

What Makes You Stand Out? Your REV Points

*If you want to stand out, don't be different;
be outstanding.*

Meredith West



In most interview situations, you have competitors for the job – maybe two, maybe half a dozen. You won't get the job just by being qualified – you need to stand out, and you need to be remembered.

Completing this chapter will prepare you to do exactly that.

Some applicants have tried to be memorable by using gimmicks – singing their interview responses, or wearing a tuxedo to show that the meeting was “a very special occasion.” This will, indeed make someone stand out – but as a person of poor judgment, not as the right person to hire.

Let's plan how you will stand out for the best possible reasons.

I'm going to ask you to look at how you stack up against your competition. That may sound a bit daunting, but if you set aside your fears and take it one step at a time, by the end of the chapter I think you'll find your confidence has increased.

Less Is More: The Importance of Focus

Interviewing is a process of educating the interviewer. Educators know that if you hit someone with a huge bunch of facts willy-nilly, they may not learn anything. People learn better when the presentation is organized around a few core concepts.

Interviewing is also like sales and marketing. People in this field know that you don't sell a car by running through every feature it has. You focus on just a few: it's hip, cheap and fits into the smallest parking spaces. Or it's rugged, good-looking and roomy. You're competing for customers' attention, so you grab it with something simple and easy to remember.

In sales, these are often called "key selling points."

In an interview, the "product" you're selling is you. If that sounds awful, let's remember that you're not selling your soul – just clearly communicating the skills, expertise and personal strengths that will make you valuable to an employer.

In fact, let's get away from sales terminology. I call these your "REV Points," because they work best if they're **Relevant, Exceptional and Verifiable (REV)**. I'll say more about that later in the chapter.

Listing Possible REV Points

Right now, take a few minutes and jot down the top 10 reasons why an employer should choose you over the competition. (Later I'll ask you to narrow it down to no more than five.)

To help think of these, ask yourself questions like these:

- + What qualifications or skills do I have that are hard to find?
- + What do I do better than most of my peers?
- + What would my co-workers and managers say if I asked them what makes me valuable?
- + What have they appreciated most about me?
- + Am I the best at something, or the first, or the only one?
- + Is there an important area in which I am exceptionally knowledgeable?
- + What part of my job am I most passionate about? Am I especially good at that?
- + Do I have an exceptional record of promotions or career growth?
- + What is my most impressive professional accomplishment of the past five years?
- + Do I have more education, training or certifications than is usual?
- + Have I won awards or been formally recognized for superior work?

Narrowing It Down

Now, let's pick the three to five points on your list that will be most impressive and convincing to an employer – the ones that will really sell you. To do that, as I suggested above, they need to be very Relevant, Exceptional and Verifiable.

Here's what I mean by these terms.

Relevant: A relevant qualification is in demand by employers. Study several job postings for the type of job you want, and underline the important skills, qualifications and qualities the employer is looking for. Which seem to be the top priorities?

Think about the likely *pain points* of your target companies – the problems that are eating into their profits or making them look bad. Skills that can help solve these problems are powerfully relevant.

Exceptional: An exceptional quality or qualification is one that *stands out*. Probably all of your competitors have experience in multi-tasking. But can they all speak Mandarin with the company's Chinese clients?

Working with me on his REV Points, Roger said, "The number one reason they should hire me is my integrity." But it didn't make his final list of points to emphasize. Why not?

Yes, integrity is hugely important in life and in work. But it's something employers tend to assume or take for granted until proven otherwise. In most cases it won't make you stand out in an interview.

Other qualities often seen as common include: hard working, intelligent, a people person, a good communicator. If you are *truly exceptional* in one of these areas, you'll need to prove it.

Verifiable: By this I mean that the item is not just a claim

or opinion. It's something you can prove or give evidence for.

Facts are naturally verifiable. Let's say you believe your graduate degree is a key selling point. No problem, this is a fact and it can be verified with a background check. Likewise, your work experience is a collection of facts that can be verified.

Skills can be tougher, especially soft skills like communication. Most job applicants claim to have excellent communication skills. By itself, this claim is so subjective – such a matter of opinion, really – that it's almost meaningless. *Until you give evidence for it.* Your evidence might be something like this:

- + The skillfulness of your spoken and written communications with the interviewer. (Thus, you're demonstrating these skills rather than just claiming to have them.)
- + A story about the time when you diplomatically sorted out a misunderstanding and kept a client from leaving.
- + The fact that you were sought out to provide coaching or training to new hires – especially if you were the only member of the team asked to do that.
- + The fact that you wrote documentation that reduced service calls 50%.
- + The fact that you worked on the school newspaper or consistently got A's in your English classes (if you're a recent graduate).
- + LinkedIn recommendations praising your communication skills.

Now your claim of exceptional communication skills has credibility!

You'll notice that we're using these terms – verify, prove, evidence – a bit loosely. We're not talking about proving your skills with legalistic or scientific precision. The point is to be able to back up your claims enough to make them reasonably convincing to the interviewer.

Examples: Three Interviewees and their REV Points

Linda Smith, Human Resources Manager

1. Broad, abundantly demonstrated expertise in Employee Relations, Labor Relations, Compensation and Benefits, HR Information Systems and Analytics
2. Talent for strategic thinking (with stories to prove it)
3. Several awards for creating successful programs and initiatives
4. Inspires a loyal and high-performing team (proven by stories, LinkedIn recommendations and team members' career advancement)
5. MBA

Rick Johnson, Energy Efficiency Engineer

1. Five years experience in energy efficiency engineering
2. Experience conducting ASHRAE level 1, 2 and 3 energy audits leading to an average of 20% energy savings per building

3. Relevant advanced degree
 4. Member of Technical Advisory Committee drafting Cordoba County's first Green Building Ordinances
- Denise Williams, Sales Manager**
1. Track record of consistently over-achieving goals and earning awards in Fortune 500 companies
 2. Exceptional talent for effectively anticipating and navigating change through cross-functional collaboration (with stories to demonstrate this)
 3. Learns quickly and positively impacts the bottom line within the first few months on any job (stories)

Which of your top 10 points really REV? Pick the top three to five and prioritize those in the order of how Relevant, Exceptional and Verifiable they are.

Together, these points make up your REV Agenda: the messages you will make a point of communicating throughout your interviews.

Now start memorizing these points. Put this list in a place where you'll see it every day. Look at it often. Do whatever you have to do to get it etched into your mind.

Congratulations! You have just built an extremely powerful tool that will help you not only in your interviews but throughout your job search, by focusing the minds of potential employers on a short, easy to grasp, easy to remember list of what makes you stand out as the person to hire.

Will Your REV Points Be the Same for Every Job?

No, your REV Points may vary as you apply to different jobs. For example, Sheila was applying to various jobs in nonprofit development (fundraising). When she applied at health-related organizations her MA in Public Health became a key selling point. At animal welfare organizations, her years of volunteering in her local animal shelter became more relevant.

However, if you're finding that all of your selling points are completely different from one interview to another, it may be that you're spreading yourself too thin in your job search. You may want to focus on identifying what you really do best, and proactively going after that.

How Will You Use These REV Points?

- ♦ **Emphasize them** throughout the interview process. These points go a long way toward creating your brand or unique identity in the employer's mind.
- ♦ **Know them by heart.** It's hard to build your communications around these points if you're constantly having to go searching for the list.
- ♦ **Take responsibility for educating your interviewer on these points.** If you meet an unskilled interviewer – for example one who asks the wrong questions, or one who talks the whole time and never listens – watch for opportunities to get your message across.
- ♦ **Start the interview with them.** People tend to remember what came first. A recent poll showed that 50% of employers believe they know within the first

five minutes of an interview whether a candidate is a good fit. Focus those first minutes on what's important by making these points the basis of your answer to the first question in the interview, which is often "Tell me about yourself."

- ♦ **End the interview with them.** People tend to remember what they hear first, but also what they hear last. Include some or all of these points in your closing statement at the end of the interview, as well as your follow-up communications.
- ♦ **Develop stories (examples) from your work to bring each of these key points to life in your interviews.** (In brief bullet form, these stories can also greatly improve your resume and LinkedIn profile.)



Speaking of stories, you've probably heard that these are important in interviewing, and that you'll need a lot of them. How many do you need? How can you remember them when you need them? How can you make sure you'll tell them in a way that's clear, concise and memorable?

The next chapter will answer these questions, while helping you build an impressive, confidence-boosting tool kit of stories that *vividly demonstrate why you're the right person for the job.*

Harnessing the Power of Stories

We learn best ... from hearing stories.

— John Kotter



What if you had a technique that would physically activate an interviewer's brain to make them pay more attention to you, grasp what you're saying more clearly, believe it more easily, and keep you at top of mind longer?

There is such a technique: storytelling.

Ordinary business communication – “I have extensive skills in yada yada yada” – engages only a small fraction of the brain, the parts that process language and logic. Stories do much more, activating multiple brain regions that work together to create multisensory, three-dimensional images and feelings. It's not just a description but an *experience*, so it's more convincing and more memorable.

Stories are a powerful way to communicate your skills in an interview, including those REV Points you developed in Chapter 1.

A Familiar Story?

I wonder if you identify with parts of this story.

Dan's "Broken Phone" – and How It Finally Rang

In four months of job search, Dan had completed a total of 11 interviews that went nowhere. He joked, bitterly, that his phone must be broken. It certainly wasn't ringing with offers.

Dan was a talented professional. He knew he could *do* the job. He just didn't know how to *talk* about his abilities.

Having read that he should tell stories, he had thought of a few, but not enough to get through a long interview. And when he told stories he would trip over his words, rambling on too long, uncertain where to stop and ending awkwardly. The interviewer would frown slightly, make a note, and move on to the next question in a neutral, uninterested tone.

And Dan wouldn't hear back. Maybe this sounds like the story of your life recently.

But the story's not over.

The Interview Success Project

One day, Dan said to himself. "Enough! I'm going to learn how to do this right."

He decided to approach interviewing the same way he would handle any challenging project that could earn him a great promotion: He would do some research, follow best practices and do the necessary work to ensure success.

Realizing that he might need 10 stories or more for each interview, and that employers in his field were

requiring multiple interviews, Dan set a goal of getting 20-30 good stories that would illustrate his value to employers.

Setting aside a few hours one weekend, he followed the instructions in this chapter and was able to tell 25 stories. He identified interview questions his stories could answer, practiced telling his stories, and got feedback from others on how the stories worked.

His next interview sparkled with anecdotes as he told a vivid, convincing picture of his outstanding work. The interviewer's eyes lit up with interest and the time flew by.

In the end, Dan's phone rang with offers – from several companies, and he was able to choose the job that was most appealing to him.

This chapter will guide you to overcome the challenges that initially held Dan back and to transform your interviews and their results.

You will learn:

- + How to gather and develop stories that highlight your key REV Points, those key reasons why you're the best person for the job.
- + How to have enough stories – more than you can tell – so that you don't run out even through multiple interviews at the same time.
- + How to tell your stories clearly and concisely.
- + How to remember the right story at the right moment.

SOAR: Anatomy of an Effective Story

A good interview story tells about a challenge you faced, the actions you took to solve it, and the results you achieved.

You may have seen acronyms like CAR (Challenge, Action, Results), PAR (Problem, Actions, Results) and SOAR (Situation, Obstacles, Actions, Results). Each of these acronyms provides a framework or model for telling a story. They're all good. ("Challenge," "Problem" and "Situation" all mean pretty much the same thing.) I'm going to use SOAR. So let's look at the parts of a SOAR story.

Example: Rob's Story "Implementing SuccessSuite"

Situation: "At the Cooper Company I realized our business management software wasn't helping us work efficiently."

Actions: "I researched the options, selected SuccessSuite, learned it, helped configure it and trained our staff on it."

Obstacle(s): "Management initially said SuccessSuite was too expensive. I prepared a presentation that changed their minds."

Results: "Efficiency was increased by 40%."

You may have noticed that this particular story has Actions before Obstacles, as if it was an "S-A-O-R" story instead of "S-O-A-R." That's okay, because the parts don't have to go in any particular order, although it's important to describe the Situation early in the story in order to set the scene.

The first thing you can learn from SOAR is *how very*

concise a story can be. If Rob needs to tell his story in 15 seconds, he can do it (possibly leaving out the Obstacle for brevity). That will come in handy, as you'll see later. On the other hand, he can easily expand into more detail.

Your Stories List

Start a new document in your computer called Stories List. Save it someplace you can easily find it, because you'll be referring to it often.

For each story in your list, I suggest you fill in the following:

Title:

Situation:

Obstacles:

Actions:

Results:

Let's get started. **Think of any work accomplishment you are proud of.** It may be a problem you solved, a process you improved, or a time when you went above and beyond your normal duties to get a job done. Now give that story a specific, unique title, like "Resolving Production Backlog last May" or "Filling In for Terry." Write that down in your list.

Then jot down a few words about the Situation, any Obstacles that arose, the Actions you took, and the Results. **There's no need to write full sentences or go into detail – you already know the story, and you won't be turning this assignment in!**

Once you've filled it all in, go ahead and tell the story

out loud (of course leaving out the title, which is just for your own reference).

Thinking about how you told your story, what worked well? What didn't?

Making SOAR Stories Work

Let's look at some tips for succeeding with each part of your story.

Situation

- **Put the story in context.** Saying which job it happened at may be all the context you need. You may want to mention the year, particularly if it's recent, because employers especially value recent accomplishments.
- **Identify the pain points.** If the situation was causing wasted time, lost money or missed opportunities, make that clear (without casting blame on yourself or others in your company).
- **Keep it brief.** You're just setting the scene for the next three parts, which are more important.

Obstacles

- **Obstacles are optional – they're a "plus."** You can have a perfectly good story that goes straight from Actions to Results. However, sometimes there was a big obstacle – an economic downturn, a microscopic budget, an aggressive deadline – that you overcame, making the story all the more impressive.
- **Focus on the skillful way you overcame the obstacle or led others to do so.** If the obstacle was

overcome through sheer luck or someone else's efforts, why mention it?

- **Be tactful** if others in your company created the obstacles!

Actions

- **Give just enough detail but don't get too granular.** If you're not sure how much to say, err on the short side, jump ahead to the Results, then ask the interviewer if they'd like to know more.
- **Watch out for "we."** The employer isn't considering hiring your team, just you. That doesn't mean you mean you can *never* say "we," just make it clear what part you played.

Results, Results, Results!

- **Don't skimp on describing the impact you achieved and how it benefited the company.** Companies hire for results, so be specific and complete about this piece.
- **Quantify.** If you saved time or money, specify how much, even if you have to guesstimate. If you improved something, by what percentage?
- **If you really can't quantify in numbers, use words.** Did you improve morale just a little, or significantly? Substantially? Dramatically?
- **Give evidence that your work was great.** Did you earn a bonus or an accolade? Did your new idea become the standard operating procedure? Are they still using it three years later?

- **Give a sound bite.** Did your boss, a client or co-worker say something memorable about your accomplishment, either aloud, or in an email, or in a performance review? Quote it!

Again, the S-O-A-R parts don't have to be told in that order. For example, a brief mention of the results can be a dramatic way to start: *"Let me tell you about how I doubled market share in two months."*

And throughout your story, remember that you're telling the story in order to sell yourself as the best person for the job. Don't waste time on details that aren't relevant to that purpose.

Connecting Your Stories to the Interviewer's Questions

Of course, interviewers aren't going to say "Tell me a story." They're going to say *"Tell me about a time when you had to work with a difficult person,"* or *"Tell me about your experience with Excel tables / taking the lead on a project / team building / negotiation"* (or whatever is relevant to the job).

How can you help ensure that the right story will pop into your head? By keeping in mind what each story demonstrates, such as team building or negotiation skills.

For example, Rob's story, "Implementing SuccessSuite," demonstrates his skills in evaluating, selecting and configuring software, training, problem-solving, workflow analysis, process improvement, innovation, initiative, learning quickly, documentation development, troubleshooting, cross-functional collaboration and so on.

By noting these skills and strengths in his stories list,

Rob increases the likelihood that he'll think of this story when asked a question like "Can you tell me about a time you collaborated cross-functionally to solve a problem?"

Now go back to your own story list. Under your first story, list all the skills and strengths the story demonstrates. These are likely to include technical skills, "soft" skills like relationship-building and time management, specialized knowledge such as understanding best practices, rules or regulations, personal strengths such as dedication or initiative, and so on.

So now your list will look like this:

Title:

Situation:

Obstacles:

Actions:

Results:

What this story demonstrates (skills and strengths):

Stories are multi-purpose because most stories demonstrate multiple skills. So don't skimp in identifying the skills and strengths each of your stories demonstrates. Writing them down will help you connect your stories to the interviewer's questions.

Tip: Create question-and-story flashcards.

Get a bunch of 3x5 cards (or you can create digital flashcards in Evernote). On one side of each, write a common behavioral interview question like "Tell me about a time you identified a possible problem and took action to prevent it." (You can find lots of these questions by searching online.)

On the reverse, write the titles of two or three of your stories that could be used to answer that question. (One story isn't enough; you might have already used it during the interview to answer another question, so you need alternates.)

To practice with the cards, flip through the deck looking at each question to see if you can remember the stories that go with it. Just start with memorizing which stories go with which questions. Then, for more in-depth practice, you can actually practice answering the questions.

More Stories, Please!

How many stories do you need? Lots!

It's not uncommon these days to have multiple interviews for one job, involving multiple behavioral interview questions in each interview. Plus it's a good idea to tell stories for some of your non-behavioral questions as well. And it's best not to repeat the same stories in all of those

multiple interviews, since the interviewers may compare notes afterwards. You don't want them thinking you have only a few noteworthy accomplishments.

Shoot for 20 stories or more. Does that sound impossible? Here's how you can come up with more SOARs than you think you can:

- ♦ **Look to your key selling points (REV Points).** Do stories come to mind illustrating these? Such stories might be some of your most important ones.
- ♦ **Practice answering behavioral interview questions.** Go through dozens of them. Don't get stuck on any question you can't answer – move on to the next one. You won't have an answer for every question, but whenever you do, immediately add that story to your list.
- ♦ **Use job postings.** Find job announcements typical of your job goal. For each bit of experience or skill mentioned, ask yourself: "When have I done or demonstrated that successfully?" Add any stories to your list.
- ♦ **Harvest stories from your resume, LinkedIn profile, performance evaluations and any kudos you've received.** All of these sources may contain, or spark your memory of, useful stories.

Once you do this, congratulate yourself on having created an awesome job interview tool that will help you get your next job, not to mention boosting your confidence and providing new material for your resume!

The 15-second Story

Often it's appropriate to take up to a minute to tell a story in an interview; or even two minutes.

At other times you'll need make it *very short*. For example, if asked "Tell me your three greatest strengths," you should illustrate your answer with an example or two (or even three), while still keeping the whole answer down to a minute or less. So any examples would need to be very short, perhaps 15 seconds.

A 15-second story can also be very convincing as part of your answer to "Tell me about yourself." I'll say more about that in the next chapter.

Theoretically, any story can be told in as short a form as necessary. Here's *The Lord of the Rings* in 15 seconds: An evil magic ring that threatened all of Middle Earth turned up in a small country town. A diverse team of comrades combined their skills to carry the ring through many dangers – including a vastly powerful enemy who wanted it for his own evil purposes – to Mount Doom, where it was destroyed, saving the world.

The key here is just to move through the SOAR steps with as little detail as possible. Here's that same story broken into SOAR components:

Situation: An evil magic ring that threatened all of Middle Earth turned up in a small country town and had to be destroyed.

Obstacles: Many dangers got in the way, including a vastly powerful enemy who wanted it for his own evil purposes.

Action: A diverse team of comrades combined their skills to carry the ring to Mount Doom.

Results: It was destroyed, saving the world.

Try it with one of your own stories. Cut the story down until you can say it in 15 seconds, or 20, or 10. Time yourself. (Really do that!) You're learning to be concise, a crucially important interviewing skill.



One of your first chances to use a very-briefly told story will come in the very first interview question: "Would you please tell me a little bit about yourself?"

If you're like most interviewees, your reaction to that first question ranges from puzzlement to outright dread. What to say? Where to start?

The next chapter may transform this into your *favorite* question, one that builds your confidence, makes you look good and gets the whole interview off on the right footing – on *your* agenda.

Acing the #1 Interview Question: "Tell me about yourself"

You only get one chance to make a first impression.

– Will Rogers



The first handshakes are over and everyone is seated. "So," begins the interviewer, "tell me about yourself."

I call this the #1 interview question, for two reasons – because it typically comes first, and also because it may well be the most important. Your answer is a crucial first impression: the first time they've listened to you talk. Like the first eye contact, it's a defining moment. (So in a way, you do get more than one chance to make a "first" impression.)

If you're like most job seekers, you dread this question (technically, more of a command). Who can blame you? It's so vague. What on earth does the interviewer want to know?

A better question would be, what do *you* want them to know?

This question is a *carte blanche* invitation, an opportunity to focus the interviewer's attention exactly where you want it, on the reasons they should hire you – in other words, the REV Points (key selling points that are Relevant, Exceptional and Verifiable) that we discussed in Chapter 1.

Your answer to this question is your REV Intro. Let's look at how to prepare this powerful tool that will get your interview off to a very persuasive start – leaving you feeling more confident for the rest of the meeting.

Less Is More

Many candidates think they need to be complete in their answer, as if the employer had asked "Tell me *all* about yourself." Free yourself of that burden right now. You have the whole interview ahead of you. Details can come later.

Your REV Intro will be a brief, mile-high overview of what you bring to the table and what's special about you. *It's an introduction, not a book!* Keep it down to a minute or two.

No Matter How They Say It

There are various versions of the opening question. They might say "Can you introduce us to your qualifications?" or "How about walking me through your background?" or even a blunt "What's your story?"

No matter how they ask this question, what they're really saying is: "*Why should we hire you (instead of one of*

our other qualified candidates)?" What do you have that the other candidates don't?

Craft an Answer That Sells

A REV Intro is based on those three to five REV Points you developed in Chapter 1. You can turn your REV points into a very effective "Tell me about yourself" answer by basically listing them. It's almost as simple as that.

Examples: REV Intro

You may recall Denise Williams, the Sales Manager in Chapter 1, and her key selling points:

1. Track record of consistently over-achieving goals and earning awards in Fortune 500 companies
2. Exceptional talent for effectively anticipating and navigating change through cross-functional collaboration
3. Learns quickly and delivers results fast

(These points have REV – they're Relevant, Exceptional and Verifiable. Points 2 and 3 sound like opinions but Denise will "verify" them by stories she tells later in the interview.)

So her answer to "Tell me about yourself" – her REV Intro – sounds like this:

"(Interviewer's name), based on your job announcement and my phone screening with (recruiter's name), it's clear the new person in this role needs to hit the ground running

and deliver results fast. That's what I've been able to do at Top Tier Technology; I transformed team morale and doubled revenues within three months. At Strong Solutions I achieved similar early wins, which my manager later mentioned in a recommendation on LinkedIn.

"As a manager, and earlier as a rep, I've consistently been well over goal, as you may have noticed from the awards in my resume. There are some interesting stories behind those, which I would be happy to tell if you like.

"Another need that was mentioned in the announcement – and something that's a specialty and a passion of mine – is to anticipate and capitalize on change. At Strong I saw how the new wearable technologies were creating opportunities for us, and I worked with Marketing and Product to maximize those.

"Would you like to hear more about anything I've said so far?"

For another example, let's look at Linda Smith, the Human Resources Manager. Linda's REV Points were:

1. Broad, abundantly demonstrated expertise in Employee Relations, Labor Relations, Compensation and Benefits, HR Information Systems and Analytics
2. Talent for strategic thinking
3. Several awards for creating successful programs and initiatives

4. Inspires a loyal and high-performing team (proven by stories, LinkedIn recommendations and team members' career advancement)

5. MBA

Those points became this REV Intro:

"I was excited to see that you're looking for someone with expertise in so many different areas within HR, because that's exactly what my background is like. I've been very fortunate that my 14-year career at Niagara, Inc. and Davis Direct has allowed me to gain experience in all of them – Employee Relations, Labor Relations, Compensation and Benefits, HR Information Systems and Analytics. I've managed all of these areas, and solved complex strategic issues in every one of them.

"For example... (two-sentence success story illustrating her strategic skills) ... for which I was recognized with a Top Performer award, one of four I've won during my time with EFG Inc.

"I couldn't have achieved any of that without a really engaged team. I'm very passionate about building that engagement. I get to know my staff individually and what their own goals are, then help them see the alignment between those goals and department's needs. It has worked well; in the past five years I've had four team members promoted. I was sorry to lose some of them, but at the same time it was a great feeling seeing them reach their dreams.

"I'm also passionate about serving the business. My

MBA has helped me partner closely with leaders in various departments.

"How does that match up to what you're looking for?"

Essentials of a Good Answer

The examples above work because they have the following elements:

- + A focus on REV Points.
- + Just a little career summary.
- + Humanity – a bit of insight into personality or motivations.
- + Brevity – Denise's answer takes less than a minute and Linda's takes a minute and a half.
- + A natural, conversational tone.

The "Talking Points Outline"

(A tool for being prepared while still sounding natural.)

Planning your answer word-for-word and memorizing it – in other words, reciting from a script – does *not* make a good impression.

Scripted answers...

...don't sound natural, because people don't speak the way they write.

...are less believable, as if they're not your own words.

...may make the employer think you lack good

communication skills or the ability to think on your feet. ...are boring to listen to.

Instead of a script, create a bare-bones outline of your "talking points" to practice with, so that *the ideas are planned, but the words are fresh every time.*

Example: REV Intro "Talking Points" Outline

To illustrate what I mean, let's take the example of Rick Johnson, the Energy Efficiency Engineer from Chapter 1. Here again are his REV Points:

1. Five years experience in energy efficiency engineering
2. Experience conducting ASHRAE level 1, 2 and 3 energy audits leading to an average of 20% energy savings per building
3. Relevant advanced degree
4. Member of Technical Advisory Committee drafting Cordoba County's first Green Building Ordinances

Rick planned a REV Intro that basically lists his key selling points, adds some reasons he is attracted to the job he's interviewing for, and finishes with a question that forms a smooth hand-off back to the interviewer.

His outline may not make much sense to you or me, because he wrote it for himself. All you need to understand from it is how brief you can be, and how you can use bullets, sub-bullets, symbols and abbreviations to create an extremely skimmable, memorizable outline.

REV Intro Outline

- + "For the past five years..."
- + >50 ASHRAE audits
- + 20% energy savings per building
- + ordinances
- + attracted to job because:
 - + unique energy challenges
 - + opportunities
 - + born here & want to move back
 - + after Master's, 1st job in IA
 - + family in NV
 - + backpacking
- + "What questions or comments do you have about anything I've said so far?" (Smile.)

This outline didn't tell Rick exactly what to say. It just reminded him what to talk about. That allowed him to practice answering in a natural, conversational manner. Soon he had the outline memorized – but the answer itself was given in slightly different words every time, so it always sounded fresh. And of course, he made minor tweaks to fit the different opportunities he interviewed for until he landed his new job.

Here's how his **REV Intro** sounded:

"For the past five years I've been an energy efficiency engineer with Adams Associates in Des Moines, working on residential, commercial and public buildings, so I have more than the two to three years you're asking for. I've conducted

more than 50 ASHRAE 1, 2 and 3 energy audits that have led to an average of 20% energy savings per building.

"I also lead a team that consults to public agencies, and I recently served as a member of a Technical Advisory Committee that drafted Cordoba County's first Green Building Ordinances.

"I'm very attracted to this job with the State of Nevada because of the unique energy challenges in this state and the great opportunities in this organization. Also, I was born here and I want to move back. After I completed my Master's in Mechanical Engineering Iowa State, it was natural to get my first job there, but I have family in Reno so it feels like home. Plus, I love outdoor activities like backpacking, and the area is so great for that.

"What questions or comments do you have about anything I've said so far?"

10 Steps to Your Great REV Intro

Now you can create your own outline, practice with it and be ready to ace the #1 interview question with your own strategic, natural-sounding REV Intro.

Get out the prioritized list of REV Points you developed in Chapter 1. Then follow these steps:

1. **Get your answer off to a good start.** Often the best way to start is by combining one of your top REV points with a one- to three-sentence summary of your career.

(Think it's not possible to sum up your career in a

sentence? Sure it is. How's this for a short career summary: "Dwight D. Eisenhower rose through the military to become a general and finally the 34th President of the United States.")

Denise, Linda and Rick also did this in the examples above. So can you.

Mention the number of years of experience you have *only if* that number matches or moderately exceeds what the employer is looking for.

2. **Move on to another REV Point.** Ask yourself: Which of my other points follows naturally after that? Segue into it. (Linda's answer is a great example of use of transitions: brief connecting statements that smoothly change the subject from one REV Point to the next. But don't get hung up on this; a transition can be as simple as saying "Also..."). Continue until you have included all of your REV Points.
3. **Include an example or two to illustrate your claims.** Put the "V" in Verifiable! But you don't need to prove every claim in this answer; it's more like a spot check. Giving one or two examples implies that you can back up your claims in general.
4. **Reveal yourself, without "TMI" (Too Much Information)!** Somewhere in your REV Intro – probably toward the end – add a little insight into who you are: talk about what motivates or inspires you, discuss your philosophy about your job, or even

share a personal interest if it supports your brand. Avoid irrelevant personal information such as your age.

It's usually best not to talk about being a parent, unless life experience with children's needs and interests is highly relevant to the job. You don't want the interviewer picturing you getting personal phone calls from the kids, leaving early, and so on (whether that really describes you or not). Keep children and work separate, starting with the interview.

Humor is a plus, as long as it's *absolutely* inoffensive. Of course, avoid anything controversial – politics, religion and so on.

5. **Plan a good ending.** Otherwise, you may find yourself trailing off with something like "So yeah, that's about it." Clunk!

One great way to end is with an open-ended question (i.e., one that can't be answered with a "yes" or "no") delivered with a welcoming smile. This helps the interview develop into a conversation, a dialogue rather than an interrogation. And wouldn't it be useful to know the interviewer's reaction to what you just said? If you're lucky you might get some useful information here, and at the very least you've shown an interest in the interviewer's thoughts.

Advanced technique: A bolder and more memorable ending would be to ask a question that turns the conversation toward the employer's pain points – their most pressing needs – and how you can help meet them. "So that's a little about me. May I ask a question?"