

# **INTERVIEW PREP PLAYBOOK**

## **College Student Edition**

by  
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# Preview

If you're like most college students, you'll get very little help finding your first big job. This book is designed to change that.

Keep reading and you'll learn how to successfully build your job hunting strategy, polish your resume, and prepare for interviews. Plus, you'll find secrets about what recruiters want to hear during interviews and what will turn them away.

The advice you're about to read is based on my experience recruiting hundreds of college students for summer internships and entry-level jobs. In this book, I'll give you everything you'll need to know to differentiate yourself from other candidates and get offers for competitive, often high-paying jobs.

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# Introduction

Over the past twenty years, I've interviewed hundreds of college students. Most of them were bright and highly motivated. Very few of them had the interview skills needed to get the jobs they wanted.

In rare instances, I've interviewed students who were amazing. They gave compelling answers to all the questions they were asked, and they received offers from nearly every recruiter who interviewed them.

If you want to become one of those superstar job candidates, this book is for you. You'll find a game plan for dazzling recruiters with incredible answers to the toughest interview questions. You'll find tips for researching companies and figuring out exactly what their recruiters are looking for. And you'll find advice for refining your skills and using tools that are available to you on your college campus.

I used many of the techniques in this book when I was a student. When I first entered business school, my fellow students might have elected me "Least Likely to Succeed" if my school had such an award. I was awkward, and I had no experience in my chosen career field. By the time I finished my two-year program, I had

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gotten an internship at one of the best marketing companies in the world, and I received job offers from powerhouse companies, including Frito-Lay, General Mills, Kraft, SC Johnson, and Quaker.

Those impressive results didn't happen because I was talented. My natural ability paled in comparison to that of my fellow classmates. Those results happened because I learned the secrets to interviewing. This book will reveal those secrets to you.

As a college student, you'll spend years getting educated in your chosen subject matter. However, if you're like most students, you'll receive very little help to get the jobs you want.

When I was in college, I was lucky enough to get life-changing advice from my school's career counselors. Their coaching set me up for years of success in my career. Most students aren't so fortunate. They won't receive the guidance they need to get the jobs they want.

After graduation, I started recruiting students for my company's marketing department. I noticed that many of the most accomplished students didn't know how to answer interview questions. Their responses were often vague and didn't communicate their true potential.

I knew that without strong interview skills, they would never make it through our rigorous selection process.

When I found particularly talented students who performed poorly during interviews, I offered them suggestions to improve their skills. That led to me organizing interview workshops for student organizations and career development offices at colleges where my company recruited.

In this book, I'll share the playbook I developed for those workshops. I'll also give you tips based on my years of experience recruiting students from some of the top universities in the world. My hope is that you'll learn from this advice so you'll get the interviews you want. Then, you'll nail those interviews using the skills you'll develop from the process described in this book.

To illustrate some of the concepts, I've included a story about four fictional college students who became successful at interviewing. While these specific students don't exist in the real world, they represent the combined experiences of many students who've gone through the job hunting process.

In each chapter, I'll summarize the key lessons from the story. I'll also provide tools and templates you can use

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to dramatically improve the skills you need to get job offers.

One more thing ... if you've read my other book, *Amazing Interview Answers*, you'll notice that some of the content in this book is repeated from that one. Please forgive the duplication. You'll find that most of the content in this book will be new. The information that came from my other book helps me explain the game plan I recommend for interview preparation. I suggest you read this book first to build your strategy. Then, as you practice your answers to interview questions, use the *Amazing Interview Answers* book to help you refine your own amazing answers for the most commonly asked interview questions.

Now, let's get started.



## **Step 1: Form an Interview Group**

When I was in school, I received the best career advice of my life. It happened when I asked a career counselor to tell me the most important thing I could do to get job offers. Without hesitation, she said four words that changed my life. I guarantee that if you follow those four words of advice, it will significantly increase your odds of getting job offers.

In the story you're about to read, I'll reveal the advice that became instrumental in my success.

As you read the story, keep in mind that your peers will be your best resource throughout your career. They're highly motivated to help you because you're going to help them. You'll find other resources, including career counselors, professors, and mentors, but your peers will have the most to offer you.

Let's see how the characters in our story approach their job hunting journey.

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## STEP 1: FORM AN INTERVIEW GROUP

After his summer break, Jim Harrison arrived at Southern State University and started to panic. He seemed behind all of his classmates. They were coming back from impressive summer jobs that gave them valuable experiences in their desired career fields. He was coming back from a summer job as a camp counselor, which paled in comparison to the summer jobs that his fellow students had.

Jim wanted to be a high-powered marketer someday. Since his first business class in high school, he knew marketing was the path for him. It just seemed impossible to get a good summer job at a reputable company.

The previous year, Jim always felt like he was behind. He didn't hear about most jobs until after the companies had finished their interviews. For the jobs he did hear about, he interviewed, but he wasn't given any offers.

As he walked into the student lounge, Jim saw Don from his track team. He went up to Don and shook his hand. "Hey, Don. How was your summer?"

"Hey, Jim. It was awesome. I got an internship at Titan Supercenters in their sales department. At the end of the summer, they gave me an offer to work there again

next summer. They said that if everything goes well, they'll give me a full-time job when I graduate."

"That's great. It sounds like you're all set."

"Yeah, I really loved working there. And it'll make things so much easier if I don't have to worry about finding a job. How was your summer?"

Jim cringed. "It was OK."

Don looked sympathetic. "Where'd you work?"

"Actually, I was a camp counselor."

"What? I thought you wanted to be in marketing. Being a campy isn't gonna get you squat."

"Thanks for the encouragement, pal. Seriously, I don't know what I'm doing wrong. I tried to get a good summer job, but it didn't work out. What should I be doing differently?"

"Look, buddy, I'm gonna give you the best career advice you'll ever get. Are you ready?"

"Yep, lay it on me."

"Here it is. **Form an interview group.** That's what I did, and it was the best decision I've ever made. Well, gotta go. See you in the weight room tomorrow."

As Don turned and walked away, Jim called out, "Wait! What's an interview group?" Don must not have heard him as he rushed out of the student lounge.

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Jim was left standing alone, wondering what "form an interview group" meant.

The next day, Jim ran into Emily from his debate club. She gave him a friendly hug and said, "Hey Jim, how've you been?"

"Great. I just got settled into my new apartment. How about you?"

She grinned. "I'm doing well. My summer was absolutely amazing! I interned at Hydropolypharm doing marketing projects for their new blood pressure medicine. My boss actually tried to get me to start working there full-time. She said I could be a marketing assistant while I finished my degree at night school. I told her I had to come back here full time to teach you how to be a better debater." Emily gave Jim a grin. "What did you do for the summer?"

"Actually, I was a camp counselor."

"What? I thought you were interested in marketing. Why didn't you get a marketing job?"

"I tried, but I couldn't find one."

"Jim, you're one of the smartest guys I know. Are you telling me that you couldn't find a single marketing job for the summer?"

"I appreciate the compliment ... I think. Things just didn't go my way. I always found out about jobs too late, or when I did get an interview, they'd give the job to someone else."

Emily gave Jim a sympathetic look. "That sucks. I hope you have better luck this year."

"Thanks. If you don't mind me asking, how'd you get your summer job?"

"It was easy. Someone from my interview group told me that Hydropolypharm was coming to campus to interview students, so I sent their recruiter my resume. They put me on their interview list, and, well, I nailed the interview."

"Someone from your interview group? What's an interview group?"

"Come on, Jim. You gotta be kidding. You're not in an interview group? No wonder you didn't get a good summer job. An interview group is the key to finding good jobs. It'll help you get your resume ready, help you research jobs, and most importantly, help you practice interviewing."

"How do I get into an interview group?"

"That's easy. Just form one yourself. Find a few people, and set up meetings with them. Come to think of

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it, I have a friend who's transferring here from Northern State University, and she's not in an interview group yet. Maybe she can join yours. Her name is Sarah. I'll text you her phone number." Emily looked at her watch. "I'm late for class. Gotta go."

"Wait. I need you to tell me more about interview groups."

"No time. Just go to the career development office. They'll tell you everything you need to know." Emily hurried off to class.

Again, Jim was left standing alone wondering why everyone seemed to know about interview groups but him. He pulled up the campus directory on his phone and found the career development office.

Later that afternoon, Jim walked into their office and found the receptionist sitting at a desk near the front door. "Hi, I'm Jim Harrison. I'd like to talk with someone about forming an interview group."

"Great, one of our career counselors will be right with you."

Jim sat in the waiting room feeling hopeful. It seemed like the secrets of getting a good job were about to be revealed. Whatever an interview group was, it might be the key to his future success.

After waiting a few minutes, Jim heard someone call out, "Jim Harrison?" He looked up and saw Billy, one of the camp counselors who helped train him a few summers ago.

Jim stood up and shook Billy's hand. "Hey, Billy. What are you doing here?"

"I guess I'm your career counselor. They said you wanted to talk about interview groups."

"That's right. Honestly, I don't even know what an interview group is, but it seems to be something that can help me get a good job."

"Well, you've come to the right place. Interview groups are my specialty." Billy led Jim past the receptionist to a small cubicle.

As they sat down, Billy said, "Let me start by explaining what an interview group is. They typically have three to five people who meet several times a week, and their goal is to help their members build the skills needed to get the best jobs possible."

"Why are there only three to five members? That seems like a small group."

"It's so you can work around each other's schedules. If you get too many members, it's hard to find times when you all can meet."

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"How do you find people to be in the group?"

"That's the easy part. Just pick some of your friends or classmates. Think of people you've worked with on group projects or in clubs. Tell them what you're doing, and see if they want to join you. If people join, but they don't show up, don't worry about it. As long as you consistently get two or three other people at your meetings, you'll be fine."

"Should everyone have the same major?"

"Well, that's up to you. Some people like to be in groups with others in the same career field so you can share information about potential employers. Other people prefer to be in groups with people who have different majors so they don't feel like they're competing with their group members for the same jobs. It's your call."

"So, what should we do in our meetings?"

"First, you'll need to build your strategy. That means figure out which companies you want to interview with, how to network with their recruiters, and how to get on their interview schedules.

"Next, exchange resumes and give each other advice for making them better. That should take about a week or two.



"Then get a list of interview questions. We have lists here at the career development office, and some of the student organizations have good lists, too.

"Finally, practice your interview answers, give each other feedback, and repeat. You'll want to spend weeks practicing your answers and giving each other tips for making each answer better."

Jim nodded. "How often should we meet?"

"I recommend two or three times a week. That'll be often enough to get some good practice in your meetings, and you'll have enough time between meetings to practice on your own. Each meeting should last at least an hour, but not more than two hours."

"That's a lot of time. I'm not sure I have that much time to spare."

Billy paused, then asked, "Why did you come to college?"

Jim looked confused. "Same reason as everyone else. I want to get a good job."

"How's that working for you?"

"Not very well."

"You run track, right? How much time do you spend on that?"

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"During the season, I spend a couple of hours a day, five or six days a week. In the off-season, maybe half that. I'm guessing that's a few hundred hours a year."

"How many years have you been running track?"

"Since I was in eighth grade, so that's six or seven years."

"So, to be competitive at track, you've spent over a thousand hours practicing. How many hours have you spent practicing your job interview skills?"

"That's not a fair comparison. The competition in track is fierce, and coaches expect me to practice a lot."

"OK. You've practiced for track because of your coaches, but you haven't practiced your job skills because no one expects you to. Which is more important, doing well in track or getting a good job?"

"Getting a good job."

"So, why aren't you willing to spend a few hours a week building the skills you need to be competitive in the job market? Look, I came to college for the same reasons as you, to get an education, play sports, party, and find a good job. After getting here, I heard a great story that taught me how to prioritize those things."

"A CEO hires a consultant to help him figure out how to improve his business. The CEO meets with the

consultant and starts talking about his priorities. He explains that he wants to generate a profit for his investors, he wants to set the business up for long term success, and he wants to create an environment where employees will want to work.

“The consultant politely nods while the CEO talks. When the CEO finishes, the consultant asks to see the CEO’s day planner. The CEO hands over the planner, and the consultant spends a few minutes flipping through it. Then the consultant says, ‘Now I’m going to tell you what your priorities really are. Your top priority is to socialize with other executives. Your second priority is to travel to interesting places. Your third priority is to spend time with the people who’re planning your company’s holiday party. You see, your priorities aren’t what you say they are. Your priorities are what your calendar says they are.’

“The consultant was right. You said your top priority is to get a good job, but how much of your time do you spend on that? You need to put your money where your mouth is ... or rather, put your time where your priorities are. If your top priority is to get a good job, you should spend more time preparing for that. The best way to prepare is to form that interview group and use it to practice for your job skills.”

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Jim looked down. “I’ve never thought of it that way. It seems like I’ve been wasting my time on the wrong things.”

Billy shrugged. “Probably. The good news is that you still have time left. The question is what’ll you do with it.”

Jim left the career development office committed to forming his interview group and getting started on his job hunting game plan. Over the next few days, he thought about who he’d like to get in his group. He wanted to find people who were motivated and people he enjoyed spending time with. He decided that he’d find people who were majoring in different subjects so he wouldn’t feel like he was competing with them for the same jobs.

In the end, Jim invited Ethan, his best friend from high school, who was majoring in computer science. He also invited Abby, who he knew from the track team. She was majoring in engineering. Jim did contact Sarah, who was recommended to him by his debate team colleague Emily. Sarah was getting a dual degree in nursing and psychology.

When they compared class schedules, they found that everyone was available on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays from 11:00 a.m. to noon, so they reserved

those times for their meetings. They agreed to meet in a quiet corner of the student lounge.

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It's rare that we spend much time doing things that we consider to be our top priorities. Most college students spend the majority of their time in classes, socializing, and participating in extra-curricular clubs or sports. Very little time is spent on becoming marketable to future employers.

One issue is that we're not accountable to anyone for building our career skills. We feel much more accountable to professors, friends, coaches, and team members so we spend our time on things they want us to do.

If your goal is to get a job in a competitive field, you should make yourself accountable for building the skills you'll need to get the job you want. An interview group is a perfect way to build that accountability. If you form an interview group and commit to meeting with your fellow group members who rely on you to build their skills, you'll stand a better chance of following through.

Interview groups shouldn't seem like an obligation. They should be fun. You should find people you enjoy

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spending time with and people who bring out the best in you. Look for people who are motivated so your time is productive, but also look for people you enjoy being with.

If you don't know where to find people for your interview group, you have several options. Student organizations are a great place to start. Even if they don't currently offer interview groups, you can encourage a student organization to add this service to their list of activities. Interview groups would be great offerings for academic organizations such as marketing clubs or math clubs. They would also be great for fraternities, sororities, and diversity clubs. You can also see if your career development office or a professor can help you get into an interview group.

Once you form your group, commit to specific days and times to meet each week. I recommend meeting three times a week for at least an hour per meeting. That'll give you enough time to practice your skills without it being a burden.

You should also commit to a certain amount of time to practice by yourself between meetings. I recommend you schedule two to three hours a week to do that.

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