

## Tough Interview Questions: Webinar Activities

### Score in Your Next Interview PRACTICE FOR THE PLAYOFFS



**Introduction:** This brainstorm activity was designed to be facilitated after viewing the *Interviewing Tips and Techniques: How to Handle Tough Interview Questions* webinar and completing *The Fundamentals* discussion.

This instruction sheet will provide the facilitator with the necessary information needed to facilitate. As the facilitator you can expect:

**Time Needed to Facilitate:** *The Practice for the Playoffs Worksheet* (brainstorm) activity will take approximately 45 minutes and *The Practice for the Playoffs Homework* will take about 30 minutes. Please note the homework while optional will be extremely beneficial for participants.

**Before You Get Started:** Please print and gather all materials needed prior to facilitating.

- *Tough Interview Questions: Practice For the Playoffs- Instruction Sheet* (facilitator details)
- *The Practice for the Playoffs Worksheet* (brainstorm), 2 for each student
- *The Practice for the Playoffs Homework* (sample interview questions), 1 for each student

**Reminder:** Throughout the activity, suggested wording for the facilitator is indicated by **(read)**. You can read directly from this script or convey the directions in your own words.

### *Tough Interview Questions Webinar Activities* PRACTICE FOR THE PLAYOFFS WORKSHEET (brainstorm) After *The Fundamentals*

**Brainstorm Facilitator Instructions:** Provide each team member one worksheet labeled *The Practice for the Playoffs Worksheet* (brainstorm). Read and review the dialog for each strategy below and encourage completion of the worksheet in groups or pairs. Never miss an opportunity to use training to build positive relationships!

**Directions (read):** While we all know preparation is key, it's impossible to practice or rehearse every single question that may be asked in an interview. But what you can do is

have a solid strategy for answering questions and a well-trained mind that is prepared to respond in a strategic way.

Let's review the strategies mentioned in the webinar and brainstorm some examples of how you might incorporate these into your interview responses. This is a great interview preparation exercise that you can complete together as a group or in pairs. Full participation in this activity will help you with your homework assignment and in the Playoffs!

*Give each participant one worksheet.*

**(Read) Strategy 1:** Every question asked is an opportunity to prove why you're the best person for the position. **Know your skills** and be ready to highlight and showcase them in every answer. Take a look at #1 on your worksheet and write down your skills. Include your hard skills as well as your soft skills. Feel free to work through this with your group or a partner.

**(Read) Strategy 2:** Practice your responses to frequently asked questions. Let's take a look at one of the most popular questions asked at the start of an interview, "Tell me about yourself."

This is the first impression and first opportunity for you to capture the attention of the hiring manager and to make your biggest accomplishments stand out. Here are a few example answers to this popular question.

- **Example 1:** *I've spent the last six years developing my skills as a customer service manager for XYZ Company Inc., where I have received several performance awards and have been recognized for my leadership and excellence in customer service. I love managing teams and solving customer problems. Although I love my current role, I feel I'm ready for a more challenging assignment and this position really excites me.*
- **Example 2:** *I have more than five years' experience as a technical project manager at several top Wall Street companies. Most recently, I led the development of an award-winning new trading platform. I'm a person who thrives in a fast-paced environment so right now I'm looking for an opportunity to apply my technical experience and my creative problem-solving skills at an innovative software company like this one.*

Now take a moment to brainstorm the skills, qualities, and achievements that you would incorporate into your answer. We're just brainstorming for now, so don't worry about drafting a polished answer. Just capture the highlights that you would include. Take a few moments to complete #2 on your worksheet.

**(Read) Strategy 3:** Examples speak volumes! For each quality or skill you present, make sure you're prepared to describe a situation that demonstrates that quality. Brainstorm a time when you used one of the skills you listed in Strategy 1. Be sure to truly highlight that skill and

the benefit it offered to the organization. For now choose just one skill. Take a few moments to complete #3 on your worksheet.

**(Read) Strategy 4:** Steer the interview your way and ***Pivot Like a Politician***. This takes serious practice and the only way to nail this is to practice answering questions that might highlight an area where you are lacking or where answering directly might be unfavorable. Let's review some examples of how a skillful pivot could change the outcome and leave the interviewer with a more positive opinion.

- **Example:** *When Amanda was asked about her salary requirements, she could have answered directly and confidently, "I need to earn \$50,000 a year." Or she could have made a slight deviation with her answer: "After a little research, it's my understanding that \$45-55,000 is a reasonable range for this type of responsibility. Hopefully this is in line and provides you room for negotiation."*
  - **Explanation:** *By giving a researched range, Amanda's pivot would avoid establishing an unfavorable ceiling for negotiation, but she wouldn't evade the question altogether. She'd leave herself in a better position to negotiate.*
  - **\*\*Side note:** *For more on researching salaries, check out the many LMI tools available through the Labor & Economic Analysis Division of Dept. of Commerce. Additional training on understanding LMI is available through the NCWorks Training Center.*
  
- **Another Example:** *When Amanda was asked about her educational background, she could have answered confidently, "I have a high-school diploma." Or she could have pivoted her response with, "In my 8 years in this field I've received real world/ on-the-job training that I feel is very beneficial. Past employers have always remarked about my written and verbal communication skills being first class. I find I really enjoy working with and learning from colleagues and clients from very diverse educational backgrounds."*

Now take a few minutes to think about something that makes you insecure professionally, where a pivot might be beneficial and how you might pivot. With your group or a partner complete #4 on your worksheet. Once you've done this take a moment to try this out with your neighbor or someone in your group.

**(Read) Strategy 5:** Being clear and concise is another important area that requires practice. You don't want to lose the details that make you stand out by cutting your answer too short, but you don't want to put the interviewer to sleep with your long-winded answer. Your worksheet has some suggestions about how to think and communicate in a more clear and concise way. Let's review:

- **Example provided on worksheet:** Think before you speak! What is your main point? Focus on that point. All other details are supporting details. Consider giving your main point first. This grabs the attention of your listener. Then provide 2-5 sentences to support your main point.

Now, I'd like you to take a few minutes to think about some ideas that you could add to this list provided on #5 of your worksheet.

**(Read) Strategy 6:** Engage the interviewer in more conversation by asking a follow-up question when appropriate. Some suggestions are highlighted in #6 on your worksheet.

- **Examples provided on worksheet:**
  - Did I give you the answer you were looking for?
  - Can I provide any additional details?
  - Are there any details that you're fuzzy on? I'd love to clarify.

Let's see if we can come up with any additional follow-up questions to add to this list and add them to your worksheet.

**(Read) Strategy 7:** Pause and think of an answer. The point of an interview isn't to see how quickly you can answer a question, so don't be afraid to pause to give yourself time to formulate the most appropriate answer. Your worksheet has a couple of suggestions on how to handle this, so let's take a look at #7.

- **Examples provided on worksheet:**
  - "Hmmm, that's an interesting question", and glance away for a moment.
  - "That's a tough one. Any chance we could come back to that one once I've had time to consider it?"

Do you all have any ideas we could add to this list?

**(Read) Strategy 8:** Strategy 8 touches on what to do if you cannot answer a question that you know is a requirement of the job. The webinar suggests remaining calm, positive, and to reassure the interviewer you can still perform the job. Let's review an example situation.

- **Example Question:** *The interviewer asks you to explain your knowledge of micros and meta tags. You have no experience or knowledge of what either are. What do you do?*
- **Example of Reassuring:** *"That's an interesting question, and while I don't have a direct answer for you because my involvement and experience is limited, what I can tell you is that I am resourceful, I'm not afraid of a challenge, and I'm a very fast learner. So, I don't think my inexperience would keep me from doing this job and doing it well."*

On your worksheet number 8 has some recommendations of what to say in this situation. What are some additional traits you could highlight that would mitigate a negative opinion by the interviewer?

**(Read) Strategy 9:** Recognize your faults. One of the most common dreaded questions in an interview is, “What is your greatest weakness?” You should be prepared to answer this question in a way that highlights a strength. #9 on your worksheet has an example.

- **Example Weakness (on worksheet):** *I get bogged down in the details and in turn I often spend more time on a project than necessary.*
- **Example of Restating as a Positive Attributes:** *I am a very detail-oriented person and have been known to get bogged down in the details. This has actually played to my benefit in the past, because I have found and corrected tremendous errors before they caused a problem. I am aware this can also be a negative when working with tight deadlines, so I am consciously working to deliver a detailed product without affecting the deadline.*

Now take a moment to record one of your weaknesses, then you and a neighbor discuss how you could turn it into a positive.

**Wrap Up (read):** This brainstorm activity was designed to get you thinking about how to prepare for some of the more difficult questions that come up in an interview. This strategy and methodology can be used to prepare for all types of interview questions, not just the tough ones.

Activities like these can be difficult, but self-assessment and preparation are truly necessary. You all did a fantastic job – thanks for your participation.

### **Session One: Score in Your Next Interview**

#### **PRATICE FOR THE PLAYOFFS (homework)**

*After the Practice for the Playoffs (brainstorm)*

**Homework** (30 minutes)

**Facilitator Instructions:** The homework assignment is a time for attendees to prepare for the simulated interview. While this is not mandatory, participants will benefit from the preparation. The time spent on this assignment should help them understand and be able to explain the preparation and self-reflection benefits and process to job seekers.

**Overview (read):** At our next meeting you’ll participate in a special mock interview that will help you better understand and demonstrate how essential preparation is for an actual interview. Each of you will have the opportunity to ask and answer questions.

We'll meet again on DATE / TIME, so you'll have # DAYS to complete this homework assignment. (*If your group completed the Brainstorm you can add – Use the brainstorm worksheet and the suggestions made by everyone here to assist in your preparation.*)

**Directions (read):** Before you leave today, I'll give each of you a list of sample tough questions and a blank Brainstorm Worksheet if you'd like. These are tools designed to help you prepare for the mock interview. Just a hint: these are not the only questions that will be asked in the interview. Your homework assignment is to complete the brainstorm activity individually and to use the sample question to prepare for the mock interview. You are welcome to do this on the sheet we completed together or I can provide you a blank copy. Now that we've done this as a group I hope you have a better understanding of the benefits of this type of reflection and how they can play a big part in successfully preparing for an interview.

*Give Sample Tough Interview Questions to each and offer a blank copy of the brainstorm worksheet to anyone who wants it.*

**Wrap-up:** Before the group departs, confirm participants understand the assignment and give them the date and time of the next meeting. Encourage them to take their assignment seriously and to work together in small groups if they wish.