the most common type you will encounter. The applicant and the employer meet, usually at the company offices, to discuss the position and the candidate's skills, knowledge, and abilities—in other words the "fit" between you and the job opening. While a screening interview is likely to be conducted by someone in human resources, subsequent interviews are more likely, though not necessarily, conducted by someone from the department where the position is open. This person may be a department manager for lower and mid-level jobs and someone from upper-management—perhaps a vice president—for high level positions. If the interview is conducted by someone from the department with the open position, you can expect the interviewer to ask many specific job-related questions. If the interviewer is from human resources, the questions may be more general.

### **Sequential Interviews**

For many positions—especially those beyond entry-level—there will be more than one job interview. Multiple interviews are the rule, rather than the exception, for higher level positions. In fact, one Haldane client was interviewed 14 times by the same company before he was hired! Sequential interviews are simply a series of interviews with a decision being made either to screen the candidate in or out of further consideration after each interview. The candidates who make the cut are called back for another interview. Although each interview is frequently a one-

on-one interview, the candidate could meet with more than one representative of the company at the same time. The candidate could meet with different interviewers in subsequent interviews or meet with the same person who conducted the previous interview. Usually if there are several interviews, the applicant will meet additional persons from the organization rather than just the same person over and over again. However, the previous interviewer may be part of a future mix of individuals.

When sequential interviews are planned, the first interview(s) will usually deal with job issues—the fit between the applicant and the open position. Terms of employment, such as salary and benefits will not likely be discussed, and certainly not in depth, until an offer is, or is about to be made. This can work to your advantage as you have additional opportunities to value the position as well as opportunities to share your accomplishments with the employer.

### **Series Interviews**

Like sequential interviews, serial interviews consist of several interviews. But whereas a decision was made after each of the interviews in the sequential interview process as to whether a candidate would be called back for another interview, serial interviews are set up as a series from the beginning and no decision is made concerning the candidate until the entire series of interviews has been completed.

Usually the interviews are scheduled with a variety of people. They may consist of several types of interviews and be held over one or several days. A candidate may meet with a vice-president of the company early in the day and then have a series of meetings with a couple of department managers during the morning. A lunch meeting may be scheduled with additional managers, after which the candidate may return to meet one-on-one with a series of additional people. The evening may be free or may continue with dinner at a nearby restaurant or in someone's home. The next day may bring additional interviews or an opportunity for the candidate to demonstrate his or her skill in some way. A candidate interviewing for a faculty position may be asked to teach a class, an advertising executive may be asked to present part of an advertising campaign, or a salesperson may be asked to sell a product.

If you find yourself engaged in a series of interviews, make sure to treat each interview with each different person as if it were your first.

After talking all day with a series of individuals, some candidates become mentally fatigued and don't focus as well on their accomplishments or their dynamism wanes. Remember this is your first interview with this individual. Remain focused on getting the information about the position that you will need to sell yourself and later to make your decision when you are offered the job. Be sure to answer questions fully—even though this is the third time you've been asked that question in the same day. Continue to sell your strengths and maintain your dynamic presentation as you respond.

*If you find yourself engaged in a series of interviews, make sure to treat each interview with each different person as if it were your first.*

## **Panel Interviews**

Panel interviews occur infrequently—less frequently these days than they once did. But you need to be aware of them since it is possible you may encounter one. In a panel interview, you are interviewed by several people at one time. Whether intended or not, the panel interview produces greater stress for the job candidate. After all, you have more people to analyze and respond to simultaneously which puts you in an inherently reactive situation. Some panel interviews are intended to put pressure on the applicant—part of what the employer wants to discover is how well the interviewee maintains composure under stress.

If you find yourself the center of a panel interview, take a deep breath and try to remain calm. Take each question one by one, ask for clarification if the intent of the question is not clear or the scope extremely broad. Ask for the opportunity to respond to the important question posed by one interviewer before being pushed into a response to a question by another one of the panel members. Chances are the content of your answers is less important in this situation than your ability to remain unflustered in the face of stress.

## **Group Interviews**

While an uncommon interview type for most positions, group interviews do take place. They may be most likely conducted for jobs in

## 5—

### **The Referral Interview**

For more than 50 years, Bernard Haldane Associates has pioneered one of the most effective job search techniques for getting job interviews and offers—the referral interview. Known in some job search circles as networking and informational interviews, this technique has proven successful for thousands of our clients. Indeed, many of our clients identify the referral interview as the single most important technique they used in getting a job. Without the referral interview, their job search would have taken a different path and perhaps resulted in a less than satisfactory outcome. A sometimes controversial technique, nonetheless, it works to the benefit of both the job seeker and employer. When done properly, it is the most powerful job search technique you can use for both shortening your job search time and landing a job that is right for you.

### **The Haldane Networking Approach**

The Haldane networking approach is designed to create a set of contacts that generates both information and support. It links you with people who can help you now and whom you can help later. The network can begin with people you know, such as friends, relatives, and professional associates. You can then expand your network to include individuals in your specific career area whom you don't know at present. A well organized networking campaign will result in building a large network of individuals, many of whom will literally become your eyes and ears for information, advice, and job leads. Rather than get a job by responding to a formal job announcement (classified ad or Internet posting), you'll land a job through your personal networking activities—perhaps before a job is ever announced. Your networking activities re-



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sample content of Haldane's Best Answers to Tough Interview Questions

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