



## Nicola Simpson Executive Coaching Interview Survival Kit

[www.nicolasimpsonexecutivecoaching.co.uk](http://www.nicolasimpsonexecutivecoaching.co.uk)

Tel: 0203 916 0121

Email: [enquiries@nicolasimpson.coach](mailto:enquiries@nicolasimpson.coach)

I run an Executive Coach and Career Coach practice in London and I see so many people stuck in a job they are not happy with and yet they do nothing about it. I always tell them **“You can do great things!”** and it all starts with the interview. Here is my **FREE** interview survival kit. You get one shot at the first interview and preparation is so critical as competition is very strong and it only gets harder the higher up the executive ladder you go. So, let's make sure you leave the strongest impression.

### 1. How should you open an interview?

When you arrive at the interview introduce yourself, offer to shake hands, even if the interviewer doesn't offer their hand first. Be prepared for some casual chat, but don't go overboard explaining the detail of your journey etc. When seated, pay attention to your body language, make sure you sit-up straight and smile, be genuinely pleased to meet them.

Keep your introduction short and concise. If there are two or more people conducting the interview be sure to switch your eye contact to include all in the conversation.

### 2. Any tips for the first five minutes?

People often stumble answering a common opening question such as “so tell me about yourself” while the temptation here is to deliver a long-winded account, from first job through to the present day, what they want to hear is what makes you an ideal candidate for the role. This is your opportunity to ‘pitch yourself’ so talk about the relevance of your skills and background to the role, any notable professional achievements and how you will not only deliver if hired, but also add-value to the organisation. It is important your pitch is succinct (no more than 5 minutes) and well rehearsed so you can deliver it easily and confidently. **Be positive and be confident in who you are and what you have to offer - this is your moment to shine and create a great first impression!**

### 3. How can you answer difficult questions?

Handling tricky questions requires preparation, classic examples include:

- **What are your key strengths/or why should we hire you?**

Reflect on your prior experience in relation to the job description, this question is an opportunity to show how your strengths match their requirements. Your answer may include your technical knowledge, sector experience, specific skills (e.g. project management), people management or budget management skills, interpersonal skills and/or personal qualities such as your work ethic. For example, you might say *“I am a qualified project manager with extensive experience in IT and the knowledge, skills and enthusiasm to get the job done.”*



- **What are your weaknesses?**

You can approach your answer to this question in a number of ways, for example, you could choose something that doesn't really impact the job e.g. I am good at working with PowerPoint but would like to be able to produce more creative presentations. You could also identify a weakness that could also be considered a positive, e.g. I am detail orientated and like to plan everything carefully. Building on this example, you could show how you have attempted to overcome this weakness, e.g. I am detail orientated and have learned I need to balance my love of planning with action to ensure I always meet deadlines on time. A useful tip is also to think about where there may be areas of weakness within your job application and use this question to address any concerns you think they might have about your suitability, e.g. I am aware I have no experience in this sector but based on the research I have done and conversations I've had with other who do, I am fully confident that I can transition into this role quickly and easily". **Be genuine but selective in your answer to this question and have a couple of answers prepared just in case more than one is needed on the day.**

- **Why are you looking for a new job?**

This is not the time to air any skeletons in your career closet or speak negatively about your current employer. Keep your answer straightforward and factual, e.g. you are looking for a new challenge, you see a good match between your skills and their requirements, the company has an excellent reputation and so on, all of which have prompted your application. If you are currently unemployed, perhaps due to redundancy, keep any reference to this short and positive e.g. "After many happy years working for my company, following an organisational restructure many roles were made redundant including mine."

**Don't ramble - be focused in your answers. Highlight key skills, strengths and experiences that are relevant to the job and make sure you answer the question being asked!**

#### 4. What should you do if you don't know the answer to a question? Or if you have a mind blank?

Interviewers understand that most candidates will be feeling nervous and stressed – we've all been there! So, don't panic, if you are unsure whether you have understood what is being asked, simply ask them to repeat the question, or seek further clarification on what they want to know. This will give you important 'time to think' in the moment, but the best advice is to go into the interview well prepared, and thereby side-step the risk of brain blank all together.

#### 5. What questions should you ask?

Be prepared to ask questions during the interview, such as:

- Is this a new role? If not, what did the previous employee go on to do?
- What is it like to work here? How would you describe the culture of the company?
- What would be your expectations in the first 90 days?
- What do you think would be the biggest challenge in this job?



## 6. How should you close the interview and is there a way to add in anything extra you haven't covered

Towards the end of the interview, let it be known that you believe the job is an excellent fit with your experience and career aspirations and that you are very interested in the role. This would be a good moment to recap your strengths and reasons why they should hire you, rather than your competitor(s). Enquire about the next steps in the recruitment process and when you can expect to hear the outcome of this stage. Finally, thank the interviewer for their time.

## 7. Anything extra you would add?

Points to highlight:

- **Preparation is everything** – and key to delivering a strong interview performance. Do your research on the role, the company and their competitors, this will not only give you credibility, but will also increase your ability to answer any questions that come your way – confidently.
- **Sell yourself** – be under no illusion the job market is highly competitive, and so you need to be your own best advocate, if you're not prepared to sell yourself as being a perfect fit for the role, you'll be giving away advantage to your competitors. You lose.
- **Be authentic** – be inspired by others, but don't attempt to impersonate someone else (e.g. Branson). You are you, and you are great, so believe in yourself and be confident in what you have to offer – be your best self!

### **Good Luck! You can do great things!**

**About Nicola:** *I coach executives at all levels of their professional career and see many executives from a range of sectors, including investment banking, finance, IT, media, marketing, arts & entertainment also, I regularly meet new business entrepreneurs, those doing (or considering) an MBA and board directors, business leaders or just someone who wants to sort their career out. The most important thing I want you know is that I am here and ready to help. You can do great things!*

- *Career acceleration and promotion objectives*
- *Help you achieve your goals*
- *Manage career change. Why do a job you hate? Do one you love!*
- *Coping with stressful work environments or redundancy*
- *Total confidence recovery*
- *Take back control. It is your life and your career*