



**Doorway
to College™**
Foundation



INTERVIEWING IN THE HOT SEAT

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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INTRODUCTION

An interview can be the most nerve-racking part of any application process, whether for college admissions, entry to scholarship or academic programs, or your first “real” job. This book offers guidance in how to conduct yourself in an interview setting. We will walk you through the interview process, from the first question to your closing statements. We’ll show you the types of questions to anticipate and prepare for, including the ever-popular situation-based questions, along with a foolproof response strategy for storytelling from the hot seat.

Along the way, you'll see journal prompts to help you begin thinking through your answers to common interview questions. One of an interviewer's main goals is to learn more about you than what's been presented on paper. A successful interview requires knowing oneself, which can be a challenge early in life when you are just beginning to discover, create, and develop who you are. The journal prompts are designed to help you tell your story in a way that brings your inner qualities to the surface.

By knowing what to expect—and what is expected of you—and by committing yourself to practice, you can be ready to shine in any interview situation.

"I think self-awareness is probably the most important thing toward being a champion."

—Billie Jean King, professional tennis player (winner of 39 Grand Slam titles), activist



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FIRST TIP: BE ON TIME

We can't begin to express how important it is to be on time for any interview. To be late shows disrespect, disorganization, or that you don't take the opportunity seriously. So set a backup alarm, double check your directions, and head out early enough to allow time for getting lost, traffic delays, or mishaps such as a flat tire. Do whatever it takes to get to the interview location with at least 15 minutes to spare. Allow time for a trip to the restroom and for catching your breath and centering yourself. You'll want to be relaxed and ready when the door opens and the interview begins.

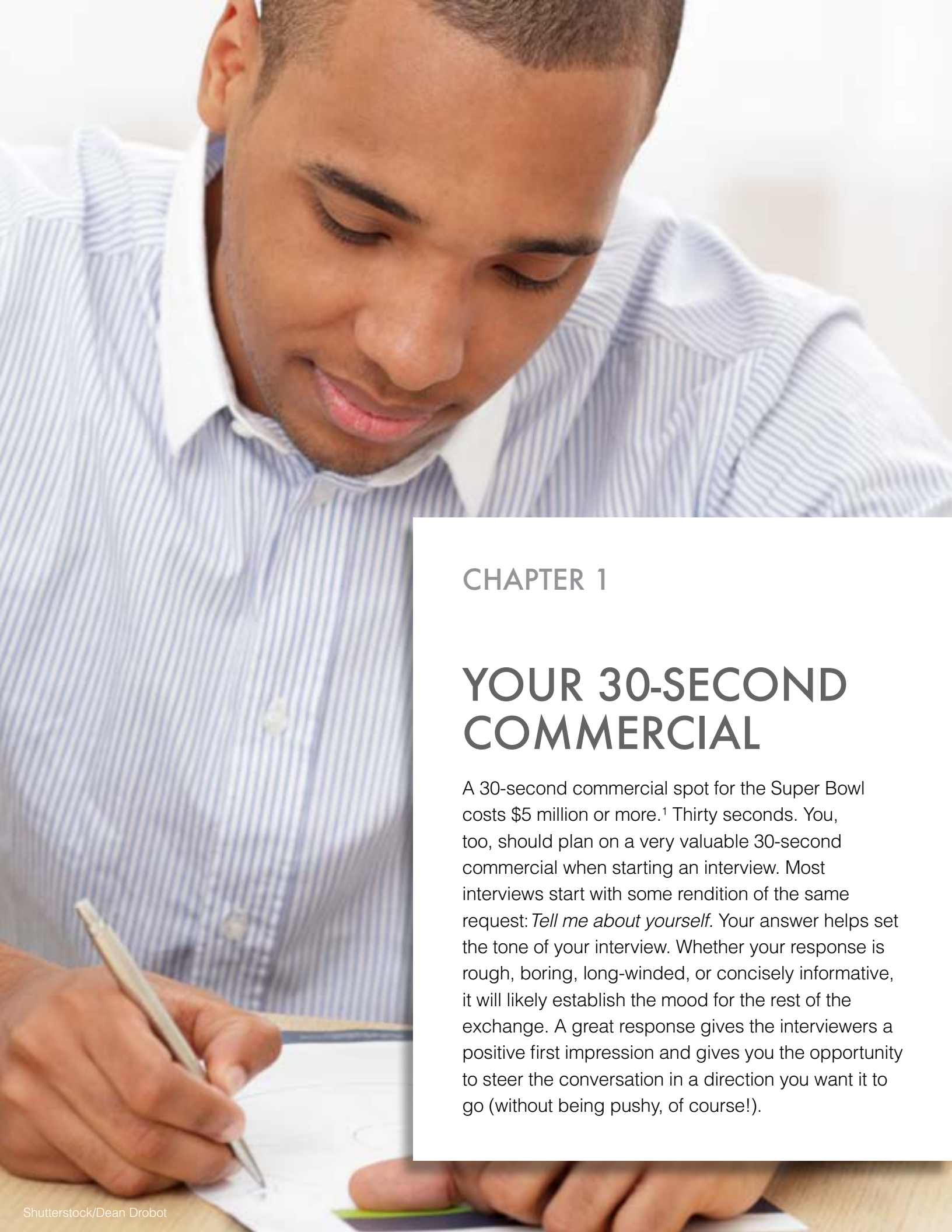
JOURNAL PROMPTS

• **Gathering background information**

- o Will you have an interview in the near future? If so, with whom and for what purpose?
- o What information about the interview has been shared with you so far?
- o Have you researched the organization to find out what it's like and what kind of person they are looking for? What are some ways you might do that?
- o Do you know anyone who has had a recent interview with the same organization? If so, ask them to share their experiences with you, and record notes of your conversation with them in your journal.

• **Initial impressions**

- o How do you feel about the opportunity you are applying for and the organization it's with?
- o What are your concerns about and hopes for the interview?



CHAPTER 1

YOUR 30-SECOND COMMERCIAL

A 30-second commercial spot for the Super Bowl costs \$5 million or more.¹ Thirty seconds. You, too, should plan on a very valuable 30-second commercial when starting an interview. Most interviews start with some rendition of the same request: *Tell me about yourself*. Your answer helps set the tone of your interview. Whether your response is rough, boring, long-winded, or concisely informative, it will likely establish the mood for the rest of the exchange. A great response gives the interviewers a positive first impression and gives you the opportunity to steer the conversation in a direction you want it to go (without being pushy, of course!).

When asked to describe yourself, imagine a few additional words at the end of the prompt: *as related to the purpose of this interview*. Remember, your interviewer is not expecting you to describe every aspect of your life. What you *are* expected to do is describe yourself (including relevant experiences) as related to whatever you are applying for: a job or internship, a scholarship, or a college acceptance. By keeping this in mind, you will focus your introduction and limit the amount of off-topic information you share.

Some inexperienced interviewees will respond to *Tell me about yourself* by saying, “My name is ____.” At this point, you’ve already been called by your name or have had some other indication that they know who you are. So skip this formality and move right into the meat of your introduction.

Your response to *Tell me about yourself* is your 30-second commercial. Your goal is to—briefly and positively—make this introduction informative and relate it to why you are in the interview setting, while also moving on to the bigger questions. For example, how do you relate a general introduction to an ambition for acceptance into a university’s College of Education?

Like many who’ve sat before you, I’m an aspiring teacher. I was fortunate to spend my high school years in a community that supported student ambitions and engaged us in volunteer efforts that supported the community in return. In my junior year, I was given the opportunity to work on literacy with second and third graders three hours a week. This reinforced my own passions for reading and writing while also affirming my comfort level in an elementary classroom, and I realized that I wanted to spend my life doing this

work. I very much appreciate the opportunity to be here with you today to discuss how I might continue on my venture toward a career as an elementary educator.

If we dissect that response, you will see that we’ve enlightened the interviewer(s) about your ambition, volunteerism, gratitude, community engagement and awareness, forethought, commitment, personal passions, and realism. An ambitious person would refer to getting a degree as a venture. A realistic person would mention her forethought about classroom management. A committed volunteer dedicates regularly scheduled hours. A grateful and thoughtful young adult pays attention and gives credit to the supports and opportunities presented in the past and present.

A response such as this stays positive and brief, while relating the message to the business at hand—and telling the interviewers plenty about the individual before them.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Free write in response to this prompt in your journal: *Tell me about yourself as related to the purpose of this interview.*

Write for 5–10 minutes nonstop. Don’t worry about spelling, punctuation, or grammar. Your goal isn’t a perfectly finished piece at this stage, but simply to generate as many ideas as possible on paper—the beginnings of a rough draft. Come back later to choose which ideas to keep or discard. Then polish your writing into the “30-second commercial” about yourself that you plan to give at the beginning of the interview.



Shutterstock/Monkey Business Images

A PROPER HANDSHAKE

You never get a second chance to make a good first impression, and that first impression often begins with a handshake. Here are a few tips to help you pull off that all-important handshake without a hitch.

- Generally, the person with the higher authority initiates the handshake. If you initiate the handshake, always follow through. If you're a female meeting a male, however, you may need to take the initiative. Some men—especially older, more established professionals—are still unsure whether to shake a woman's hand if she doesn't offer it first. So gauge the other person's body language. If he seems uncertain about shaking your hand, offer yours first.
- Make sure your hands are clean and dry.
- Stand, square your shoulders, face the person directly, make and hold eye contact, smile, and shake with your right hand. Maintain eye contact; not doing so can seem at best unconfident, at worst shifty or dishonest.
- Your left hand should be visible and by your side, not in your pocket.

- Stop whatever you are doing for the handshake; don't try to shake on the run, as if you are itching to get away.
- Don't present a weak handshake, but don't crush the person's hand, either. Your goal isn't to send a message of dominance, just confidence and sincerity. Read the other person's cues; if the other person offers a weak handshake, be careful not to overpower him. This is especially important to practice with a respected, confident adult, as your grip sends messages about your personality.
- How long to shake? Two to five seconds—two or three shakes—should do the trick. But don't pull your hand away prematurely; if the interviewer is still gripping your hand, pulling away too quickly may seem rude.
- Exchange pleasantries, such as "It's nice to meet you, Ms. Jackson." Repeat the person's name to yourself a few times so you won't forget it. You may want to say the person's name again during your farewell.

The more you practice your handshake, the better it will get, so enlist help from parents and professional adults.

A woman with blonde hair and blue eyes, wearing a dark blue blazer, is looking towards the right side of the frame. The background is blurred, showing other people in a professional setting.

CHAPTER 2

THE DRILL

After a glowing introduction, the interviewers will generally turn to a more direct line of questioning. You can anticipate many of the questions: *What are your greatest strengths? What are your greatest weaknesses?* These questions, in some form, are often asked in interviews. Honesty will make for the smoothest interview. Honesty *and* practice. A balanced amount of both will allow you to disclose relevant information in a fluid way.

WHAT TO TAKE TO AN INTERVIEW

What should you bring to a professional interview? It is a nice idea to have with you a clean, professional looking (but not necessarily expensive) folder or portfolio containing the following items:

- Extra copies of your résumé, if applicable
- Any additional information you would like to share that wasn't sent with your application
- Brief research on the organization or program for your reference, if needed
- Questions you want to ask
- Your list of references and/or letters of recommendation, if applicable
- A pen and paper to take notes (shows interest and engagement)
- Examples of your work, accolades or glowing reviews, new test scores, or awards not yet seen by the interviewers

“Truth allows you to live with integrity. Everything you do and say shows the world who you really are. Let it be the Truth.”

—Oprah Winfrey, media mogul, actress, and philanthropist

Lies are hard to maintain and follow. Even variations of the truth can get away from you. Honesty will prevent such complications. A balanced amount of honesty is necessary; the phrase *brutal honesty* was coined for a reason. Over-sharing can send you off track. Keep your cool.

Honesty is related to sincerity, and you certainly want to project this quality. Sincerity also means sharing *your* truth. Asking others for their input about your strengths and weaknesses can be a helpful brainstorming tool in preparing for early interviews, but unless you truly see these traits in yourself, you may not come across as sincere.

Balance also applies to practice. You can prepare for an interview. You can and should practice responding to questions. It's a good idea to review lists of potential and common interview questions. This way, you are less likely to be completely baffled or at a loss for words when asked any given question.

Over-preparation can lead to a robotic tone, however. It can give the impression that you are more *prepared* than actually *present*. Such an impersonal tone makes it harder to make a connection that will leave a positive and lasting impression. You want to be a candidate they remember—for all the right reasons. No matter what question you are asked, advance preparation and honesty will set you up to be that candidate.

Examples of questions you might anticipate include the following:

- *What are your strengths?*
- *What is a challenge you need to overcome?*
- *Why should you become part of our program?*
- *Why are you interested in this particular field?*
- *What skills do you have to offer?*
- *What experience has prepared you for this position?*

There are loads of sample questions on the web as well. Tailor your search terms to the position you're applying for, of course. Here are some that will yield plenty of results:



- sample interview questions for college admission (or internship, job, etc.)
- what will I be asked in a job interview
- most common interview questions

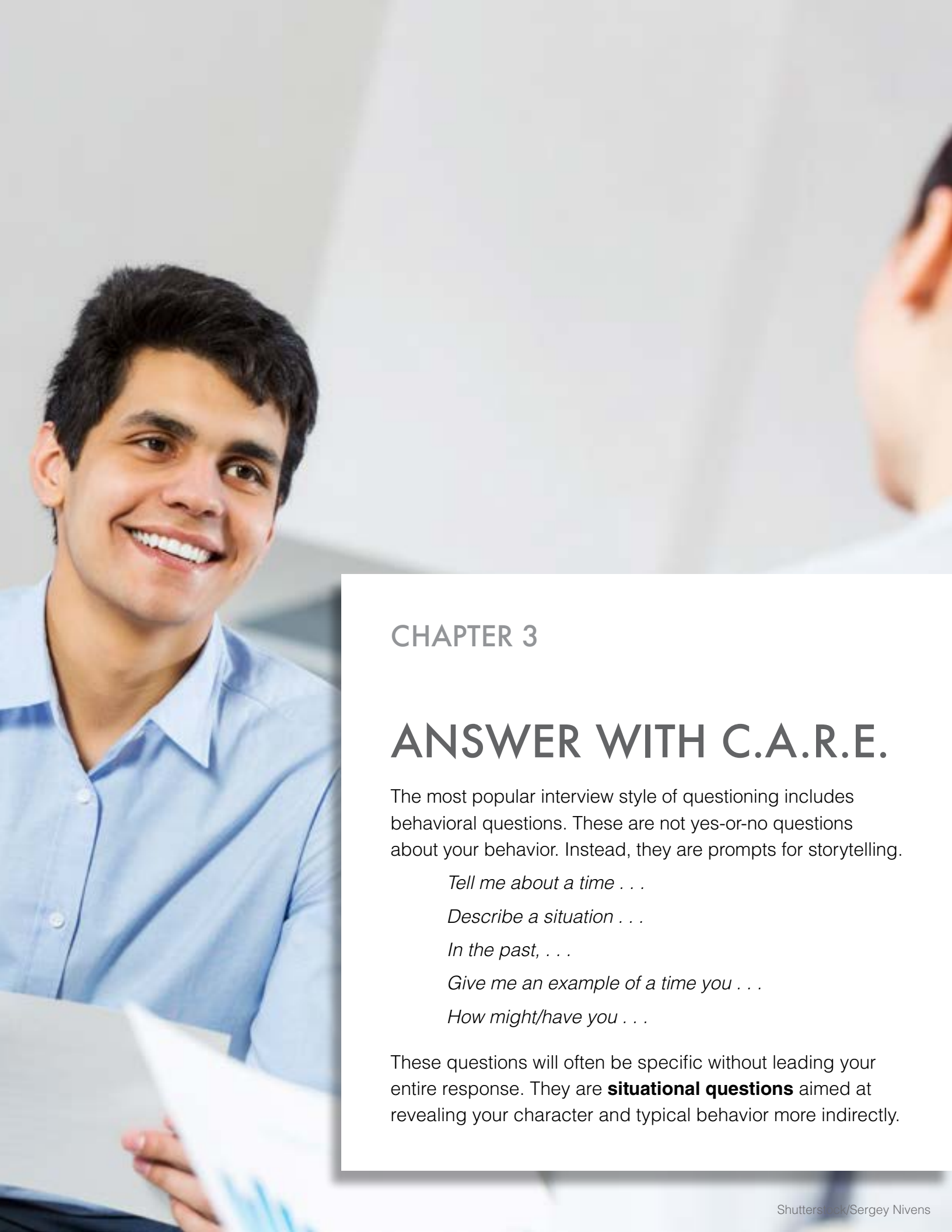
Project confidence in your abilities and experiences—even if they don't specifically match the stated criteria—and even if you don't feel confident. After all, you've gotten this far, so you know they're interested in you. It's your job to convince them that you're a good fit. Don't falsify your experience or qualifications, but remember that your innate qualities may well be more important than what they say they're

looking for. Are you eager and willing to learn? Are you a quick study? Do you persevere until you master a task? Will you readily adapt to the culture of the school, business, or other organization you're applying to? Many hiring managers and college admissions officers see these qualities as even more important than the stated criteria for the "ideal" candidate.

Don't be afraid to toot your horn (modestly) a bit, but be sure to give concrete examples of your qualities to counteract any shortfall in experience.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- **Self-reflection:** Brainstorm on a piece of paper for 5–10 minutes in response to the following questions: *What are your greatest strengths? What are your greatest weaknesses?* It is okay to brainstorm in the form of a two-column list or to write nonlinearly, all over the page. Don't worry about complete sentences or correct spelling. Just keep writing, jotting down as many ideas as possible within the time frame you have set for yourself. Make sure that for every weakness you include at least two or three strengths.
- **Feedback from others:** Interview two or three people who know you well, asking them what they perceive as your greatest strengths. Also ask them to tell you frankly about areas where they think you need to improve. Try not to interrupt or be defensive. Jot down their responses in your journal. Then set their comments aside and come back to them later, after you've had some time to absorb their feedback. Think about which comments ring particularly true.
- **Write your responses:** Using the self-reflection page and the feedback you received from others, draft a concise response to *What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?* Pick at least three strengths and one or two weaknesses to write about.
- **Brainstorm evidence that you are a good fit for the program:** Prepare a concise, informed response for the question: *Why should you become part of our program?* In other words, why would you be an asset? What makes you a good fit? This is not a question about why you like their program but about what *you* will bring to their program. Your answer should incorporate some or all of the following: *Why are you interested in this particular field? What skills do you have to offer? What experiences have prepared you for this position? What qualities do you possess that will be an asset to their organization? In short, what's in it for them?*



CHAPTER 3

ANSWER WITH C.A.R.E.

The most popular interview style of questioning includes behavioral questions. These are not yes-or-no questions about your behavior. Instead, they are prompts for storytelling.

Tell me about a time . . .

Describe a situation . . .

In the past, . . .

Give me an example of a time you . . .

How might/have you . . .

These questions will often be specific without leading your entire response. They are **situational questions** aimed at revealing your character and typical behavior more indirectly.

These types of questions can produce angst among candidates. *Do I have enough stories? Which ones are good enough to share? What if my stories are all from school or home or lifeguarding? Are those enough?*

The truth is, *your* stories are exactly what they are requesting. Your stories have to be enough. They are the only genuine responses.

Yet there are times when your stories may be more than enough, as in, they go on and on, veer off topic, end up being too revealing, or have no real conclusion because you are storytelling as if talking to a friend rather than an interviewer. Again, recall the tagline “*as related to the purpose of this interview*” and apply it whenever possible.

THE C.A.R.E. STRATEGY

To ensure that you tell an appropriate and concise story, answer with C.A.R.E.

C: Challenge/Circumstance

Open your story by briefly describing the situation that applies to the circumstance the interviewer presented.

A: Action

Describe the actions you took in that situation.

R: Result

Explain the outcomes of your actions by summarizing how the situation ended.

E: Epiphany

Elaborate on what you learned from the experience.

“Story is a yearning meeting an obstacle.”

—Robert Olen Butler,
Pulitzer Prize-winning author

You may be thinking that storytelling is obvious or easy—or that telling a story about yourself is hard. By clearly outlining the four parts of your story, you are more likely to stay on point, take ownership of your part in the given scenario, and give a clear picture of how the entire story played out (the Result).

The unique part of the C.A.R.E. response strategy is the Epiphany. An epiphany is a discovery or realization you gained from the experience. Stating what you learned brings the focus back to you in your closing.

A great benefit of this approach comes when you are given a behavioral prompt such as, “Tell me about a time you experienced failure.” Typically, you might think this is the last type of experience to highlight when trying to sell yourself in an interview. If you don’t follow the C.A.R.E. response strategy, you will likely end with the result portion of your story which, obviously, would give a negative impression since it is about failure. By adding your epiphany, you can highlight what you learned and what you have done differently since the incident—or will do differently going forward. This ends the exchange on a positive note in a situation that very likely could otherwise leave an awkward silence in the room.



Unsplash/William Stitt

Let's explore a question-and-answer illustration of the C.A.R.E. response strategy. For the sake of the most valuable practice, we will use a request for a negative experience.

Interviewer: *Describe a situation in which you had to deal with a difficult team member.*

**“Be yourself;
everyone else is
already taken.”**

**—Oscar Wilde,
Irish playwright,
novelist, essayist,
and poet**

Response: *When working on a senior project focusing on environmental protection, we had one student who did not prepare in advance for a presentation to the 9th-grade class. Though we made up for her lack of preparation so the students could have the best possible experience, I did confront her afterward. Instead of attacking, I asked what had happened to make her behave out of character, and I found that she had gotten some terrible news of a death in her family. I was glad I had approached her the way that I did instead of making assumptions and regretting my actions later. I learned that covering for her made this awful situation better for her and all of us instead of making it worse by leaving her hanging. Protecting the reputations of team members when possible is important in many situations.*

Analysis: Let's identify where each element of the C.A.R.E. response strategy was applied. The **Challenge/Circumstance** is presented right away in the first sentence: The interviewee had an unprepared teammate on presentation day. The **Actions** he took quickly follow. He met the challenge by making up for her lack of preparation, and he confronted the classmate afterward in a kind and concerned manner. The **Result?** His actions allowed him to understand her plight, and the team had an explanation for the challenging situation they found themselves in. The **Epiphany** steers the discussion away from the sad news his classmate received and brings it back to the interviewee's willingness to be a team player, with concern for his audience and his team taking precedence.

"Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today."

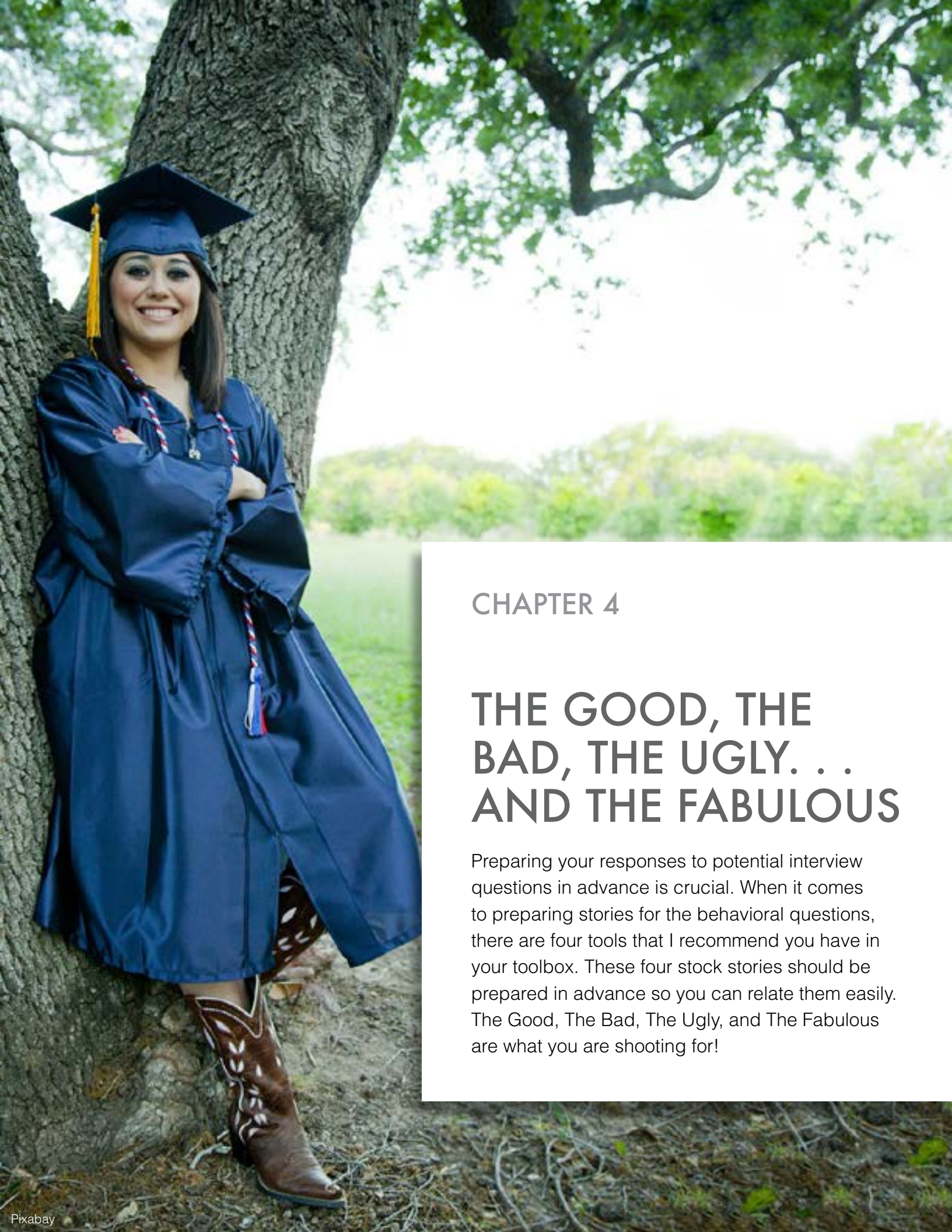
—Robert McKee, writer, professor, creative writing instructor

Not only is this response comprehensive and relevant, it also allows the respondent to highlight characteristics and experiences that might be appealing to the interviewer: teamwork, presentation skills, and difficult dialogue within a confrontation. In such a scenario, the interviewee might find that he's prompted a line of questioning about the presentation, its topic, his work with younger students, and so on.

Such difficult questions can feel as if they are meant to trap you, but they actually give you an opportunity to shine. Don't be afraid of them.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Outline one or two personal stories using the C.A.R.E. strategy. Make sure they point to characteristics you want the interviewers to see in you. Discuss your stories with someone who knows you well and who is a good writer—an English teacher is a great choice—and incorporate his or her feedback in developing your final response.



CHAPTER 4

THE GOOD, THE BAD, THE UGLY. . . AND THE FABULOUS

Preparing your responses to potential interview questions in advance is crucial. When it comes to preparing stories for the behavioral questions, there are four tools that I recommend you have in your toolbox. These four stock stories should be prepared in advance so you can relate them easily. The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, and The Fabulous are what you are shooting for!



Shutterstock/Antonio Guillem

THE GOOD

The experience you wish to relay in this situation should be one that tells of a success or learning experience that was positive. This might be an accomplishment you reached after working long and hard, an accolade formally received, or a situation in which you took on a leadership role. You'll very likely come up with one or two ideas right away. Going through the process of shaping your stories into the C.A.R.E. response strategy will help you land on the one that would be best to share in an interview setting.

THE BAD

Sharing an experience that represents a failure, a plan that went awry, a third-place finish after plenty of preparation, and so on may put a knot in your stomach. It shouldn't, though. We've all had such experiences.

- **Change bad to good.** Fessing up to a weakness or a mistake you've made shows you are self-aware and honest. But don't dwell on how horrible you are or were. Your interviewer isn't expecting you to grovel apologetically. Instead, speak calmly and forthrightly about what happened. Frame

your weakness in a way that shows positive aspects of your character, or tell what you've learned and how you're working to improve that particular weakness.

For example: *Until recently, I often turned in big assignments late. I always want to submit the best work I can, and it was hard for me to let go before squeezing every possible minute out of the timeline. But this past semester, I set up a schedule in my planner for each long-term assignment—including time for review and revision—and I make sure I stick to it. I'm on time now, and sometimes I even turn in assignments early!*

"Most failures aren't actually failures, but remarkable ways to grow as a person."

**—Jack Wilkins,
Student, University
of Virginia**

Or: *My natural inclination is to be shy in large groups. I used to be afraid to speak up and contribute to class discussions. I'd turn red with embarrassment whenever the teacher called on me. I could barely utter a word. But since last year, I've been practicing mindfulness techniques when I get scared, and I've successfully conquered most of that fear. Two of my teachers have even commented on how much I now add to class discussions.*

- **Remember, T.M.I. means too much information.** When an interviewer asks you to talk about a mistake you've made, you don't have to admit to the worst thing you've ever done. Pick a mistake that's mostly innocuous, one that might be a bit embarrassing, but not one that would get you ejected from the interview. Hopefully you've been a paragon of virtue throughout your high school years. But if not, unless you have a police record, use some discretion.
- **Illegal activity could come to the surface.** If you *do* have a police record—and it wasn't sealed because you were a minor—this is as good a time as any to face it. Young people make mistakes, and some of those mistakes lead to trouble with the law. If this has happened to you, hopefully you've learned a lot from the experience and are on the right path now.

If asked about a mistake, be up front about anything that is likely to come to light when the college or business researches you. If you lie on an application and your employer or college finds out the truth later, you may well be shown the door. So tell the truth (the short version, not detail by detail). Show what you've learned from your mistakes. Tell how you are different now. Just don't cast the blame on others, which takes us to the next type of interview question: "The Ugly."

THE UGLY

“The Ugly” is called such because it gives you the opportunity to get ugly. Often it is the story that provides an option to criticize other people. For example: *Tell me about your most difficult leader, teammate, conflict, or experience of ridicule or criticism.* Questions about “The Ugly” invite you to tell how other people may have done you wrong. These questions are an easy trap to fall into.

Being prepared in advance for this type of question can be a game-changer. The key here is to describe bothersome *actions* rather than *people*—not describing the person but the situation. Again, explaining how you learned from the incidents and the actions of the person (*who shall remain nameless*) will allow you to put a positive light on a negative experience.

THE FABULOUS

This absolutely should be your point-of-pride story, the one you can’t wait to share. This is the story that has you poised for the interviewer to ask just the right question so you can pull it out of your back pocket. What makes you proud? How will you be remembered among your

classmates and teachers? What experiences have defined you or guided your decisions and helped bring you to this very point in your life? Answering these questions will undoubtedly bring your fabulous story to the surface.

A great reason to prepare this story in advance is to set the right tone in your portrayal. Practicing this story can help you be confident without crossing the bridge to arrogance.

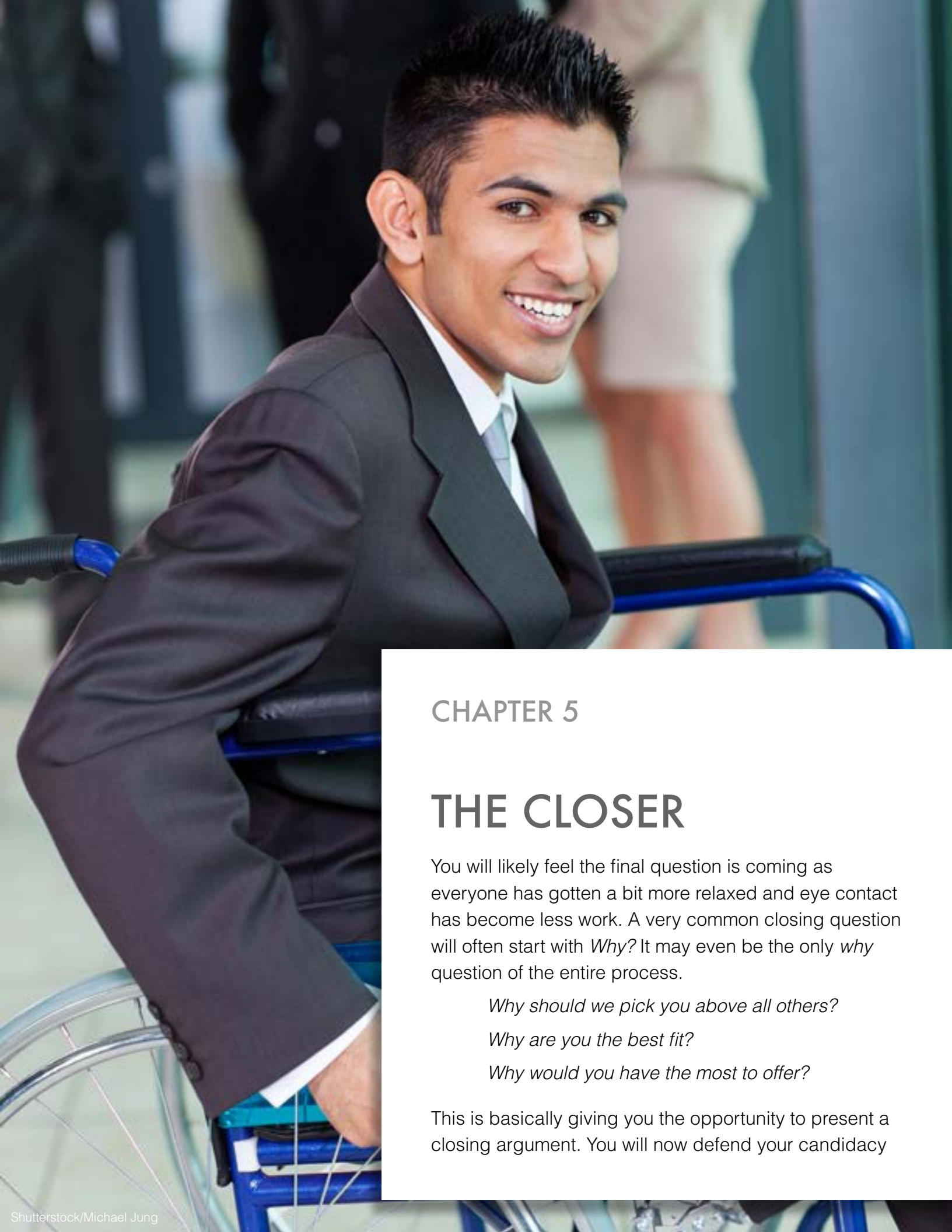
YOUR ARSENAL

With these four stories developed and practiced, you are a well-prepared interviewee. While you may not be asked all four question types, you will certainly be presented with variations that lend themselves to using at least half of the stories in your arsenal. The more you’ve practiced these, the more likely your other off-the-cuff responses will be intelligibly delivered as well.

One last point about your tale of fabulousness: Work it in. If you feel the end of the interview drawing near, and you’ve yet to be asked a question that has allowed you to share this story, look for a window. That window may very well come with the closer.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

Jot down four experiences that fit the categories of The Good, The Bad, The Ugly, and The Fabulous. Tell the stories aloud to a friend and a wise adult whose opinion you respect, such as your high school counselor. Discuss the stories in light of your goals for each category. Are the stories appropriate for the purpose? How can you refine them to be concise and to the point?



CHAPTER 5

THE CLOSER

You will likely feel the final question is coming as everyone has gotten a bit more relaxed and eye contact has become less work. A very common closing question will often start with *Why?* It may even be the only *why* question of the entire process.

Why should we pick you above all others?

Why are you the best fit?

Why would you have the most to offer?

This is basically giving you the opportunity to present a closing argument. You will now defend your candidacy

with a summative response about how you have given the opportunity great thought, feel prepared but excited to learn more, and are sure your past experiences and positive characteristics are a good fit. Close with your eagerly expressed hope that they agree with you. (Of course, this is a guide to your closing response only if it's your genuine feeling.)

THE HOT SEAT CAN GO BOTH WAYS

Part of your recommended closing statement includes your belief that you are their best candidate. But what if you've not been given the opportunity to ask your interviewers any questions by this point? Can you really be certain that you'll be happy in their organization? Before bringing in The Closer, take the initiative to say something similar to the following:

I've highlighted much of what I have to offer and am excited about this opportunity. I would really like to hear more about exactly what you are looking for in filling this role.

THE POWER OF THE PROFESSIONAL THANK-YOU NOTE

One thing that can set you apart from the crowd is sending a professional thank-you note after the interview. Thank-you notes are almost a dying art form, and few applicants still send them, but recipients of these notes are almost always impressed by a good one.

A good thank-you note—

- Is sent promptly (the same day as the interview is a good guide)
- Is positive and professional in tone
- Addresses the recipient by his or her correctly spelled name
- Thanks the interviewer for the opportunity to meet and discuss your qualifications
- Reiterates your core strengths and your interest in the position
- Emphasizes the value you would bring to the program or why you are a good fit
- Respectfully and politely counters any reservations the interviewer expressed, if applicable
- Presents important information you didn't get to in the meeting, if necessary
- Says you look forward to hearing from him or her soon



In most interviews, you will be interviewing the interviewers as well. Indirectly, you should be asking, *Why should I want to offer my time and talents to your organization?* I say “indirectly” because I do not recommend you actually phrase a question this way. I do recommend you have a handful of questions prepared that show you’ve given great thought to the opportunity before you. It is important for you to get this position, scholarship, or opportunity, but it is just as important that you know it’s a good fit for you as well.

“Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one’s courage.”

—Anais Nin,
author

Questions that will be valuable in making such a decision might look something like these:

What do you enjoy most and/or least about being part of this team or organization?

What characteristics have made others successful in this role in the past?

What opportunities for leadership would exist if I am selected?

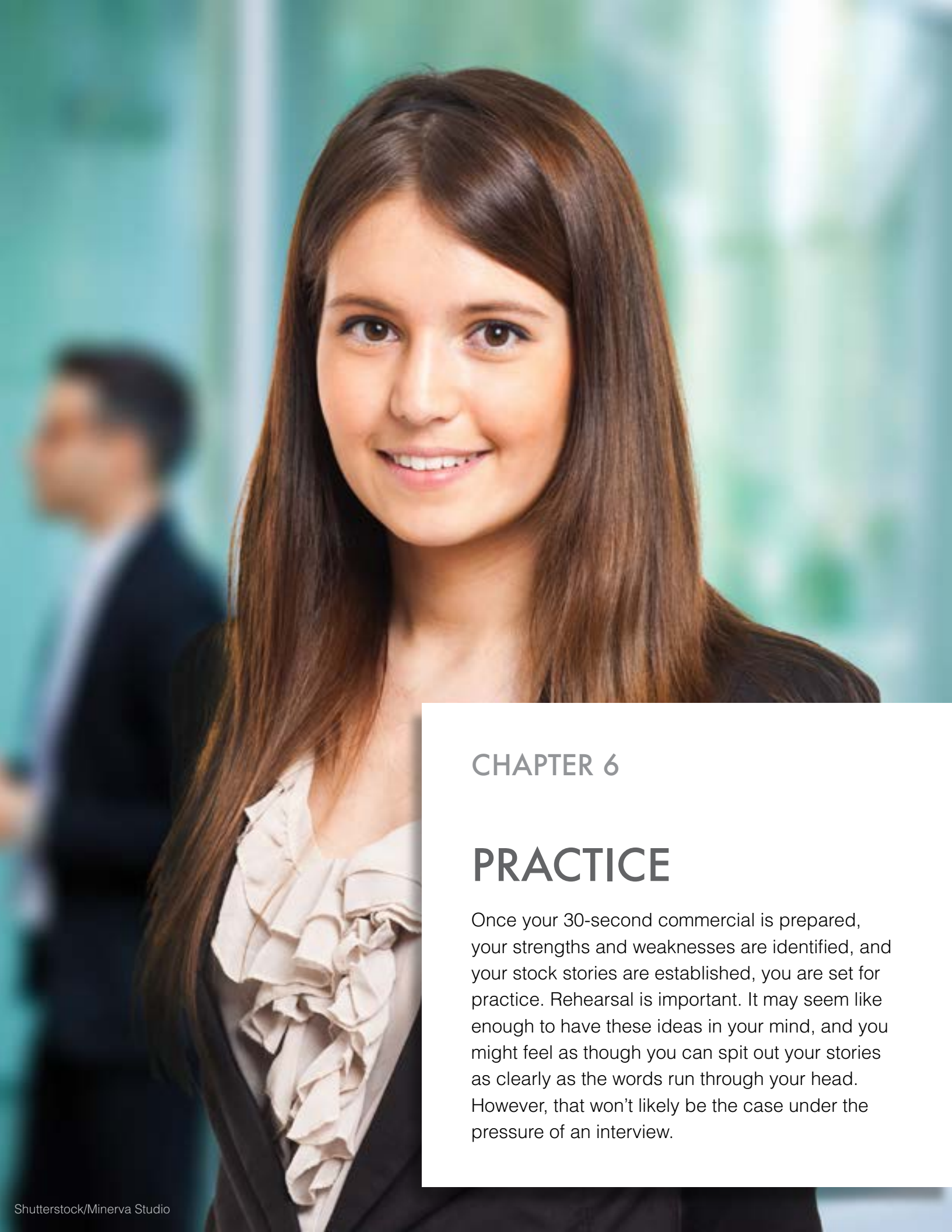
Your questions should not be limited to schedule, pay, benefits, breaks, discounts, et cetera. They also should not include information you could have easily gathered through their website or any preparatory materials they shared before the interview. What is most impressive is when you actually cite those sources in leading up to a question.

I saw on your website that your enrollment in the College of Education has grown by more than 20% in the last five years. How has the college grown its faculty and resources to meet that need? Has the graduation rate kept up as well?

This type of question shows you’ve done your homework and have given thought to your future with them. It also can give you valuable information about what—in this case—the college has to offer you. This sheds a positive light on you as a candidate and will leave a lasting positive impression.

JOURNAL PROMPTS

- **Closing argument:** Write a response to the question, *Why should we pick you?* Your response should summarize your pitch but also say something you have not said before in answer to previous questions.
- **Tossing the ball back in their court:** What questions do you have about the organization or opportunity that would be ideal for the closing discussion? Review the information you have on hand about the organization, and talk to parents and other adults who can help you think of questions that may not have occurred to you yet.



CHAPTER 6

PRACTICE

Once your 30-second commercial is prepared, your strengths and weaknesses are identified, and your stock stories are established, you are set for practice. Rehearsal is important. It may seem like enough to have these ideas in your mind, and you might feel as though you can spit out your stories as clearly as the words run through your head. However, that won't likely be the case under the pressure of an interview.

Think of an interview as an important marketing presentation in which you are both the salesperson and the product. You need to practice your sales pitch and thoroughly know the product you have to offer. This should drive the point home that practice is necessary.

How you choose to practice is up to you. If you are already aware of your best study techniques, apply them now. The goal is not to memorize your responses verbatim. It is to get comfortable with the process and your answers. Preparation requires you to get familiar enough with both your responses and yourself to sound confident and prepared.

Expand your preparation techniques to include a formal mock interview. Dress the part, and meet your volunteer interviewer at a set time and unfamiliar location. At the very least, have a willing and honest friend or family member drill you with likely interview questions.

To have already delivered a response aloud before the day of an interview will give you a more realistic idea of its length, its ring of sincerity, and your preparedness for the hot seat. It will also give you time to adjust responses you feel need to be reframed. That same opportunity won't come without advanced practice.

Mary Mingo-Gallet worked in Career Services for twenty years at the University of Minnesota Duluth before retiring recently. Her advice about practicing before an interview is spot on:

There are several resources for conducting a practice interview online. Some will allow you to go back and watch the video, and that will provide you with a realistic picture of your preparedness. Visit your counselor or advisor for assistance as well.

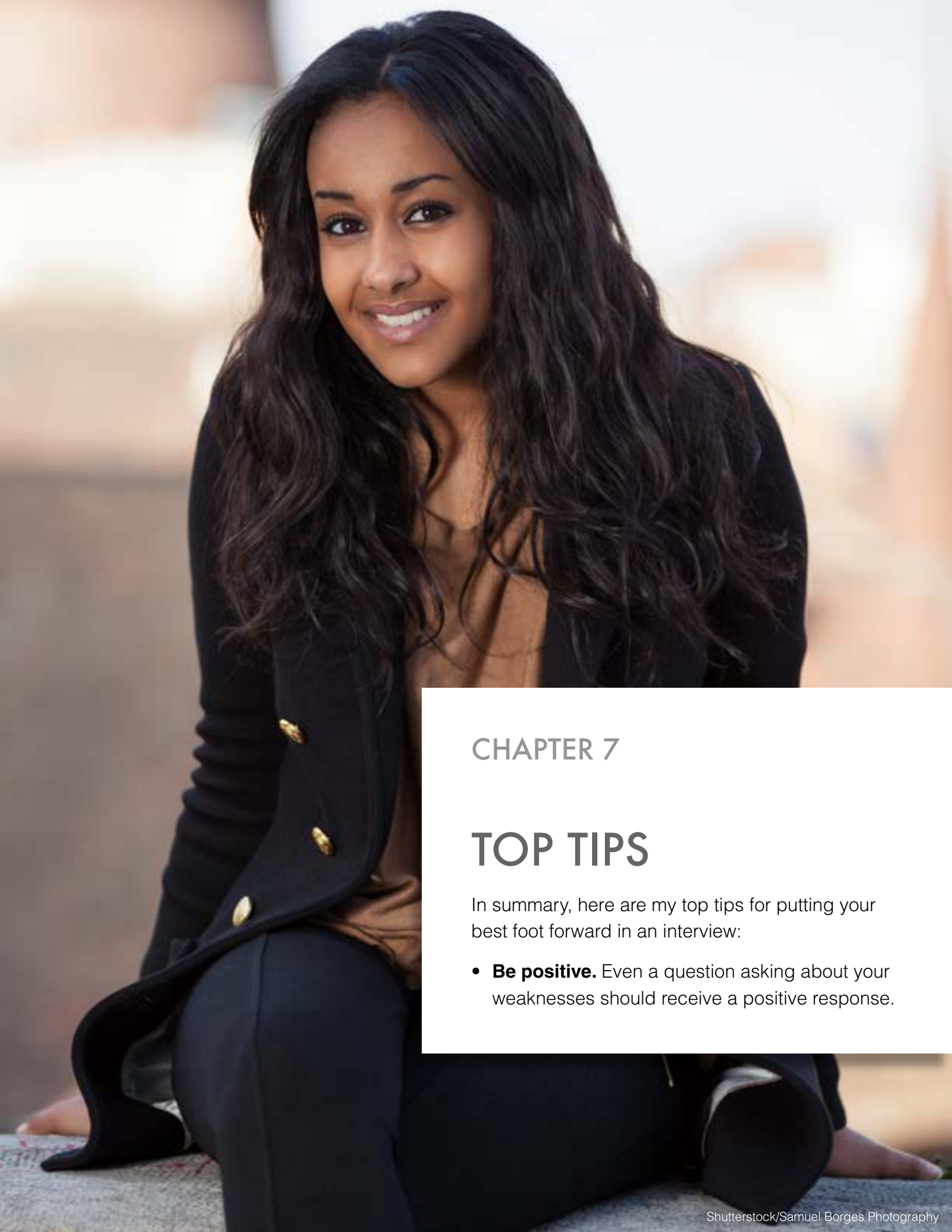
When you are seeking someone to do a mock interview, refrain from involving your parents. There's too much emotional involvement in this process. Find someone who has genuine interest in you but who also can give honest and constructive feedback. Preparation is so incredibly important.

Working as Employee Relations Coordinator, I got feedback directly from employers about the candidates they thought they'd hire: good students and personable kids who then fell apart and were tongue-tied [in the interview], costing them the opportunity. The people who are best-prepared for an interview are the ones who are selected to progress through the interview process and/or final selection.²

Practice can give you the edge in an interview situation. Don't take this necessary step lightly.

"A surplus of effort could overcome a deficit of confidence."

—Sonia Sotomayor, United States Supreme Court Justice



CHAPTER 7

TOP TIPS

In summary, here are my top tips for putting your best foot forward in an interview:

- **Be positive.** Even a question asking about your weaknesses should receive a positive response.



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- **Focus on the purpose.** The purpose of the interview is to land the opportunity for which you are being considered, so try to answer every question with some reference to how you are a good fit.
- **Balance personal and professional.** As frequently and passionately as you might speak about your personal life, be sure to talk more about your relevant educational and professional topics.
- **SELL, SELL, SELL!** Even if your education is your biggest qualification, keep coming back to it. Sell what you have. Specify your skills.
- **Use your time.** When you are asked a question, the interviewer is giving you the floor. Use it by answering with more than a

couple of words. Try to see every opportunity as one to feature what you have to offer. Elaborate on your answers to really get your *positive* point across (but be concise).

- **Finally,** have questions for your interviewers other than those about schedule and pay. This shows interest and intelligent thought.

Implement these tips, and you will be setting yourself up for success. There will be little need for luck with intentional practice and preparation on your side. These strategies will grow with you and be valuable throughout your career. Though your responses and stories may change, you will be equipped to frame them for all types of interview settings and opportunities.

END NOTES

1. "Fox Bids to Push Super Bowl Ad Prices Past \$5 Million," by Brian Steinberg, *Variety*, June 9, 2016, <http://variety.com/2016/tv/news/super-bowl-ads-fox-5-million-1201792176/>.
2. Mary Mingo-Gallet, Retired Employee Relations Coordinator, Career Services, University of Minnesota Duluth.

All hyperlinks are accurate and all referenced resources are free at the time of publication. If you find a broken link or learn that the resource is no longer free, please report it to us at answers@doorwaytocollege.com. Thank you.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Brienna Decker, M.Ed., has focused professionally on career preparation for students at multiple points along their educational and career paths. Since obtaining her Master of Education



degree in Higher Education Administration from Iowa State University, she has served as advisor to dual-enrolled high school students taking college preparatory courses; undergraduates at private, public, and proprietary institutions; and medical students advancing to postgraduate and residency programs. Through student employment at the University of Northern Iowa, graduate work at Iowa State University, and her work as executive director of the Northeast Iowa Area Health Education Center at Des Moines University, work with Des Moines Area Community College (DMACC), and a joint program of Des Moines University and the University of Iowa, she has been engaged in many aspects of college life. With experience in financial aid, admissions, residence life, academic advising, career advising, internship coordination, and college teaching, Decker views advising and empowering students for professional success as her passion.

ABOUT DOORWAY TO COLLEGE FOUNDATION

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