

Autism: Attacking Social Interaction Problems

A Pre-Vocational Training Manual for Ages 17+

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Lesson 3: Acing The Interview

Advanced preparation and rehearsal of commonly asked interview questions will help reduce some of the anxiety in an interview situation. However, it is important to understand the reasons behind the questions (i.e., what is the interviewer “really” asking?)

The following activity is designed to provide the participants with a translation of what the interviewer may be asking. Thoughtful and honest responses to these initial questions will encourage the interviewer to want to continue the interview and know more about the applicant and potential employee. Encourage the participants to think of how they might respond to these questions.

Activity A: Translation: What the Interviewer is Really Asking

Prior to beginning this activity show the interview video, *Video 4–3: Alex*, which can be accessed from our companion website located at <http://www.pluralpublishing.com/publication/aasip17>



1. **Tell me a little about yourself.** Think in terms of brevity. Identify three to four things about yourself and how this may help you in the workplace.

Example: *I have five brothers and sisters, and growing up I had to learn how to share, compromise, and work with everyone.*

Example: *I come from a small Midwestern farming community and while I moved to the big city when I was 14 years old, I think I still have that Midwestern, small town work ethic. I am a hard worker.*

2. **What is your greatest strength?** Think in terms of how this may be advantageous to the prospective employee.

Example: *I am detail oriented, a critical thinker, a people person, and a hard worker, which would make me a good fit for your company.*

3. **What is your biggest weakness?** Give an example of a weakness and also provide the “positive solution” to your challenge.

Example: *I have time management issues, especially if I am having a hard time figuring something out. I've learned to create a schedule for myself to keep me focused so that I don't lose track of time on my other responsibilities.*

Example: *When I am challenged by something that I can't figure out, I've learned to ask for help. And I accept the fact that it's OK if I don't have the answer to every problem. I can ask a coworker or a team member for assistance.*

4. **How do you respond under pressure?** Answer honestly, but think in terms of how this could be handled in the workplace.

Example: *I get a little frustrated when I'm under pressure, but I will sometimes take a brief relaxation break to regroup and recharge. I usually come back refreshed and ready to work again.*

Example: *I thrive under pressure. I will work around the clock until I complete the job.*

5. **What kind of boss do you work with best?** Be honest and forthright, realizing that bosses are humans, too. Think in terms of what might be a deal breaker for you.

Example: *I work best with someone who is respectful of me. You sometimes hear of bosses who verbally take their frustrations out on their employees and I would probably not do well in that type of environment. Be prepared to explain specifics.*

6. **What three things would your previous boss say about you?** This is tricky because your previous employer may be called for a reference. Answer honestly. If your previous boss has nothing good to say, make it a point to leave the next job in good standing.

Example: *I now realize my last job was not a good fit because I didn't consider . . . I have spent the last **x number of months** reflecting on what went wrong and am committed. (Describe what you will do to change your behavior.)*

7. **In what type of work environment do you feel most comfortable?** This response is very personal and reflects your tolerance and environmental preferences. On the other hand, the employer will consider your response in the context of the culture of his or her organization. Many companies stress teamwork and open work spaces, whereas others are more traditional and foster autonomy in the workplace.

Example: *I am sensitive to loud noises and voices so for that reason I prefer to work alone. In looking at your website I was unclear as to whether the culture encourages one or the other. Can you explain your situation to me? Are there jobs that allow individual versus group efforts?*

8. **What do you hope to get out of this experience?** A thoughtful, personal response is required. Despite the fact that millennials change jobs more frequently than older workers, many employers are reluctant to invest time and money in an employee who is unwilling to commit to a reasonable period of employment. If the opportunity presents itself, you may want to ask the interviewer about the average length of employment for its employees.

Example: *How long do most employees stay with your company?*

Remember that the interviewers may sometimes ask for examples to support your responses. Be prepared to support your answer.

Upon completion of this activity, show participants the video interview, *Video 4-4: Nicholas*, which can be accessed from our companion website located at <http://www.pluralpublishing.com/publication/aasip17>



Activity B: Common Interview Questions

Tell me a little about yourself. _____

What is your greatest strength? _____

What is your biggest weakness? _____

How do you respond under pressure? _____

What kind of boss do you work with best? _____

What three things would your previous employer say about you? _____

Activity C: Interview Partner Practice

The group leader should explain to participants that the greatest challenge in any oral presentation or interview is nerves or anxiety. Advanced preparation and rehearsal of the commonly asked interview questions will help reduce some of the anxiety and create an initial impression of poise and confidence.

Participants should exchange their response sheets from Activity B with a partner for interviewing practice. It is suggested that this activity be video recorded for self-assessment.

Activity D: Interview Dilemmas

Instructions: Respond to the following situations. Be prepared to defend your position.

1. John feels he has done well with his interview. At the end of the conversation, the interviewer asks John if he has any questions or final comments. John wonders if he should tell the interviewer that he has autism and that sometimes loud noises bother his ears.

What would you do in this situation and why? _____

2. Bob was asked to tell a little bit about himself. He told the interviewer that he was very poor growing up and that the world seemed against him. He told how on many occasions he had no food and then one day he came home and his mother announced they were moving to a shelter. He choked up and abruptly ended his response. He sat quietly and waited for the interviewer to ask him the next question.

What advice would you give in this situation and why? _____

3. While on the bus, Mary spilled coffee on her blouse. Consequently, she has a big stain on her chest. She is so nervous and embarrassed. Should she say anything about it to the interviewer?

What would you do in this situation and why? _____

4. Erin is interviewing for an assistant position in a childcare setting. She is excited by the possibility of working with children. The interviewer explains that while his work hours would be 9:30 am to 6:00 pm, sometimes because of traffic, a parent occasionally may run a bit late and pick up a child after 6:00 pm. Erin is very familiar with the labor laws and is wondering if she should ask about overtime pay. She's not sure of what to say, if anything.

What would you do in this situation and why? _____

5. Bob is connecting with the interviewer and feels he has aced all of the questions. The interviewer raises one final question that throws Bob for a loop; she asks what he would do if he overheard a fellow employee at the lunch table saying that he was going to quit the job, not give the boss any prior warning, and destroy all of the company files. She says there is no right or wrong answer.

What would you do in this situation and why? _____

6. Twenty-two-year-old Daniel really wanted the job, but was so nervous he was certain he had blown the interview. He was surprised at the end when the interviewer said, "While I could tell you were uneasy, I think you would be a great fit for our company. I would like to offer you employment." Daniel was excited but wanted to ask his mother if it was OK. He wasn't sure how to respond.

What would you do in this situation and why? _____

Extension Activity

- Invite an HR consultant or a job coach to speak on the interview process and hiring considerations.