

CareerSmart Advisor™

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

A Note From Dave

What are your main priorities as a leader? According to the recently released third annual CEO Survey conducted by Frost & Sullivan, the top priorities for CEOs are growth, vision strategy and innovation.



The leaders who responded to the surveys had several ideas for how to achieve growth within their organizations, such as increasing sales, strategic partnering and product development.

Not surprisingly, these executives expressed a need for solid management teams to help their growth initiatives succeed, and they recognized that the sluggish economy will impact any growth objectives and strategies they plan to follow. But the best leaders will work through the challenges and succeed anyway.

Determination is really the name of the game. While we can't completely control when the economy is definitely going to turn around, we can certainly begin to implement strategies that can be kicked into high gear once the economy gives us the green light toward growth.

Regardless of the economy, it's always a good time to work on building your business. Innovation and product development must be ongoing in order for them to be successful. It's certainly very promising that the CEOs polled in the Frost & Sullivan survey are so focused on growth strategies. When the economy rebounds, we all need to be ready to hit the ground running. Make sure one of your main priorities today is laying the foundation for a successful tomorrow.

Sincerely,



Dave Opton
ExecuNet Founder & CEO
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How Change Can Drive Your Career

By Marji McClure

It's difficult to ignore the economic environment and how it has affected the job market in nearly every industry sector. At the same time, it's important not to ignore how the economy and other business factors (from mergers and acquisitions to downsizings) have changed the way companies do business. Depending on your industry, technological advances can also change the skill and leadership requirements of executives leading the way.

Regardless of your current status on the career ladder, keeping tabs on changes within your particular job title, company and industry can help ensure that you change with them and are positioned for the future successes these changes are expected to yield.

If you're in transition and seeking your next career opportunity, by first adjusting to a change in your career and then by recognizing changes in the marketplace, you can help yourself accept change and make it a positive next step in your career.

Employed executives also need to track changes in the business world to ensure that they keep their skills current in order to guide their organizations into the future. It can help you determine new areas of growth as well as help you hone your skills to make sure they are the ones in demand by hiring organizations.

Whether a change in your career journey is unexpected (such as a layoff) or planned, how you adjust to such changes now and in the future can have long-term effects on your career success as well as the success of your organization.

Navigating Through an Involuntary Change

For some executives in job search, dealing with change can be a bit more challenging since the change they are currently facing is typically an involuntary one; they were laid off from their positions because of factors other than poor performance (such as the result of a merger or acquisition or downsizing). It's important that these executives avoid feeling like victims of this unexpected (and unwanted) change, and eventually learn how to embrace the change as it leads them to their next career opportunity.

Houston-based executive coach Cecilia Rose says "to avoid being the

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Career-Enhancing Programs
October/November 2009
Hosted by Dave Opton,
founder and CEO, ExecuNet

- 10/29 — **Your Executive Portfolio: Effectively Communicate Your Brand** — Louise Kursmark
- 11/4 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS — Expert Q&A Ask the Headhunter** — Nick Corcodilos
- 11/5 — **Winning Interviews: Converse, Connect, Convince** — Judy Rosemarin
- 11/13 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS — Critical Components for Starting Your Job Search** — Jan Melnik
- 11/19 — **FREE PROGRAM FOR MEMBERS — Onboarding Q&A** — George Bradt

Networking Meetings in Your Area
October/November 2009
Hosted by ExecuNet Facilitators

- 10/28 — **Stamford Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Linda Van Valkenburgh
- 10/28 — **Toronto** — Martin Buckland
- 10/28 — **Denver** — Karen Armon
- 10/29 — **Dallas** — Bob Hueglin
- 10/30 — **St. Louis** — Ken Coleman & Randy Hove
- 11/3 — **San Diego/Carlsbad** — Mark James
- 11/4 — **New York City** — Judy Rosemarin
- 11/4 — **Philadelphia** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher
- 11/4 — **Portland** — Jean Walker
- 11/4 — **Cincinnati** — Jennifer McClure
- 11/4 — **New York City Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Judy Rosemarin
- 11/4 — **Philadelphia Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Mitch Wienick & Ed Kelleher
- 11/5 — **Sarasota** — Susan Mell
- 11/5 — **Southern Wisconsin** — Clara Hurd Nydam & Tom Senge
- 11/9 — **Miami/Hollywood** — Jeannette Kraar
- 11/9 — **Detroit** — Marge Larsen
- 11/9 — **Boston Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Marg Balcom
- 11/10 — **Orlando** — Catherine Coates & Mike Murray
- 11/10 — **Phoenix** — Fred Coon
- 11/11 — **Toronto Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Martin Buckland
- 11/11 — **Stamford** — Linda Van Valkenburgh
- 11/11 — **Denver** — Karen Armon
- 11/11 — **Irvine (Orange County)** — Mark James
- 11/11 — **Cleveland Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Rick Taylor
- 11/12 — **Seattle Sr. Executive Roundtable** — Susan Stringer
- 11/12 — **Vienna/Tysons Corner, VA** — Peter McCarthy
- 11/12 — **Atlanta** — J. Patrick Haly
- 11/12 — **Columbia, MD** — Ed Loucks
- 11/12 — **Los Angeles** — Eileen Hupp
- 11/13 — **Parsippany** — Linsey Levine
- 11/13 — **Buffalo/Niagara** — Beth Stefani
- 11/13 — **Tampa Bay** — Gina Potito

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Learnings From Landings You Never Know Who People Know

How many of us have said to ourselves something like, “He’s not high enough up the corporate ladder to be connected to anyone I want to meet.”? Fortunately for Harry Robertson, he did not take this approach when another parent struck up a conversation at their children’s baseball game. It turned out that Robertson was sitting next to a mid-level manager in a publishing company who was friends with a director in a medical devices company looking to fill their vacant CEO position.

Robertson couldn’t believe his luck. He’d always heard to never ignore anyone in his network, but he never actually thought idle small talk with the father of one of his son’s baseball opponents counted as networking or could turn into anything serious. Robertson now understands that networking is successful when one does not have a “what’s in it for me?” attitude. A friendly chat on bleachers next to a baseball field opened the door to an exciting opportunity. He is now president and CEO of that director’s company. “You never can tell who will be a valuable source,” Robertson says.

Niche Companies are a Good Way to Go

The larger companies have great appeal, but they also are on everyone else’s target list. The smaller companies are not known by every job seeker in the industry and frequently make hiring decisions more quickly because there are fewer people in upper management. “The smaller and more niche-oriented a company is the better. They usually have more needs for great executive talent with experience in their particular niche, says Robertson.

A Surprising Marketplace

Despite feeling well prepared when he

began his search, several aspects of the executive marketplace surprised Robertson. “The executive marketplace is really tough, and it takes much longer than what most people expect to land the right opportunity,” says Robertson of his six-month-long search. “It’s a sign of the times.”

He tried the Internet listings, but discovered few viable positions at his level in his industry. “Several online postings, even through reputable sites, did not tell the whole story, and often what is posted is short of the facts,” says Robertson. It is better to use one’s network to reach a decision-maker, thereby ensuring the position really exists and that you will be granted true consideration.

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Robertson didn’t have any existing connections with recruiters, so as a result he had little luck with them. “Executive recruiters work on behalf of their client companies. They will ignore candidates if they have no assignment on their books to match the candidate’s qualifications,” reports Robertson.

Robertson encourages job seekers to stay upbeat and to take every opportunity to network. He believes in networking every day and now makes it something he does several times a week, even though he’s no longer in job search. Your next conversation could lead to the opportunity of a lifetime! ■

Books Worth Your Time: Q&A With Authors David Booth, Deborah Shames and Peter Desberg

Own the Room

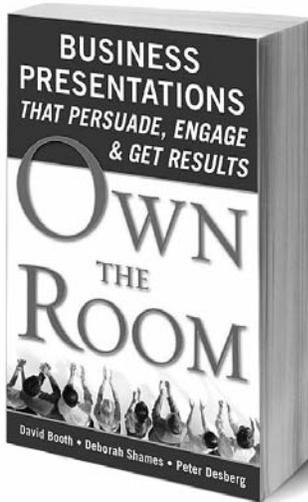
Have you ever been to a conference or a meeting where the presenter clicked through the slides of a PowerPoint presentation and did little more than read them to the audience? Chances are, most of the people in the room were bored and couldn't wait for the presenter to finish. According to David Booth, Deborah Shames and Peter Desberg, the authors of *Own the Room* [McGraw Hill, 2010], "Good communication is personal, revealing and memorable." Using PowerPoint slides as visual cues to talk to, or worse still, read, does nothing to connect the presenter with his audience, and if the presenter does not connect with his audience, he will not be memorable or achieve buy-in.

This diverse team of authors (an actor, a television and film director, and a psychologist) has put into print their method for giving presentations that reach audiences on both an emotional and intellectual level. The authors stress that both levels must be targeted for a successful presentation, and they explain how to create what most presentations lack: a specific action-oriented objective for the presentation, providing the audience with a clear picture of what their role is once the presentation is completed.

In this exclusive interview, ExecuNet Editor Will Flammé asks the authors to discuss their views on creating memorable presentations.

Q. What is the most effective way to connect with an audience in a business presentation?

A. Determine the challenges of your audience and then tailor your presentation to meet those needs. Make sure to use specific, vivid details and concrete language, rather than polite generalities. Add your perspective and tell anecdotes or case studies which are relevant to your topic. Be yourself and authentic. An audience wants you to connect with them, rather than to experience an



overly polished, canned or memorized presentation.

Q. What are some easy-to-follow steps executives should keep in mind when preparing to make a presentation?

A. Consider your intention or what it is you would like to achieve. Intention should always be considered first before constructing content. That is why the first chapter in our book, *Own the Room*, leads with intention. Make it simple, clear and action-oriented. For example, an intention in a pitch might be "they will see me as critical to the success of their business." Assess how you will persuade your audience or client to this intention, rather than educating or informing them. This may include asking questions, relating examples of how you solved a problem for a client in a similar situation or making assumptions about their business.

Then select the content that supports your intention and leave out everything else. Organize your material in a clear outline with a compelling opening, no more than three to five main talking points with examples, transitions and a dynamic close. Remember, the mind can only absorb what the seat can endure. Keep your presentations engaging, targeted and concise. As they say in

the entertainment industry, "Leave 'em wanting more!"

Q. How does one effectively use PowerPoint to present?

A. An effective PowerPoint demonstrates relationships between concepts and ideas, rather than being packed slides with text, charts or graphs. Too much content on a slide takes the attention away from the presenter because we can't focus on two things at once.

PowerPoint should only be used as a visual medium, not a cueing device. The presenter can then serve as an interpreter, pointing out what to pay special attention to and how it serves the audience. When using PowerPoint for text, the rule of thumb is six words per line and six lines on a slide. This means the presenter is necessary to "flesh out" the text with examples or analogies, rather than relying on sub-bullet points. And never, ever read the slide. Otherwise, why do we need you? Give us a hand-out.

Q. What portion of presentations is typically the weakest, and what suggestions do you have for improving that area?

A. We have observed that speakers spend time developing their opening and body of the presentation, but fail to put their attention on the close. We typically hear, "That's about all" or "Questions?" when a presenter is concluding. This is a big mistake, since we remember most what we hear last. Recall your intention and then choose an ending that you believe will most allow you to achieve it. In *Own the Room*, we devote an entire chapter on how to close, including seven varieties, with client examples. When delivering your close, slow down, make eye contact and re-invest your commitment.

Q. How would you suggest presenters freshen presentations they've given

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victim one must feel like a victim, and the way to do this is to feel everything that comes up. Feel the feelings. Feel what it feels like to be told your services are no longer needed.” Rose says she suggests to clients that they write about their feelings in a composition book. “Pour all of the feelings, good, bad and ugly upon the pages. Write about how unfair it was; write about your boss; your colleague who didn’t support you; how you did such a good job and they didn’t value it; and why you and not [someone else]. Don’t try to do this in your head. It is not the same and will not achieve the outcome you desire, which is to feel your feelings and purge them so you can move on with your search.” Rose says the goal will be achieved when there is nothing left to write.

“When emotions, self-confidence and mindsets are not addressed in the beginning of a search, it can impact the overall outcome,” adds Rose. “Once these things have been felt and dealt with, it is easier to see the opportunities that lie before you, and you will feel grounded, self-confident and know there are companies looking for someone with your talents. Now you can put together a winning search strategy that won’t be sabotaged by unfinished business.”

Gaining that control of the situation can help executives develop a mindset that will lead them to a more fulfilling position and make the change a beneficial one for their career. “Circumstances change, and one who is open, adaptable, flexible, less egocentric and more solution-oriented, will be able to take his or her strengths and apply them where they can be utilized most,” says Susan Arth, CEO of Sea of Change, a California-based consulting firm.

“It’s amazing when you come from a mindset of curiosity and ‘what’s possible,’ that you will see way beyond the loss,” adds executive coach Marcia Reynolds, PsyD. “I have never met anyone who said, ‘That job loss was the worst thing that happened to me.’ It is usually the opposite. They were simply pushed into

Values Can Help Create Balance

Cliff Hakim and Maureen Wrinn of The Values Tree Inc. note the benefits of values in helping those within an organization manage change. “Values — personal and organizational — create a balance in times of change that brings focus and grounding so that relationships stay strong, decision-making is supported and leadership remains steady,” say Hakim and Wrinn. Here are some examples:

- **To make hiring and firing decisions.** Hakim and Wrinn point to a vice president who used integrity as a core value during the firing process. When meeting with an engineer that needed to be transitioned out of the company because his skill set no longer matched the company and its marketplace, the executive provided the employee with referrals to companies that better fit his skill set. “This leader accessed and turned on her core values and aligned them with her behavior. She had to fire someone, yet maintained the relationship in a manner that helped them both.”
- **Using values to decide to increase volume of service or maintain quality.** Hakim and Wrinn worked with a nonprofit organization facing a decline in grants and charitable donations. Deciding not to increase volume was a difficult decision, but the organization realized that quality of service would be compromised. Instead, cost-cutting measures were implemented and layoffs were limited.

a better direction, one they wouldn’t take on their own. The journey is continuous; it is far from over.”

Taking a Strategic View

Executives in job search and those who are currently employed must always keep an eye on the future, what career opportunities will exist, their location and what skills will be required to accomplish future organizational goals. It’s crucial for executives to take a strategic view of changes within past and current employers as well as in competitor companies.

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One of the best ways to manage change is to be a step ahead of it, diminishing the surprise factor. This requires executive due diligence before even being aware that change is imminent; leaders need to become trend watchers. “I follow a couple of futurists — one is optimistic and one is pessimistic,” says Maureen Metcalf, president of Ohio-based

management consulting firm Metcalf & Associates. “It is my job to decide what to do with this information.”

Arth believes it’s important to have a clear view of one’s current company’s climate, the politics of the organization and its issues. “Take a step back to review the situation objectively and seek advice from outside, objective sources,” Arth adds. “Be a problem-solver instead of a problem, and take a long view of a career. Make sure you are aligned with your values and act accordingly; seek an opportunity to make a contribution that furthers the goals of the company versus personal gain.”

Understanding Your Change Tolerance, Preparedness

Before executives reach out to potential employers, or even face changes within their current organization, they need to take a step back and gain a solid understanding of how they personally handle change as well as how their skills will enable them to do so.

Reynolds says that executives need to learn emotional self-awareness and recognize their own common emotional triggers that are set off during the change process. “The leader sets the emotional tone,” says Reynolds. “They need to start the process with a strong self-awareness and skills for shifting their emotions into a positive state. They also need to stay focused on their self-care to maintain the compassion,

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patience and tolerance needed to lead through the process of change.”

Allan Steinmetz, CEO and founder of Inward Strategic Consulting, a Massachusetts-based management consulting firm, notes that part of a self-assessment requires executives take an inventory to determine what skills and talents are going to be needed by their organization. “If they don’t have those skills, they have to get them quickly,” warns Steinmetz. “If you take stock of what skills are needed and what will be needed, you’ll be at an advantage.”

Developing a Career and Company Game Plan

Executives must look beyond the skill set they offer and instead focus on how those skills can guide their organization through the changes it could likely face.

Arth says executives need to take a global view of their company, industry and the economy and base their decisions related to change on that information. “Develop a strategy to add value from the inside out by stressing innovation.” She adds that there are various ways this is accomplished:

- Value the people working for you; since they are also under the same distress as the executives, keep them informed as realistically as possible.
- Add value to the marketplace by understanding where the product/service fits into the changing landscape; be flexible enough to adapt quickly.
- Add value to the stockholders by conducting operations in an ethical manner, one that increases visibility globally by finding new opportunities to market products/services.
- Seek out new technology to increase efficiency, and hire people who are “out of the box” thinkers not restrained by policies, politics or the bottom line.

“Executives face challenges every day to their vision, authority and management style,” says Arth. “In the face of uncertainty,

Expert Resources:

- Susan Arth, Sea of Change (suearth@yahoo.com)
- Cliff Hakim, The Values Tree Inc. (RethinkingWork.com)
- Maureen Metcalf, Metcalf & Associates (Metcalf-Associates.com)
- Marcia Reynolds (OutsmartYourBrain.com)
- Cecilia Rose (ceciliarosecoach@gmail.com)
- Allan Steinmetz, Inward Strategic Consulting (InwardConsulting.com)
- Maureen Wrinn, The Values Tree Inc.

lowered profits and lowered expectations, executives can lead by example. They can be optimistic in the long-run, open to seeking new solutions that adapt to changing markets and changing needs.”

Helping Others Manage Change

While it’s important for executives to seek those new solutions to position their organizations for success amidst continuing marketplace changes, they must be able to effectively communicate the end goals of such initiatives to their employees. They must also ensure that their confidence in the eventual success of such changes is apparent to those employees, which can help reduce any fears and concerns they have toward a different course of action. Only then will employees be able to begin the process of embracing any change.

“Most change courses give you the ‘mechanics of change.’ Leaders have to deal with both the mechanics of change and the humanity of change,” says Reynolds. “Instead of avoiding the resistance, they should embrace it and help their employees move through it. This ensures sustainable engagement and buy-in to change efforts.”

Buy-in is perhaps one of the largest challenges executives managing change face. Experts agree that strong communication can provide a solid foundation from which to build consensus around change. “The first and best thing to do is be transparent and honest,” says Steinmetz. He notes how during mergers and acquisitions, the tendency is to be quiet and keep the details of the deals under wraps. But, he says, leaders must communicate with employees during such times. If they provide a public platform at which employees can provide ideas, they will offer suggestions, and become part of the solution.

“Often, there is a perceptual disconnect between the top, who believe they have the answers, and the staff who perform the work and actually may have the answers. Now is the time for inclusion, trust and willingness to listen,” Arth explains.

Executives need to know what may stand in the way. Reynolds notes that executives need to understand the reactions people typically have to change. “Almost all of them deal with emotional components,” she says. “It is a myth to think they should ‘recognize that the cheese has moved’ and then move on. Their voices need to be heard, their concerns acknowledged, their ideas recognized and their input utilized before they will move on.”

Showing the specifics of the change, when possible, is very important, experts say. People need to know how they are going to be affected by the change (both the good and the bad), and executives must demonstrate how that will happen and address any employee fears in the process. Crafting a specific plan of action can help executives remain on track as they accomplish these goals.

“For those who value stability, plan and implement changes with care to minimize disruption to actual production,” suggests Metcalf. “Implement in phases with clear plans for how jobs change, how pay changes (if it does) and a learning process that will allow people to practice new work before they are facing a customer where the change will adversely impact the company. Leaders should send a message that they are on the job of managing the change, and employees need to be on the job of delivering results against commitments.” Reynolds adds that it is important to illustrate a compelling vision. “People need a picture of the future to latch on to, one that provides hope and opportunity,” she says. ■

Insider Insight

Communication Strategies for Your First 100 Days

By Karen Friedman

So, the day has finally arrived. You've earned it. You've fantasized about it. You're expertly qualified, which is why you've been selected for the job. But you walk into that executive suite and start to sweat. Yes, you want a seat at the table, but now that you have one, do you really know what to do?

As a communications coach, I earn my living teaching others how to talk. However, talking doesn't always translate to leading, which many of us learn early on in our careers. As a television reporter in Philadelphia some years back, I recall receiving a phone call from my son's daycare as I was about to leave for work. They said he was running a high fever, and I needed to come get him. But on that day, I had no one to take care of him, which is what I explained when I called the executive producer. Expecting her to understand, she politely said, "That is not our problem, and we expect you at work." I told her that wasn't possible and there was nothing I could do.

After a tense silence, she said, "Well, there is something you can do. You can hang up and call back. Tell whomever answers the phone that you are running a high fever and can't get out bed and don't mention that we spoke." Then she hung up. It was at that moment I realized sometimes leading is about what you don't say because quiet understanding can make you appear stronger.

In today's business world, employees will tell you they crave authenticity. They'll also tell you what management says or doesn't say affects morale which is why communicating early and often is essential when leading.

Communicate Early and Often

If you aren't talking, that means someone else is. In the absence of information, rumors take over. Rumors aren't simply

repeated; they're typically refined and embellished so they can fill in the blanks that aren't being communicated. For example: *Are pink slips being handed out? Is the company being sold?* In today's world of instant communications and social media, office rumors can hit the Internet quickly, sending what you could have controlled completely out of control.

Empower Through Questions

In his book *The First 90 Days*, Harvard Business School Professor Michael Watkins recommends asking questions that will elicit information to help you create strategies for success. Open-ended questions such as, *What's your opinion?; What do you think we should do?; What do you think should change?* or *What is your biggest concern?* create dialogue and enable leaders to encourage others to express themselves so they feel their voice is important.

Say What You Don't Know

How you communicate during your first days on a new job tells others what you're about. Remember, the organization searched long and hard to fill your position, and you have a seat at the table because you have something they need. But it's okay not to know what you don't know. Kung Fu Tzu (Confucius) said, "When you know something, say what you know. When you don't know something, say that you don't know. That is knowledge." This allows you to understand so you can effectively gather information before participating in the conversation.

Once you do join in, think about the headline to avoid making listeners work too hard to figure out what you're saying. For example, an executive trying to convince investors to strap in for a rocky ride that would be worth the results, spent six minutes (I clocked her) delivering background information before focusing attention on what her listeners cared about. Finally, she said, "This is an

exciting product with great potential to address a huge unmet need, and we have a strategic plan in place to hit 1 billion in sales."

When you fail to deliver headlines up front, not only do you risk tuning people out, but you undermine your own credibility. Keep your communications short, direct and to the point.

Dare to be Different

It's equally important to differentiate between listeners, or you risk treating everyone the same way. If you are speaking to team members about a new product, they may want to know about competition, safety data and strategic planning. Yet, if you ran into your neighbor at the supermarket, she might be more interested in side effects, benefits and how it differs from what is already on the market. So before you speak, ask yourself two questions: *Who am I talking to?* and *What do they care about?*

Make Others Feel Important

Just because people know you doesn't mean they aren't watching you. In any new role, you should greet everyone you meet with direct eye contact and enthusiasm to make them feel you are approachable and genuinely interested in their success. That means in your hurry to move on and tackle your to-do list, you must focus on what they are saying.

Finally, think back to your own experience to help you lead. Perhaps you had a boss who put you down, or you worked with someone who didn't seem to value your input. When you make the people around you feel that their opinion counts, you make them feel important, and when you make people feel important you create a climate of trust and mutual respect. ■

Karen Friedman is founder of Philadelphia-based Karen Friedman Enterprises Inc. She can be reached at KarenFriedman.com

Your Career Advisor

“Oil” Questions Keep Interviews Humming Along

By Judy Rosemarin

Every smart executive knows that to prepare for an interview, you should be ready for any and every kind of question you might be asked.

Great! But what about the questions *you* ask? Are you prepared to keep the interview humming with some well-positioned questions of your own?

Did you know that different kinds of questions elicit different dynamics and answers? Do you know the types of questions that can make things move forward, glide smoothly, that grease the wheels of the interviews so well that the interview just hums along? These kinds of questions that help “grease” the interview are called “oil” questions, and they are what make the difference between a “squeaky” interview and one that purrs. Silence is golden, the sages say. Silence can also be deadly if you don’t use “oil” questions in your interviews.

There are five types of “oil” questions:

1. Opinion
2. Open-ended
3. Closed-ended
4. Menu-driven
5. Clarifying

All five can be used for different situations and can be used alone or along with the others.

Opinion Questions

Interviewees should always have “opinion” questions handy since everyone has an opinion. For example, if you ask an interviewer, “What is your opinion on innovations or new paths your marketing department is taking?” you are opening up a whole area that should trigger a conversation. Asking this kind of question allows you to peek into someone’s thinking. It can surface excitement and even opportunities, if you listen very carefully. It’s like starting

up an engine and letting it go as the interviewer becomes more engaged in his or her opinions.

As an added bonus, most of us are rarely asked for our opinions and listened to, so it can make the interviewer feel acknowledged as well. Making interviewers feel good can go a long way in your favor!

Open-Ended Questions

Open-ended questions narrow the field and cannot be answered by a “Yes” or “No” response. It is an effective way to ferret out the most information on a subject.

Most of us know the dreaded old, “Tell me about yourself” question that most people hate. The funny thing about that is that you are more in control with this one than almost any one because it’s totally yours to do with what you wish. Most people cringe when they are asked open-ended questions because they think there is only one right way to answer it. The truth of the matter is that it can be answered *any way you want to*. The structure of it sets no real direction, and it can be answered in countless ways.

Now, try it yourself. Yes, turn it around. If you ask the interviewer the question, “Tell me about...” something in the company or the department, the answer has to be as he or she wants to answer it. It’s a trigger for information, not a trick. It will be answered with a story, or some examples of what is going on in the department. Or, if you ask, “Could you tell me about the ideal candidate for this position?” you will elicit important elements which the interviewer is seeking, and you might learn about the highly valued criteria that the interviewer is looking for.

Open-ended questions all have a certain structure. The words that are used for open-ended questions are: “**Tell,**” “**Describe,**” “**Who,**” “**What,**” “**How,**” “**Where,**” “**When.**”

So, you could ask about the position in seven different open-ended ways:

1. **Tell** me about the position.
2. **Describe** the qualities of the ideal candidate for this position.
3. **Who** is the person responsible for the hiring decisions?
4. **What** are the things that you think are critical to be successful in this position?
5. **How** did this position come to be open?
6. **Where** does this position fit into the organization as a whole?
7. **When** will a decision be made on this position?

Closed-Ended Questions

Closed-ended questions can be answered by a “Yes” or a “No” or possibly an “I don’t know,” but little else. There are reasons to ask closed-ended questions as valid as reasons for asking the open-ended ones. Where the open-ended questions give you lots of information, the closed-ended will *narrow down* the field and get more focus into your conversation. For example, “Do you see this project moving forward soon?” is closed-ended, and the answer can only be, “Yes,” “No” or “I am not sure.” Of course the latter helps least, but it helps bring some clarity to the picture.

Closed-ended questions can be useful when you want to narrow down the information. They are used when you need to contain the information you are getting into manageable compartments. The structure of a closed-ended question uses words such as: “**Did you?**” “**Will you?**” “**Have you?**” “**Is there?**” “**Can you?**” “**Could you?**” “**Do you?**” Use these and the answers will provide you with a nice clean “Yes” or “No” answer.

Menu Questions

Menu questions are a bit like the closed-ended, but they contain more content

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many times or have overprepared for?

A. Look at your content in a new way. Re-edit the order of your phrases. Change up the wording. Choose new graphics. Craft a new opening and close, according to what's happening in the news. Keep the basic idea, but tailor it to your audience. We advise presenters to rehearse, but never the same way, or the brain will lock the structure into memory, causing it to sound canned and over-rehearsed. If the presentation is memorized, the other potential pitfall is that if you forget one word or idea, you may freeze or stumble.

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from your conversation. They are meant to be used when you need to *clarify or prioritize information*. For example, "Will you be working on the marketing piece first, or will you be gearing up the research? The key to the menu questions is the word "or" which links the choices the respondent needs to make for your clarification.

Clarifying Questions

Clarifying questions are used for just what they sound like: to clarify. They are also questions that help the interviewer get clarity about what you are saying as well.

For instance, if you have just answered the question, "Tell me about yourself," and have listed several aspects about your background,

But if you've rehearsed the presentation *differently* each time, whatever way you deliver it will be fine.

Q. Even the most experienced executive can feel anxiety before a presentation; what strategies have you found successful in controlling pre-presentation nerves?

A. It may sound counter-intuitive, but some anxiety is a good thing. It focuses your thinking and can energize a speaker. However, too much anxiety can be paralyzing.

Whenever possible, minimize surprises by checking out the space ahead of time, and asking questions regarding who will be in the room, what they expect to

expertise and interests in the position, you can ask a clarifying question that might sound like, "Is there anything that I have just told you that particularly intrigues you and that you would like me to elaborate on?"

The other way you can use clarifying questions is when the interviewer has mentioned something that seems fuzzy or confusing. Your question would then sound something like, "If I understood you correctly, you believe that the ideal candidate needs a good solid background in market research and technology skills; is that correct?"

Answers to these kinds of questions help you understand more fully and keep the conversation moving along. Good interviews are more like conversations, and they help both the interviewer and the interviewee.

Using "oil" questions can make

take away and how much time you have. Do a sound-check when using a microphone, and make sure your PowerPoint works with the technology in the room.

Since most anxiety occurs right before and during the first two minutes of a presentation, craft your opening from your own experience or perspective. Know it cold! Then, about 20 to 30 minutes before your presentation, eliminate all distractions and go into "speaker mode." In the theatre, this is called bridging. Rather than reviewing your entire content, remember your intention. If necessary, do a sense memory — creative visualization or breathing exercise to feel grounded and ready. ■

the difference between a difficult and grinding interview and one that hums with conversation and information exchanges that are rich and meaningful to you. It doesn't take much to "oil" conversations, but the benefits can be tremendous for a possible next interview or a new job offer.

To learn more about interviewing — from pre-interviewing preparation to post-interview follow-up — visit ExecuNet's Career Center (via the ExecuNet home page) to read Judy's blog, *Interviewing Success*, where you can comment on Judy's entries and submit questions for her expert advice. ■

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CareerSmart Advisor

Strategies & Solutions for Your Career Success

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Copy Editor: Carol Hamilton

Layout/Design: 5050Design.com

A biweekly publication of ExecuNet, the premier executive job, career and networking organization for senior level executives with salaries in excess of \$100,000.

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