

**TIM VINCENT**

**→ NAIL THAT  
INTERVIEW**

**ANSWER  
TOUGH QUESTIONS**

**MAKE THE  
BEST IMPRESSION**

**AND  
GET THE JOB**

**Vermilion**  
LONDON

# ***CONTENTS***

<b>YOUR INTERVIEW, YOUR CAREER</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>STEP 1: WRITE YOUR CV</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>STEP 2: REVEAL YOUR CAREER FRAME</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>STEP 3: REVEAL YOUR CORE</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>STEP 4: PLOT YOUR CAREER TRAJECTORY</b>	<b>47</b>
<b>STEP 5: CAPTURE YOUR USP<sub>s</sub></b>	<b>69</b>
<b>STEP 6: DRAFT YOUR STORIES</b>	<b>75</b>
<b>STEP 7: RESEARCH THE ROLE</b>	<b>81</b>
<b>STEP 8: READY YOUR ANSWERS</b>	<b>113</b>
<b>STEP 9: NAIL YOUR QUESTIONS</b>	<b>129</b>
<b>STEP 10: PRACTICE</b>	<b>145</b>
<b>PRACTICAL PREPARATION</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>AFTER THE INTERVIEW</b>	<b>175</b>
<b>YOU ARE READY TO NAIL THAT INTERVIEW</b>	<b>180</b>
<b>INDEX</b>	<b>183</b>

# **YOUR INTERVIEW, YOUR CAREER**

Welcome to a whole new look at job interviews.

The interview is a misunderstood meeting. And yes, although you might not have thought of it in this way before, the interview is indeed a meeting. A business meeting, to be more precise, in which both parties are essentially trying to decide whether or not they want to work together.

*Interviewer:* Do I buy this candidate?

*Candidate:* Do I buy this job?

'Buy' might be an unfamiliar word to you in this context, but it's a word that you will come to know well as you work through this book. For *buy* you can, if you prefer, read *choose* or *select*. Making good buying decisions requires skill and perhaps a little luck, but when it comes to significant decisions such as which career path to buy then your skills ought to be as sharp as possible so that you don't rely on being lucky. Your career path is one you only get to walk once. So try to make sure the route you take is the right one.

This book cuts through some of the more commonly held misconceptions about the interview and gives you a clear process to follow that will help ensure you are prepared to give of your very best every time you walk into an interview and take the candidate's chair.

I'm a headhunter. I search out exceptional talent. Over some 16 years of recruiting I have been asked to find candidates, up and down the seniority ladder, across industry sectors, from all around the globe. Once a candidate has been successfully selected for a role, I help them decide whether or not to accept the job offer and join our clients' businesses.

All of the candidates we submit on shortlists end up representing themselves and our company at interviews. Without exception, these candidates tend to believe they interview either 'very well', 'pretty well' or at least 'okay', whereas unfortunately we have learnt the hard way that however good they are at their day job, the majority are, in fact, hopeless when it comes to selling themselves in interviews.

If, following the interview, our client doesn't hire our candidate then we don't get our placement fee. So I have become fascinated by interviews and what it takes to be successful at them. In this book I have pulled together all that I have learnt and set out the now well-proven, 10-step process my colleagues and I have developed to help ensure our candidates *nail* interviews for themselves and for us.

*Nail That Interview* will help you do exactly what the book title says. Take these 10 steps one at a time to ensure you are thoroughly prepared, rehearsed and poised to nail *any* job interview. Whether you are a first-timer, expert veteran, junior intern or senior board member, these steps are equally effective.

## IT'S YOUR MEETING

You have *more* than an equal responsibility to make the interview a worthwhile and successful meeting. Note I stress the word 'more'. You, the candidate, are in charge of this meeting. It is *your* meeting. At stake is *your* career. Potentially several years of your life ride on what you invest in this interview. On the other hand, the person interviewing you simply has one empty seat and possibly three to ten candidates. I don't care how senior a person is required to fill the position – cleaner to CEO/president, this meeting belongs to the candidate *not* the interviewer.

Ask yourself the following question:

*What has to happen for the job I am interviewing for to serve as a sturdy rung on the stepladder to my dream career?*

My aim is to help you be honest first with yourself and then with others so that the interview stands a better than average chance of taking you where you want to go.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT ATTITUDE

Good interviewers these days are trying to gauge the candidates' *attitude* because having the 'right attitude' is commonly perceived as the single most important criterion required for success.

In the past I presume you might well have prepared for interviews with a few obvious moves:

- Clean shoes
- Buy new suit
- Get hair done
- Bone up on interviewer
- Arrive early
- Remember to shake hand firmly

Additionally, if you are like many of my candidates, you will have searched the Internet for examples of common interview questions and how best to answer them. Here are some examples of questions and suggested responses that you'll readily find online for free:

### **Q. Do you make mistakes?**

A. (Be honest.) Yes, of course, on occasions, but I obviously try not to, and I always try to correct them and learn from them.

### **Q. How do you plan and organise your work?**

A. Planning and writing a plan is very important. I think how best to do things before I do them. If it's unknown territory I'd take advice, learn from previous examples – why reinvent the wheel? I always

prioritise, I manage my time and I understand the difference between urgent and important. For very complex projects I'd produce quite a detailed schedule and plan review stages. I even plan time slots for activities that aren't in themselves organised, like thinking time and being creative, solving problems, etc.

**Q. What type of people do you get on with most/least?**

A. Generally I get on with everyone. I respond most to genuine, positive, honest people. (If pressed as to people you don't get on with, say that you respect people for their differences and seek to understand them, rather than seeing differences to be a reason for conflict or difficulty.)

So now we know where all the rubbish that the average candidate reels off comes from. Honestly ... what a waste of everyone's time!

If you are ever interviewed by someone who hires you just because you gave a few snappy answers (better than those above I assume) at an interview – turn the job down. They are idiots! What do you think pre-rehearsed, one-size-fits-all answers tell an interviewer about your attitude?

By giving you the proven principles and coaching you to apply them, you won't need to surf the Web to find answers to stock interview questions. Rather you will have a structure around which the entire relationship between you and the interviewer is built.

## CAREER CATALYST

In completing the 10 steps you will come to realise that the job interview, rather than being a daunting test or scary audition, can be a significant and powerful catalyst for your evolving career.

More than how to pass smoothly through the interview doorway, you will learn how to use the interview to build and develop your career into what *you* want it to be. The preparation for the interview and the meeting itself can, when well executed, reveal and realise your (perhaps as yet unknown) career dream.

The actual job for which the interview was arranged in the first place should not be the sole basis and focus of the meeting. In fact the job behind the interview might in this context be seen as a *distraction* from the broader possibilities. Adopting this attitude encourages you to actively seek out and explore the wider career opportunities through the interview doorway. Possibilities will be revealed that you hadn't dreamt of. You will see how to realise them and set the wheels in motion to actually achieve them.

### POSTMAN TO CEO

Provided you, the candidate, arrive well prepared and with the right attitude, the interview for *any* job can be used to launch you on a trajectory towards *any* career target. For example, the trainee internal postman can become CEO of a Fortune 500 company. Manny Fontenla-Novoa started out in the post room of a travel business and rose to take the helm at Thomas Cook, a globally recognised brand that he led with great skill. When Manny interviewed for that postie job do you think he took the right attitude with him?

Something is attracting you to go for another job and you think the interview stands in your way as an obstacle. You would like to get to the opportunity beyond. So the interview represents some form of career stepping stone for you.

I don't think the interview stands in your way. On the contrary, I see the interview as your opportunity to explore your dream career with the selected representative of the shareholders/owners of the company you are considering working with.

Preparing for the interview is the simple and exciting first step to realising your dream career. This book will show you how to harness your knowledge and understanding so that you can drive your career forward in exciting ways.

## YOU HAVE TO HAMMER THE NAIL HOME

So the good news is that, when *nailed*, the interview can be *hugely* effective. Indeed it can be one of *the* most effective business meetings you ever attend.

The bad news is that you, the candidate, have to wield the hammer that hits the nail all by yourself because the traditional interview is, root and branch, designed to fail the lofty objectives set for it. It sits nestled as a process point, a singular stage within what will likely be a broad candidate selection process. As the candidate you are being considered for a role you probably know little about, by people who likely know absolutely nothing about you, in a meeting that asks that both parties make the call to go/no go based on whatever they *feel* following this face-to-face session.

The interview meeting is indeed unlikely to be effective. In fact, it is very likely to be dangerously ineffective at what it is intended for. Interviews (or more specifically, 60-minute meetings designed to select candidates for specified roles on the one hand, and for aspiring careerists to select their next career platform on the other) happen in the many millions worldwide every day and they are, for the most part, appallingly conducted by both interviewer and candidate.

Not any more. You the candidate can use the 10 steps outlined here to make sure your interview is well conducted, meaningful and fruitful. Pick up the hammer and get ready to swing.

## LET'S NAIL IT

Like any good meeting, whether business or otherwise, you should go into the interview with clear objectives. These are:

1. To answer the question: 'Do I want the job?'
2. To persuade the interviewer to want you for the job.
3. To clarify and agree on the next steps – how does this process lead to an offer?

To help ensure that you meet these objectives and indeed nail that interview, you are going to take 10 simple steps one at a time.

## THE 10 STEPS

- Step 1. **Write your CV**
- Step 2. **Reveal your career frame**
- Step 3. **Reveal your core**
- Step 4. **Plot your career trajectory**
- Step 5. **Capture your USPs\***
- Step 6. **Draft your stories**
- Step 7. **Research the role**
- Step 8. **Ready your answers**
- Step 9. **Nail your questions**
- Step 10. **Practice**

\* Unique selling points.

## USING THIS BOOK

Before we dive in, here are three pointers that will help you nail it first time!

### KEEP A JOURNAL

This journal is for your thoughts, reflections on and specific responses to each of the 10 steps. This will help ensure you retain everything for future reference because each time an interview comes around you will need to remind yourself, after all. (My instructions on using the journal are given for a handwritten notebook, but you can use an electronic format; whatever you feel most comfortable with.)

I will indicate where you need to use your journal with the following symbol: 

## READ THE INSTRUCTION MANUAL

Are you the kind of person who reads instruction manuals or, like me, do you prefer to be hands-on and figure stuff out as you go along?

Most of us have a tendency to simply get on with things and are too impatient to bother. We do miss something here. Usually it will be relatively minor but in some cases we can damage an appliance or, worst-case scenario, injure ourselves if we don't read and follow the instructions.

I recall the tale one candidate related of how his mate had bought a garden zip wire for his children and asked him to help set it up. He went round to his friend's house and found the zip wire assembled: all they had to do was run the wire between the selected trees. In his haste his mate had mislaid the instructions. No bother, it couldn't be that difficult. Could it?

To cut a long story short, an eight-year-old girl (the friend's daughter) ended up travelling at speed between the two trees and then beyond them some way distant into an adjacent field. Fortunately, she only sustained a few bruises.

Her father and his mate looked at each other with expressions that were a mixture of relief and shock. They had taken a stupid risk, but had got away with it on this occasion.

And the moral of this story? Simply that here in your hands you have an instruction manual for the interview meeting. Don't be tempted to skim it or skip over the parts you think you already know. Your career zip wire can fling you off into all sorts of weird and wonderful places. It's better to be in control. Read your instruction manual, this book, with care to ensure you use these meetings to best effect.

## THE RIGHT PACE

Having said this, it might not be possible for you to carefully work your way through this book as it depends when your next interview is. If you don't have that much time it's important that you focus on the priorities and these will vary depending on the amount of time you have available. The box below will help you set the right pace for your preparation.

<b>When is your next interview?</b>	<b>My recommendations and advice on how to use this book to the best effect</b>
<p>Not sure. At the moment I have no interview planned. I'm interested in career development and how I can make sure I am ready.</p>	<p>Perfect. Not only do you get to absorb the 10 steps at your leisure, you also get to play with the material in a variety of different settings before your next important interview encounter. However, to help ensure you really do get to grips with the techniques and principles, I recommend that you pretend that you have an interview in about 30 days' time.</p> <p>This will give your preparation some impetus and a sense of importance that will, to some extent, mirror what you will feel when you have a real interview looming.</p>
<p>In more than 10 days' time.</p>	<p>Schedule some personal time in your diary every day (a minimum of one hour per day) until the day before your interview. Over the time you have available, read the whole book, work through the 10 steps and try to ensure you have completed your journal. Ideally you should leave yourself four days to rehearse using Step 10 as your guide, so build this into your schedule.</p> <p>Monitor your progress and pace to ensure you don't overrun.</p>
<p>8–10 days' time.</p>	<p>Schedule some personal time in your diary every day (a minimum of two hours per day) until the day before your interview. Read the book through, but if you have already shared your CV with the interviewer (as it's likely that you will have by this point) I recommend a skim read of Step 1, but don't complete it, just move straight to Step 2.</p> <p>Monitor your pace carefully. You should aim to leave yourself two days as opposed to the luxury of four for rehearsal and practice.</p>

When is your next interview?	My recommendations and advice on how to use this book to the best effect	
6–7 days' time.	<p>As above but make your journal less of a priority to enable you to focus on the production of Prompt Sheets #1 (see page 78) and #2 (see page 139).</p> <p>Your reading of the whole book should still be timed to allow you two days to refine and rehearse the use of the prompt sheets.</p>	
5 days' time.	As above but schedule only one day for rehearsal.	
4 days' time.	Go straight to Step 5 and aim to read through to the end of Step 9 in a day. Then follow the advice below for the final three days before your interview.	
3 days' time.	<p>Provided you accept that this meeting will be more for experience and practice then leave it in place, but if you really want the role then I recommend you ask for a postponement. Use the line: 'I have looked into my preparedness and realised that in order to do the meeting justice I need to turn up with the right questions for you as this is a two-way exchange. How is your diary ten days from now?'</p> <p>If this fails or you want to go ahead and practise then accept that you aren't going to nail the interview but you'll give it your best shot in the time available.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Go straight to Step 5 and read through all the subsequent steps paying particular attention to Step 6 to draft your stories and the question structure in Step 9, both of which yield critical prompt sheets you need for your interview pack.</li> <li>2. Look up the bio of the person you are meeting. Print it off.</li> <li>3. Research the company in detail. Find the latest information, news articles and announcements. Look over the job specification if you have one. Consider the gaps between you and the role requirements.</li> </ol>

When is your next interview?	My recommendations and advice on how to use this book to the best effect	
1 or 2 days' time.		As above but: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Skip some of the detail in Point 3. Go for a skim here.</li> <li>b. Only aim for five questions and two stories.</li> </ol>
Tomorrow.		Ask for a postponement to allow you more time to prepare for what is a very important meeting. Failing this: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Take the rest of today off if possible.</li> <li>b. Only aim for three questions and one story.</li> </ol>

If the timing of your next interview doesn't allow you to go through the book in detail, do find the time once the interview is over. Allow yourself the space to reflect on some of the finer points of your career; this is the sort of thinking that simply doesn't usually surface through the noise of your busy life.

I am pleased to reassure you that whether you're looking for a job, moving jobs, hoping to rekindle enthusiasm, change career tack or simply seek greater progression in your current career – and whenever you are next due to be interviewed – *Nail That Interview* is the right place for you to begin. This book will help you turn the interview from a scary firewall into an open doorway to your dream career.

Whatever you have in mind – nail it!



# STEP 1: WRITE YOUR CV

'Thank you for coming along this afternoon. Would you mind beginning with a little bit about yourself? Just take me through the highlights. You know. Tell me who you are.'

Whoa! If there was a list of challenging interview questions this one would be right up there. It usually comes early in the meeting at a time when you are hoping to be given a slightly easier ride. It might well be asked by a senior manager who has only just received your curriculum vitae (CV) from their PA and is buying time to glance through your vitals while they figure out a more interesting question or two.

This type of opening question is commonly used but it is a challenge for the candidate. It's a great place for us to start because:

1. It is a blunt reminder of the sort of bizarre meeting you are going into.
2. It reveals a great deal about the interviewer and you will learn here how to gain strong control over the meeting from this type of opening question.
3. It is actually a great question to use on yourself to help get you in the right frame of mind as we begin.

The third point listed above is the most important. At an interview you are selling *you*. You are the product. You are on the shelf. Just you. So we had better begin by understanding a little about you. A lot

about you in fact. We need to get to know you really well so that we can sell you.

We are going to start to prepare for the interview where career advisers, headhunters and prospective employers begin with most candidates – the CV.

## THE CV MINDSET

Before diving into the CV itself we first need to look at who you *really* are, and do so in the right frame of mind. Understanding who you are is important in this context because it's the basis of what you're going to put in your CV and what goes into your CV ought to be an accurate reflection of reality.

Honest self-analysis can be tricky. I usually find candidates are inclined to be a combination of modest and bashful; however, it is critical that you are candid with yourself. This is not the time to hide your light under a bushel, nor is it helpful to view yourself through rose-tinted glasses.

Following are the three points I find best help those I coach to get into the right mindset before putting together their CV.

### I. BE YOUR OWN HERO

We often reference others as we place ourselves in the spotlight. We look to extraordinary individuals for inspiration, from the extremely successful in our immediate vicinity, such as friends, family or work colleagues, to global icons.

Our culture and the media eulogise the achievements of these global icons, which might suggest that we should strive to be just like them. Apparently, not only can we learn from what they have achieved and how they have achieved it, but, by implication, we can model our own career and achievements around theirs.

Possibly, for the truly remarkable among us, we can. But a far more practical approach would be to consider the wise reflection offered by creative strategist, consultant and writer Royale Scuderi:

*Don't measure yourself against other people, measure yourself against your own yardstick.*

Hero worship and striving to be like others is seldom of real use, whether the hero is someone famous or someone a little closer to home who has skills or qualities that you admire. Being inspired by extraordinary people is certainly good and the human spirit can achieve amazing things, but don't let these lofty goals distract you from setting realistic ones for yourself. Every journey is one step after another and it's your steps that are important, not trying to live up to the journeys of others.

## **2. PATS ON THE BACK AND SETBACKS**

Too often we don't take the time to congratulate ourselves when we are doing things right. So pat yourself on the back for one or two of your better decisions.

At the same time, acknowledge the setbacks you have suffered that have informed your wisdom. Facing failures is a cornerstone of great success. Every setback in life provides another stone for your personal foundation. I take candidates through a career-reflection stage that draws out the mishaps and hiccups along the way, as well as the successes and high points. We can usually line up their setbacks like a row of stones that points to what they have become. Here are two examples of setbacks from two different candidates:

### **SALES MANAGER**

A sales manager missed his budget by a huge margin and learnt from this never to accept an unrealistic budget but to ensure he pushed back until the numbers were rooted in reality at the outset. Since this setback he has not fallen short of his budget and has become known as the benchmark for overachievement.

### **SENIOR DATABASE ENGINEER**

The engineer delegated a small task to a friend who was unemployed and learnt that mixing business with personal relationships can cause you to relax normally rigid and important standards. The subsequent

mess was one that took two weekends and many late evenings to unwind. He considered he had been lucky – the whole project had been threatened. He raised the bar instead of lowering it for any friends he engaged subsequently.

Neither of them could have paid for better lessons than these. Both of them, when reflecting, realised just how critical these incidents were to forming the behaviour that earned them their subsequent success.

Sprinkled among major examples such as these are the many smaller failings experienced by all career-minded people who set out to try and succeed, but they know and understand that such setbacks go to make up the rungs they will use to climb their career ladder.

### **3. DEFINE SUCCESS IN YOUR OWN TERMS**

Consider the story of James, who is a candidate I coached out of making a very poor fist of a key review meeting he was preparing for. As is so often the case, his career setbacks were significant and painful for him.

James had joined the company in its infancy and played a key role in driving growth over his seven years' tenure with them. He had regularly been overlooked for promotion up the ranks as his contribution to front-line sales was considered too critical. He had become negative towards the company and his senior management team, having seen too many people join on more generous remuneration packages than his own. In his view these new recruits didn't have his ability and experience. When we met for this particular coaching session he was scheduled to see his line manager the following day and in his words: 'If he doesn't promote me and raise my pay in line with my peers I am walking!'

We needed to begin by redefining what a successful outcome for this meeting would be or it was pretty clear to me that he would be 'walking!'

It turned out that he was earning very well since his bonuses were linked to sales and he was succeeding. It also transpired that he loved selling and had no particular aspirations to do the administrative side of man-management. Furthermore, he had loved being recognised on stage at the global conference in the previous quarter.

With some further digging we managed to uncover what was at the root of his dissatisfaction. He told me that his best friend didn't recognise any of the above factors as positives; rather he held the narrow view that the de facto measures of success are title and basic pay. This guy nagged him to continually press for more and when he failed to get it he blamed firstly the employer for not recognising him fairly and secondly his friend for failing to get his just desserts.

It is easy to see how he might be drawn into defining success on terms that were defined by:

- His best friend, who apparently held a narrow view of progress measures
- The managers, who had bigger titles, bigger pay cheques, but very different roles

His terms needed to be his own. Once I had coached him to recognise this we worked together to prepare him for the meeting and he went in with a very different agenda:

- Expand territory
- Adopt vacant accounts
- Negotiate stock bundle for over-target performance
- Recognition as 'senior pursuit lead' for Central Europe

All of which he secured. In the subsequent 12-month period he more than doubled his income to record levels. Much of it he was now receiving as stock options that it turns out were destined for significant heights.

Now, in his view, he is a success. I don't know how his best friend feels and I honestly don't care!

Making success something you *expect* for yourself will be greatly helped if you follow three simple guidelines:

## **I. START SMALL**

If you are a couch potato today, you would be ill-advised to run a marathon tomorrow, because even if you were to succeed you would

be putting your health at risk. Begin by making improvements and enhancements that are reassuringly achievable, before stretching yourself further. For example, you might get up 10 minutes earlier tomorrow, do five press-ups and eat a yogurt. The next day add a short stroll, and so on. By taking a series of progressive steps people complete triathlons or run marathons. Apply the same principles to your career aspirations. By all means go for big, lofty goals, but make sure you allow yourself lots of little success checkpoints en route. As the saying goes, 'An inch is a cinch. A yard is hard.'

## 2. WELCOME SETBACKS

Accept that setbacks, however large, are a part of attempting to further yourself. They are the means by which you gather the necessary stones to build your personal foundation for success. Be very conscious of this at the start and you will welcome failure as a characteristic of looming success. You will no longer be among the many who give up when the going gets a little tougher than they had imagined in their daydreams.

When you imagine success allow yourself to consider the obstacles you are likely to encounter and see yourself handling each in turn. Again you are working to *your* terms here. To use the couch-potato analogy again, your personal terms should acknowledge that you first need to adjust your attitude and form some new habits before taking on a rigorous fitness-training programme.

## 3. CELEBRATE SUCCESS

While recognising successes as milestones to your broader progress they also act as reassurances. Do celebrate each successful achievement and do it with as much energy as you can. Be your own biggest fan. We fall too readily into the habit of dwelling on the negatives when actually positives abound.



As you achieve each success, make a note in your journal to capture the moment.

## THE CV AS A TOOL

I am frequently asked by candidates: ‘Do I need to redo my CV if I already have one?’ The answer to this question is yes. Drawing up your CV is the critical first step to ensure that you are working from a solid foundation from the outset. But as you may have grasped, the action of putting together your CV is actually valuable on many levels. Initially I recommend you approach your CV as a self-coaching tool and ultimately the end product becomes one of the keys that opens the door to the interview and indeed furnishes the interviewer with their briefing notes for the meeting.

The CV, when well structured, should act as a useful tool in three areas to:

- **Self-coach:** Understanding how you arrived where you are; this is the career management summary to date for yourself.
- **Direct:** Thinking about your key skills, experience and other talents; picking out the strong threads and achievements to date will help direct your career planning.
- **Communicate:** Providing a proven, well-established way of getting your profile to decision-makers; this is the traditional role of the CV as a sales support document (remember, the CV is presenting you). A hiring manager should be able to grasp quickly your value to their team.

What job you are interviewing for and at which organisation does not matter at this stage. Whether internal or external our preparation approach will be just the same and the CV just as valuable.

- **Internal move:** An internal move should be treated no differently to an external one. Essentially, you are still moving from one employer to another as usually your reporting line changes. However minor this change might be, you should prepare to be screened for the new role as thoroughly as if you were being hired from outside the business. Don’t make the mistake of assuming that the new line managers

who are going to be looking at your CV have access to all of the documentation on you or that they know you well through contact with other colleagues or perhaps because you've socialised with them. Assume the reverse and you will probably be closer to the truth.

- **External move:** When applying to a new organisation (or perhaps for your first job) the CV is the essential headline summary that helps support your case to join the company. It acts as the teaser that gets you an interview.

## WE BUY ATTITUDE

This is a timely reminder of the importance of attitude and the need to project yours positively throughout the process – beginning with your CV.

When a headhunter is trying to tease out all of the attributes our client is looking for in an ideal candidate we use questions such as:

- What are the key behaviour traits that the ideal candidate would exhibit?
- How will you know that you have found the right candidate?
- When you interview, what sort of specific aspects do you like to focus on?
- What three headline successes would an ideal individual have achieved within their first 12 months working for you in this role?

There is, however, one question that we have always found particularly useful in these assignment briefings:

*'When all is said and done, what one word do you feel best describes the person you want to hire for this role?'*

Sixteen years ago the most common answer we got in response was:

*Experienced*

We can logically assess experience. It has highly measurable aspects that are easily verified. It is indeed reassuring to know that a candidate has already proven they can do what you want them to do.

Today the most common answer to this question is very different. In actual fact, the answer is now usually one of these three:

*Attitude – Presence – Substance*

These attributes are not easy to measure and assess but projecting positive attitude through your CV should be much easier when you use the template (see pages 21–22). These qualities are also more difficult for the candidate to manipulate since they get a lot closer to the real you, the inner self if you like.

It is not the case that our clients have stopped looking for experience. Rather that it has simply dropped down the criteria ranking. We sense they are saying to us: ‘Find me a person that I can relate to and be impressed by. Then let’s make sure they have the other stuff.’

We have found that candidates who demonstrate the right attitude are people who seem to have a very good handle on who they are. Hopefully, once you have drawn up your CV you are somewhat closer to this clarity yourself. For sure you will have a sharper insight that in turn will help you project enhanced attitude, presence and substance when the topic is you! First impressions really do count and in many cases your CV will land ahead of you. Nail it!

## THE CV TEMPLATE

The CV is not supposed to be a complete history of you. It should be designed as a summary, focusing on the key points about you. You are the product and we need to big you up. The content and layout should ideally make it easy for the reader to glance through your CV and gain a good insight into your skills, experience and background. If it goes beyond two A4 pages, it’s too long. The temptation to oversell yourself is huge. When you’re concerned about securing an interview, you may well feel compelled to go to substantial lengths to justify why

you deserve the job. Unfortunately, it's very difficult to do that to any useful or reliable extent on your CV.

The good news is that there is a well-proven, tested and effective CV template. The CV samples that follow (see pages 25–31) meet a set of simple yet critical guidelines.

1. Font choice is a matter of taste, but there is a lot to be said for the readability of Times New Roman. I recommend a point size of 12, but whatever you do don't use anything less than 10.
2. Your name is at the top in a large, bold font. There is absolutely no need for the title 'Curriculum Vitae'.
3. What you are at your professional core is captured succinctly and compellingly without any fluff immediately beneath your name. This is the headline description of what you are professionally.
4. What you want is stated next. To help affirm that you aspire to something that the reader can understand and probably assist with.
5. Next your professional career chronology in reverse order so the most recent role is listed first. Critically, the relevant dates are in the left margin to enable a scan to any point in your history without risking confusion over when you did it and for how long. This section has to be kept extremely simple and yet content rich.
6. Education and the remainder are towards the tail end as they are usually not a priority and are of less interest to the reader.

## **WHAT YOU SHOULDN'T INCLUDE IN YOUR CV**

Just as important as what is included in your CV, is what you leave out. Please resist the urge to add anything 'clever' to your CV. Specifically avoid:

- Photos
- Generic covering letter

- Appendices
- Payslips
- References
- Diagrams
- Logos

I still get new and creative angles on the CV sent through to me, though none, I admit, as creative as the award winners you will find published each year by Business Insider. Try searching online for ‘insanely creative resumes’. Here you will find among others:

- A CV designed to look like a Facebook page (complete with complimentary wall comments).
- One set out like a Google page where the search was ‘Creative+Excellent Designer’.
- A CV sewn into cloth by a graphic designer who was a keen sewer.

Creative slants such as these on the traditional career summary are indeed entertaining and compelling. These particularly creative examples did actually help the respective candidates get interviews and indeed land jobs, but I don’t think they needed to go to these extremes. Too much effort and emphasis placed on the CV as a sales instrument runs the risk of giving the impression that the candidate behind the CV has to dress themselves up because they might lack the core quality that should speak for itself.

That said, if you are indeed going for a job as a clothing designer at a funky clothing company you might go so far as to make your sewn CV part of your proposition because there are exceptions to my principles and guidelines; some insanely creative jobs do indeed justify insanely creative CVs to win an invitation to an interview in the first instance. They are the rare exception and in my view the CV is not the right medium for expressing your creative flair. Please resist the temptation to indulge your talents here.

At the other end of the scale are those CVs we receive that are simply poor because they are:

- Too long
- Too short
- Unstructured or badly structured
- Full of spelling errors and typos
- Full of employment gaps that are not explained
- Incomplete and miss out an employer altogether that is shown elsewhere (e.g. on LinkedIn)
- Not consistent in style and use of font

Accuracy is crucial so check each detail carefully and make sure there are no gaps or inconsistencies. Ask someone who knows you well to read through this core content to ensure it is spot on.

If you follow these guidelines your CV will be laid out in the correct order. It will have all of the information that a prospective employer or recruiter needs to see and it won't have any extraneous detail or sales puff. Simply put, this template works.

Example 1 (opposite) is the CV of a recent graduate; Example 2 (see page 28) is for a more senior level executive. What I'm showing you here is that the template is identical for candidates who are at completely different ends of their careers. Don't be put off if the content doesn't relate closely to your career, rather notice the application of the template and guidelines I have set out.



Follow the template and draw up your CV. Print a copy off and keep it in the front of your journal.

**CV EXAMPLE 1****James Vino**

117b Etherly Road, London, E18 1QJ, England

tel: 09768 473871 (M), 0608 874 281 (H), email: jvino33@yap.co.uk

**A POSTGRADUATE with significant experience in sales, leadership, coaching and presenting. A qualified coach of martial arts. An academic foundation in Classics and International Relations.**

**OBJECTIVE: A challenging opportunity requiring the application of a broad range of skills and knowledge with a particular interest in international travel in the short–medium term.**

Dec 2008–date ***Mac Zone Magazine, Future Publishing, Freelance Writer***

- Wrote numerous video–game reviews as well as other articles and features that were published in several issues in 2009
- Also involved with brainstorming ideas for the magazine, one of which became a recurring feature that was highly rated in reader feedback sessions

Nov 2008 ***The Chronicle and Echo Newspaper, Research Assistant***

- Provided administrative support to the news desk and wrote news reports of varying length. Shadowed a number of correspondents and assisted with vox pop surveys and interviews with local politicians
- Recognised by the editor as ‘particularly determined and adept at impartiality in his research and information gathering’

June–Sept 2007 ***Richards No.1 Bar, Nottsborough, Bar Associate***

- Managed the main bar area for a local branch of a major chain of public houses. Completed three initial modules of the in-house management-training programme with distinction
- Increased up-sell by 18% and reduced losses through fraud, breakages and spillage by over 60% during my tenure. Rated as ‘Future Star’ by Regional Head

- June–Sept 2004 **Ecco Shoes, Nottsborough, Sales Assistant**
- Rapidly rose to assume responsibility for key shift leadership
- Aug 2003–July 2006 **Cargin Moss Black Belt Academy, Martial Arts Coaching Assistant**
- Delivered 45-minute tae kwon do lessons to children aged from 5 to 13. The classes generally consisted of 30 to 40 children. A typical lesson would involve a combination of warm-up drills, self-defence techniques, fitness exercises and training for competitions
  - Responsible for helping prepare lesson plans for each session, ensuring that all the necessary components were included to make the classes as beneficial and safe as possible for the students
  - Many students still reach out to me for pointers in their further development

## OTHER RECENT ACHIEVEMENTS AND ACTIVITIES

- Jan–June 2009 ***The Arts and Culture Show*, University Radio Nottsborough, Co-presenter**
- Researched, planned and presented a weekly programme that covered a variety of topics including local events in Nottsborough, film, theatre and current affairs
  - Responsible for organising and hosting weekly planning meetings where we would assign individual topics and discuss ways of improving the show
- Sept 2008–May 2009 ***Impact Magazine*, Contributor**
- Regularly wrote film reviews for Nottsborough University's student magazine

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## EDUCATION / QUALIFICATIONS

2009–2010	<b>MA International Security and Terrorism (Distinction Expected), University of Nottsborough</b>
2006–2009	<b>BA (Hons) Ancient History (2:1), University of Nottsborough</b>
2004–2006	<b>A-Levels, Nottsborough School for Boys</b> English Language (A), History (B), Drama and Theatre Studies (B), AS Politics (B)
2001–2004	<b>GCSEs, Nottsborough School for Boys</b> 2 A*s, 4 As, remainder Bs and Cs (10 in total)

## OTHER SKILLS

- Proficient in Microsoft Word, Excel, Outlook and PowerPoint. Basic competency in Microsoft Access, Adobe Reader and Photoshop. Basic understanding of HTML and Web content management
- Typing speed of approx. 70 wpm
- Clean driving licence, four years

## INTERESTS

Diving (PADI), triathlon (Nottsborough Team), tennis, 5th Dan tae kwon do coach

References available upon request

D.O.B: 16.10.1987

Nationality: British

## CV EXAMPLE 2

# Jocelyn R. Armstrong

The Vine, 18 Lois Drive, Peterborough, PE3 1GU, ENGLAND

tel: 09678 517435 (M), email: jocea13@ymail.com

**A CONSULTING ASSOCIATE adept in winning and developing major accounts and relationships, and in managing very large international projects in strategy, customer service and operational review across a broad range of sectors.**

**OBJECTIVE: An MD/CEO/COO role in a service sector organisation with a particular interest in those involving NVO.**

1987–date **BYOO Inc.**

T/o £1.5bn, a global operations, technology and review market leader

2006–date **Rawlinson Pickett, Client Associate**

Re-appointed to Client Associate with responsibility for greatly enlarged Group

- Led Group strategy project, reporting to CEO, to assess market opportunities and development of options to increase Enterprise Value materially over 5 years
- Played a central role in assessing attractiveness of options and developing the equity story with investment banks and the Board of Directors

### **Strategy Practice Head**

Promoted to head the £10m+ UK transport strategy consulting practice

- Appointed specifically to grow practice significantly over next two years

2002–05 **BYOO NVO Singapore, Managing Partner**

Promoted to build a substantial NVO practice in Singapore

- Developed and gained adoption of strategy and market-entry plans for start-up of NVO business securing \$10m seed-corn budget
- Created and owned whole business including hiring management team, developing operations blueprint and deal economics, selecting sites, negotiating contracts, implementing technology solutions, employee communications, client relationships, etc.
- Designed customer relationship management and shared services propositions for North American and UK transport, logistics, supply chain and wholesale clients
- Appointed as Managing Partner for Asia Pacific Operations, based in Singapore, directly responsible for P&L – £20m capex and £30m opex budgets – and 1,250 staff across region, serving clients primarily in the USA (Dow Jones 100) and UK (FTSE 100)

#### 2000–02 **Unity Rail & Cargo, Client Associate**

Promoted to full equity partner and to build the relationship from scratch

- Led numerous assignments sponsored by the Group finance and strategy directors including peer group analysis and benchmarking, strategic value analysis and review of South American telco acquisition
- Oversaw an operational budget of *c.* £85m reporting directly to the IT director
- Scoped, estimated, organised and gave leadership to an IT department of *c.* 200 staff
- Managed a programme of approximately 80,000 man days of effort, with six distinct project streams, including finance, shared service, field force and knowledge management systems
- Planned the integration of two substantial IT departments following the acquisition of a major UK transmission company
- Grew consulting sales from zero to *c.* £20m

- 1999 **Office of BYOO, Global Managing Partner, NVO**  
Appointed Programme Manager for head of \$3bn global NVO practice
- Reviewed performance across the top-10 client contracts, supported client service reviews and developed programmes to roll out standard methods, tools and practices globally, resulting in the closure of two unprofitable arrangements
- 1997–99 **ES Water Company, Account Manager**  
Promoted to Associate to repair the relationship with a major communications company
- Led all major projects with IT director's sponsorship including: geographic systems product selection, NVO programme management methods, field force product selection
  - Co-led with customer operations director's sponsorship the team winning major contracts for field systems implementation and NVO
  - Built revenue from zero in FY96 to £10m in FY99
- Pre-1997 **FR Consulting across a range of sectors in CRM and Shared Services**  
Invited to take a classic consulting career path leading from graduate to senior executive
- Led the team delivering the ITM strategy project for Rollo Stores Group, addressing customer segment profitability and customer experience across all channels
  - Led the project for a pan-European customer service centre programme for JY Chemicals collapsing fourteen administrative centres into two contact centres
  - Led a market entry strategy project defining the customer service capabilities that 'start-up' comms FM company, RTO, would take to market in Scandinavia
  - Led a customer service strategy project defining the future operational vision of a major customer service function for RoRo
  - Led a project defining the service strategy and business operations model for R2 across its varied customer base

- Acted as the subject matter expert in the FR-Spanish team developing an operations blueprint for the customer service function for Spanish electricity company, ESTL

**QUALIFICATIONS** James Wyatt College, Oxford University, IT, BA (First Class Honours)

**LANGUAGES** Fluent English, French and Spanish

**PERSONAL** Italian, married with two sons, willing to travel  
Hobbies include: classical music, opera, tennis and golf

## CV TIPS

Here are some things to bear in mind:

### Invest the Time

- Set aside a few hours when you aren't likely to be interrupted to think about and develop your CV.
- It's best not to develop your CV while you're at work; try and find some time at home at the weekend, when you are rested but alert.
- If you have objectives or personal review documents that have emerged from any scheduled review meetings over the past year (or as far back as five years if you can find them) with your manager, these can be useful aids/prompts to help clarify what to include on your CV.
- Focus on the benefits that you have brought to your organisation(s), in terms that people outside your company will understand.

- Refine your CV to emphasise those aspects you feel best illustrate your aptitude for a specific role or those sorts of role you are aspiring to, but I strongly recommend you do your tailoring after you have first developed the raw template as opposed to developing the whole CV with this in mind.

### **Keep it Confidential**

Your CV is a confidential document containing information about you and where you live and work that you should seek to keep confidential. There is nothing to be gained by a general broadcast of the complete document. It should not be passed to anyone without your having first agreed with them:

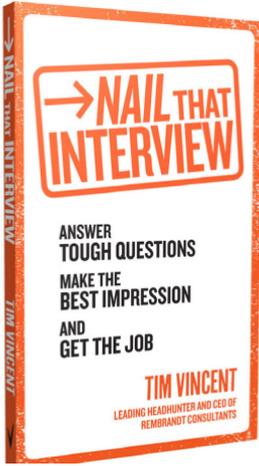
- Why they need it
- What they will do with it
- Who else they might share it with
- What has to happen for you to have it removed from their records

Elements of your CV can be released in various media formats (LinkedIn, etc.) but never the CV in its entirety.

## **STEP 1: WRITE YOUR CV – KEY POINTS**

- Don't hold back in selling yourself. You are the product here.
- Understand the pitfalls of hero worship and how setting realistic goals is much better for your peace of mind.
- Recognise that knowing who you are and projecting attitude, presence and substance is at least as important as your level of experience to the interviewer.
- Write your CV, based on the proven template.

This is an extract taken from *Nail That Interview*  
by Tim Vincent



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