

**EPISODE 08**

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**[00:00:07] TF:** Welcome to Episode 8 of Job Search Strategies with Tiffany Franklin. Today, I am going to dive into the best way to prepare for interviews, whether you have a day or a week to prepare, or you sent in applications and are still waiting to hear back. In this episode, I will provide you with an array of techniques and strategies to approach your interviews and present the most professional version of yourself.

We will focus on the skill that is essential to interviewing success, as well as the purpose of the interview and recruiter insights, understanding what hiring committees are seeking, how to prepare, including resources for your research. Tips for interviewing success, including making a positive impression, and dos and don'ts. The power of empathy in your interview prep, how to tell stories in a compelling way, behavioral interviews, and the greatest hits exercise, formulating answers for typical questions, and how to navigate those tough questions. What happens when you don't have a relevant example, questions to ask the interviewers, video interviews, follow-up, and additional resources.

If you do have interviews lined up, congratulations. That means your resume is doing its job, since the resume gets you the interview and the interview gets you the offer. You think you've done all the necessary prep work, but are you really ready to knock it out of the park? You want to show this employer why they should hire you and give yourself as many options as possible. To do that, you need to take the time and really prepare for your interviews. To begin, let's look at the purpose of the interview.

Interviews are the most important part of the job search process. They are professional conversation to help employers learn more about your skills and experience, and gain insights about whether you can add value to their organization. What is it that recruiters are seeking? The main thing employers want to know is, can you do the job? Are you motivated to do the job? What are you going to be like as a coworker? Now that we know what you need to accomplish, there are concrete steps to take to prepare for the interview and we will discuss those one by one.

Before every episode, I like to start with a quick tip. Today, it's about recording yourself answering a few questions and then review the videos to understand how you are presenting yourself. Just as athletes review their performances in prior games, it's helpful to see yourself answering questions, especially since many first-round interviews are often conducted over video. Back when I became a recruiter in 2013, my whole interview

process for that job was through video interviews and involved several rounds of interviews. While it may be a bit uncomfortable at first, the insights you gain will be worth it. Plus, it's easy to use your phone to record the video and then erase it once you're finished. Try recording your answer for the "tell me about yourself" question, asked at every interview.

When reviewing the video, did you answer the question in 90 seconds to two minutes max? Was your answer focused? Are there filler words, such as like, um, or ah? Is there a lot of background noise? How is your background? Is it clean, professional? Is the lighting sufficient? Are you looking at the camera or do your eyes wander? Are you speaking clearly and enunciating your words? Do you speak too quickly? How's the volume and sound quality? Is your WiFi strong or are you having connectivity issues? Are family members, roommates, or pets interrupting?

Recording yourself will allow you to see whether you are presenting yourself as intended and to adjust accordingly. Small changes can make a big impact when it comes to the interview and the impression you are making on a potential employer. Do you need help interviewing? If you need more support, go to my website, [tjfcareercoach.com](http://tjfcareercoach.com), where you can book a one-hour Zoom career strategy session or mock interview with me online. We will discuss how you can prepare, how to approach questions, as well as questions you find difficult and other ways to make the best impression. I will ask you questions and then provide feedback on your responses, what you are doing correctly and ways you can make your answers or delivery stronger. Once the appointment has been booked online, I will request that you send me your resume and the job description for the position you are interviewing, so I can ask you questions tailored to that specific opportunity.

Let's begin by talking about the essential skill I referenced in the title of this episode. That is the ability to articulate your experience in a way that is meaningful to this particular employer. If the employer is interviewing you, that means they already have a vague notion that you may be qualified for the job, or else they wouldn't take the time from their busy schedules. Now, it's time for you to inspire confidence in them that will confirm that their initial instincts about you were on point. The interview process needs to assure the employer that you have the specific knowledge, skills, both hard and soft, and abilities to perform the job duties. That you have the motivation and initiative to do the job. That you will work well with the team and various stakeholders, whether that's clients, board members, students, parents, patients, or customers. That you will demonstrate emotional intelligence, and that you have problem solving skills and can offer solutions to the organization's pain points.

You want to show the value can deliver and how everything you have been doing has been leading you to this point. You need past examples of your professional success to show how you would be able to dive in and quickly make substantial contributions to this organization.

Let's explore strategies for interview prep based on how much time you have to prepare. When you receive a last-minute interview request for the next day, it can feel like crunch time, but you can still use that time wisely. Focus on the job description. Think about the top five or six skills needed for that job and your success stories for those skills. Know your resume inside and out, because anything on it is fair game for questions. Here's a helpful exercise.

Take the job description and copy and paste it into a Word document. Make every sentence a separate bullet. Ask yourself which skill are they seeking and write it down. Is it leadership, account management, problem-solving, data analysis, et cetera? Then place your resume beside this new document and look for times when you demonstrated that skill. Perhaps it was in a project, a past job, your volunteer experience, in school. You probably have multiple times, for instance, when you demonstrated communication skills or teamwork in each of your roles.

Write a keyword by each job description line to indicate which corresponding job or experience or project you will use as an example of that. This will help jog your memory for success stories that are relevant to this job. It may not always come from your current role, and that's okay, as long as a good portion of your answers are relatively recent. Be prepared to answer common questions, such as, "tell me about yourself," "why do you want this job and company," "why should they hire you," "what are your strengths, your weakness," "how well do you work with others?" I will address how to answer these later in the episode.

Be familiar with the organization's website. Look at their mission and values, their products and services, know the CEO's name, the year founded, were there any major milestones in the company history. There's usually one of those history pages on their website. Any acquisitions or mergers, when they went public, reinventions. Be aware of their stock symbol and price. Try to gain insights into how they are differentiating themselves from others. Google industry research to find out about news, recent changes, and innovations for this industry.

Glassdoor, research the interview questions tab on Glassdoor for this company and the specific job title if they have it. You can create a free account on Glassdoor and simply provide some data about your past jobs to see a detailed look at the company you are interviewing with, including company reviews and interview questions

by job title. The Muse, that site has great job search and professional development articles, as well as profiles on various companies.

If your interview is next week and you have a little longer to prepare, be sure to do the prep work that we've already covered, plus these additional items. The greatest hits exercise that I will go over later in the show, really practice those success stories. Spend more time on the organization's website to get a greater sense of how they present themselves to the world. Gain a better understanding of the services or products the company offers, and the user experience for their customers or clients.

Look at the company's LinkedIn page and other social media, see how they are interacting with their clients or customers. Search LinkedIn groups for relevant industry groups and see what people in the industry are discussing. Consider your thoughts on the topic and how you would contribute to a conversation. Learn about the company culture if possible. Glassdoor is great for this, with company reviews and The Muse has those company profiles I mentioned.

The best way to learn about culture is by networking. Networking is helpful both for research and to find champions. Talking to people can give you great insight and help you figure out questions to ask at the interview based on the things you learned. Google LinkedIn, the company name, and your university to find alumni from your school who are working at the company you are interviewing with next week. Reach out, either through LinkedIn or your university's alumni database, and see if they would be willing to talk for a few minutes about the company culture and their experience at the company. Do not ask for a job. That's way too forward for someone you just met or don't know very well.

Another way to identify alumni is to go through your college's LinkedIn page. Just click on the logo on your profile and go to the alumni tab for your school. You can search by location, company, job title, skill, or other keywords. It's a really powerful research tool. Understand the competitors and collaborators or partners with the company you are interviewing with. How do they differentiate themselves and market their products or services?

Research three months of articles about the organization through Google, The Vault, Hoovers, et cetera. Review annual reports if they're public. Attend career fairs or information sessions so you can learn more about the company and meet recruiters. Build skills that are needed for the job, such as online courses,

certificate programs, boot camps, projects, volunteer work. There are lots of free resources online as well as the fee-based options.

Let's talk about how to make a positive impression on the day of the interview. Dress appropriately for your industry. For most interviews, it will probably be traditional business professional, meaning a suit. However, if you're interviewing with tech or startups, that would be more business casual. Then for a fashion or PR, you would want something really stylish. Through your networking and your research on the company culture, you can look up these details and learn what's expected.

Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early. For in-person, you may have to go through a check-in process downstairs in the lobby that could take a while, as you get a guest ID. Have a photo ID with you for that check in process. Bring a portfolio with you with resumes, a pen and paper. If you are in-person, have your resume with you for the video interviews as well. I will go over more tips for video interviews at the end of this episode. Turn off your cellphone even for video interviews. You don't want text and calls popping up on your screen. Be friendly and polite, make eye contact, and sit up straight. Be professional, be enthusiastic. Know and use the interviewer's name.

At the interview, you want to be confident. Not arrogant, but just you want to convey that you are sure of yourself and your abilities. Stay positive, give honest answers supported by examples. Honesty and integrity are so important. Ask thoughtful questions about the job and organization or the services and products. Be aware of when the interview is coming to a close. A frequently missed opportunity is taking the time at the very end of the interview to reiterate your interest and enthusiasm for the position and then asking when you may expect to hear from them.

Here are some additional dos and don'ts. On the dos side, use examples to back up your points, completely answer questions. Aim for 90 seconds to two-minute answers for most questions. An exception would be if it's a case interviewer or a group interview with other candidates present, those are a different format from typical conversations, or if the interview follows up with just a brief question. Maintain a conversational flow. Some interviews stay conversational in nature the whole time, while others are more Q&A in nature, especially if there are several interviewers in the room. Use your common sense and read the room as much as possible. Check out articles on emotional intelligence for some great tips on social interactions. Tie answers back to the position and/or the employer when possible. Again, clearly express your enthusiasm and remember to smile.

Don'ts; don't bring up salary until the employer does, but research it and have your range ready. Locate [glassdoorsalary.com](https://www.glassdoor.com/salaries) or [payscale.com](https://www.payscale.com) for your research. Don't forget the power of informational interviewing in preparing. Don't speak negatively about previous employers, activities, or coworkers. Don't give one word or run-on answers. Don't use slang, unprofessional, or rude language. Don't exhibit poor body language or manners, and don't memorize your answers. It comes off as unnatural and people tend to speak too fast or get off track if they don't say it exactly the way they memorized. Instead, use the techniques I outline next to help you learn how to demonstrate the value you will bring to this organization.

The power of empathy in your interview prep. If you are ever unsure about what you're going to say, try a little empathy and put yourself in the shoes of the recruiter. Think back to a time when you had to hire someone or if you haven't had that experience, think about scenarios where you would need to select a candidate. When you are questioning yourself about the content of one of your answers, do a gut check and think of how would you react if a potential candidate said that to you. Would it raise a red flag? Has the intended impact of your answer been lost? Did it sound negative? Be honest with yourself about how you would perceive that answer. Does your story clearly demonstrate the skill or competency you hope or does it meander and lose the point along the way?

If you feel your answer is missing the mark, then take time to workshop it a bit more or sign up for a mock interview for help crafting your success stories. When faced with tough interview questions in real time during the interview, ask yourself, what is the skill or competency the employer is really getting at and which past experience or success story of yours shows that skill and action. Then do your best to provide as succinct story using the techniques I outline next in this episode.

If you are still preparing for the interview and you come across a question you don't know how to answer, Google it and read the perspective of various coaches, recruiters, and HR professionals who have provided tips and sample answers for that question. As you read these articles, pretend you're a recruiter and see which answers stand out to you for the right reasons. For the strongest answers, evaluate what makes them so compelling and look for ways to emulate that style, such as concise storytelling while making it your own.

A word of warning here. Do not simply copy answers you read somewhere else. If you are reading them, other job seekers are as well. The recruiter may hear these generic responses from other candidates. The whole point of the interview is to articulate what sets you apart and how you are the best person for the job based on the unique combination of your past experiences, skills, and abilities. Don't sell yourself short. Yes, preparing

your success stories take some time, but it's worth the effort. It will take the most time at the beginning of your interview prep process, but no effort is lost. As you navigate the job search process and interview with several employers, all of your initial prep work will help you across the board and you will learn more from each interview, which leads me to telling your story in a compelling way.

Sometimes, in interviews, it can feel like you are on a game show, where the hiring committee throws questions at you and you hope to return the right answer and beat the buzzer. If you answer in brief sentences, it falls short of conveying the true breadth than depth of your experience. If you ramble off on a long monologue, trying to pack in everything you have ever done, their eyes will glaze over and you will lose the impact. The trick is to find that middle ground where you have concise, 90-second to two-minute yet compelling stories that invite the interviewer to learn more. Ideally, your interview will morph into more of a conversation, with a tennis match quality of going back and forth, where the interviewer ask you follow-up questions.

Consider the best storytellers in your life. They have a way of captivating an audience with not only the content of their stories, but how they tell them. As a listener, you become engrossed in the world they create and feel eager to learn more. These storytellers use their words to paint a vivid picture and infuse their voice with energy, inviting you to visualize the journey they are describing. I'm not mentioning this to add pressure to you. This is a professional setting, not the children's reading hour at the library, and you are not expected to keep listeners on the edge of their seat as you talk about your last data project. However, you can incorporate elements of great storytellers to bring your experiences to life.

In terms of marketing strategy, you have already checked off the hard part. That is getting the experience and you know yourself. Now it's a matter of giving yourself enough time to prepare and crafting stories that will highlight all you have to offer. Here are some tips to keep in mind. Don't speak in a monotone voice, vary your tone when possible. Be truthful and don't embellish. You don't want to jeopardize the reputation you have worked so hard to establish. Make eye contact, read the room. If your interviewers are getting fidgety or look like they are losing interest, wrap that story up. Prepare an array of success stories spanning your career so you are not recycling the same story for every question. Although, have the bulk of your stories from the past five to seven years.

Behavioral interviews and the greatest hits exercise. Behavioral interviews are based on the premise that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. They usually start with the interviewer saying, "Tell me about a time when. Give me an example of. Describe a situation when." It's an opportunity for you to share success

stories from your past to help this employer feel that you have the experience and transferable skills to make significant contributions to their organization. Here are some samples.

Describe a group work situation where you and your partner were having trouble getting along with each other. How did you resolve this? Tell me about a situation when you had to learn a large amount of material quickly. How did you do it? Give an example when you are faced with a deadline you couldn't meet. How did you handle it? The best way to answer these questions is the CAR method. C for challenge. What was the challenge you encountered? A for action. What actions did you take to address the challenge? R for results. What were the positive results? Keep your answers between 90 seconds and two minutes. The CAR method is a great framework for structuring your answer in an efficient way to get the main points across.

When asking these questions, employers are trying to discern specific skills or competencies they need for the person who fills this role. The questions can focus on hard or, most often, soft skills like communication and teamwork. To make the best impression in the interview, it's important to have many stories ready that demonstrate your skills. You may be good at thinking on your feet, but it's better to give this some thought in advance. Here's an example of mapping out a CAR story for the question, "Tell me about a time when you demonstrated adaptability."

In this example, I will pretend to be a wedding planner. I would talk about working with a couple and it's 10 days before their outdoor wedding when the extended forecast predicted thunderstorms that day. The challenge is rain predicted for an outdoor wedding. By the C, I would include keywords: rain, outdoor wedding. First, I would talk to the couple and see if they would be willing to have the reception under a tent. Since it was last minute, I would call on other vendors with whom I cultivated strong relationships over the years to see if someone had availability. I also would connect with the florist and the designer to ensure the reception had the ambience the couple envisioned with this change of plans. Once I did that, I would inquire about renting 300 umbrellas to make sure all the guests stay dry.

By A, I would include the keywords: talk to couple, vendors, florist, designer, tent, umbrellas. Thankfully, it all came together and, on the day of the wedding, it was sunny for the actual ceremony and they were able to hold it outdoors, but it did pour during the reception. The lighting and flowers in the tent looked beautiful and everyone stayed dry and seemed to enjoy the evening. The couple expressed their gratitude, left positive reviews, and referred good friends who had just gotten engaged. By R, I would include keywords: rain, reception, everyone dry, happy couple, referral.



One exercise I have my clients do in preparing for interviews is called the greatest hits exercise. This exercise walks you through the steps to prepare a quick visual depiction of 20 to 30 success stories across skill areas that will help you feel more confident when faced with behavioral questions. On one sheet of paper, write down 10 to 15 skill areas. For example, they could be leadership, teamwork, communication skills, strategic planning, analytical skills, project management, adaptability, resilience, negotiations, delivering presentations, demonstrating initiative, compliance, risk management, technical skills, business development, change management, navigating conflict, client account management, customer service, sales and marketing, teaching and mentoring. The list goes on.

Let the job description be your guide in terms of which skills appear on the sheet. Ten to 15 skills, that was just a guideline. Select all the ones that are relevant to your target job. For each of these skill areas, right two CAR stories. Meaning challenge, action, result. Pull examples from every area of your resume, including your jobs, consulting work, board membership, philanthropy, activities, internships and more. But focus the majority of your stories on your relevant past experience, particularly the past five years. If you're returning to the workforce after a gap or pivoting, then you may pull stories from further back in your work history.

When doing this exercise, don't write out the long answers. It's too overwhelming writing it out and it could come across as too rehearsed and unnatural if you try and memorize it. You know your experience, so there's no need to memorize the answers. Instead, using keywords and phrases to prompt your memory. I will have the greatest hits exercise sheet for you to download in the show notes at TJF Career Coach under the podcast tab and Episode 8. I recommend having your resume beside this greatest hit sheet as you decide which success stories correspond best to each skill.

In some cases, you may use the same story for two skills. For example, a major project you spearheaded could serve as an example of leadership or it could fall under the category of change management as well. That's why I recommend having two stories for each skill category. It may take an hour or two to map out all of your stories and get the keywords on the sheet, but it's worth the effort. Once the sheet is complete, practice saying these stories out loud before your interviews. Don't skip this step.

In your head, things sound great, but it usually takes a bit of practice to articulate your value and they are only 90 seconds to two minutes each, so it's not that much time. Practicing will help you smooth out the flow, get rid of the um, pauses, likes. Identify areas where you need to come up with a better example. And in the process, increase your confidence. You will now be better prepared to show this hiring committee how everything you

have ever done in your career to this point has been building transferable skills that will enable you to jump in and contribute right away to their organizational objectives.

Next, let's talk about how to formulate answers for common questions. Tell me about yourself. With every interview, they are going to ask you some form of a question, tell me about yourself. It's like the 30,000-foot airplane, big picture view and highlight reel from your professional journey. You want to spend between 90 seconds and two minutes, providing a brief snapshot of your career trajectory and some insights into what brought you to this moment. As I mentioned above, avoid monologues. It may be tempting to tell them everything in hopes that they will love you, but it makes you seem unfocused. It's your job to pull out the most salient touch points of your career and weave those into your story. Remember, the employer already has your resume. Now it's up to you to bring it to life.

The tell me about yourself question is your opportunity to concisely convey the experiences and skills you have gained in your journey while emphasizing the ones most relevant to this particular role and employer. This is one of those situations where you start with, I was born on a stormy night or my name is. They already know your name and you want to focus on your professional experiences. If you are just starting your career, I would begin the answer with your college years, including what you majored in and a mention of your internships, athletics and leadership roles on campus. A professional with years of experience may gloss over the college years and then briefly mention launching their careers and engineer, and focus on their business development and strategic executive roles since earning their MBA.

To help my clients prepare, I have them list five bullet points describing their main selling points or accomplishments, such as education, major accounts, and other wins. In addition, what were the key roles, companies and turning points in your career? What are the main experiences that have prepared you to deliver value to this potential employer? Weave all of these elements into your answer. The trick is not to dive too deeply into any one experience. This is the overview that will hopefully make the interviewer want to learn more and serve as the starting point of a productive conversation.

For sample, see Episode 1, The Best Career Advice I Ever Received. Within the first few minutes, I provide a brief overview of my career and answer the tell me about yourself question. It's basically the touch points for where I've worked, my side business, the pivot to this podcast and what got me here.

Next question, why are you interested in this company and this role? You want to convey your motivation and passion for this company. Applying to this role was a purposeful and strategic decision on your part, it wasn't a random application. Show how everything you've been doing has led you to that screen or chair across from this hiring committee. Your journey may have had twist and turns, but you can explain why you are excited to join this team and how this company resonates with you and this particular job fits into your career plan. You understand this new role and have the transferable skills and enthusiasm to hit the ground running and make substantial contributions.

Why should we hire you? In this answer, you want to demonstrate that you know who you are, you understand this company and role, and you can articulate how those go together. This answer should incorporate both your self-reflection, like the values exercise I mentioned in Episode 7 and will include in the show notes, as well as your research on the company, including the website, mission, values, and networking with employees if possible. You want to demonstrate that you thoroughly understand the job description, the company, and you've conducted research to gain insights about the organization's pain points.

By understanding these things, you have a sense of the main skills and experience they need in a candidate, and you can outline why your experience uniquely qualifies you for this role. This answer should convey your enthusiasm as well as some brief yet concrete examples or success stories that paint a clear picture of what differentiates you. The answer is all about inspiring confidence in the hiring committee and showing that you are the person that can deliver results for them and work well with the team.

What are three of your strengths? This is a fun question, because it's positive in nature and an opportunity to shine. We all have many strengths, but you want to select the ones that best align with the role. Instead of simply listing three words like leadership, emotional intelligence, and creativity, add a brief success story to demonstrate those strengths and action using the CAR method, the challenge, action, results.

What's your weakness? This is often asked, and when answering this one, you don't want to just take a strength and turn it into a positive, because recruiters spot that overdone trick a mile away and you're not really answering the question. I can't help but think of the meme from the office where Michael Scott says, "I care too much, I try too hard." That just makes people laugh. On the other hand, you don't want to tell them something that's really going to make them worry. It's about finding balance and showing that you are self-aware, committed to growing, and it reflects the level of emotional intelligence. It's best to select a legitimate

weakness that you have worked on, perhaps something from early in your career and something that's not pivotal to the job you are seeking.

For example, many people are not fans of public speaking in front of large crowds of 300, but then you can focus on how you joined a Toastmasters group to build your public speaking skills and how you have become accustomed to delivering client presentations including the one last month that secured the contract with a major client. Tell me about a time when you failed. I don't like to focus on these negative questions, but they are often asked so you need to be prepared.

This one doesn't necessarily need to be a literal failure on a test. What they are looking for especially in this world is an example of your resilience. Think of a time when something didn't go the way that you thought it would. How did you handle it? Was it a mistake that you took accountability for? Did you go into problem-solving mode and employ a trial and error approach? What did you learn from that experience? With the events of the past year and a half, pivoting has become the norm. This is a great way to demonstrate how you adapt when things go off track. Provide an example using the CAR method that shows you won't fall apart and can strategize and implement creative solutions. Your answer should showcase your resilience and ability to bounce back from setbacks.

Where do you see yourself in five years? For this question, put yourself in the recruiter's shoes and think of how you would respond to the answer you're considering giving. You want to avoid being abrasive or sounding like you want the interviewer's job. At the same time, you want to show how this company is part of your longer-term career goals and that you're not going to leave in a year. Focus on how you would like to be with the company for a while, since their values align with your own, and be ready to articulate which company values resonate with you. Emphasize how you hope to keep growing as a professional and taking on projects with increasing levels of responsibility.

In the show notes, I have included a link to an article in The Muse that provides great tips for how to approach 50 common interview questions. We've talked about some of the common questions, what about navigating tough questions? Interviewers may ask you something out of the blue, such as, if you could be a fruit, what kind of fruit which you be? What animal best represents you? These are asked to determine how quick you are on your feet and how you respond to high-pressure situations. There's no one right answer. Instead, it's about how you backup your answer. Remain calm, buy a little time by saying, "That's an interesting question" or something similar to that, and think of what the hiring committee is looking for in this position.

This can be an opportunity to demonstrate your creativity while highlighting skills relevant to the target job. For example, you could mention the versatility of apples or the thick skin of bananas yet soft insides. Let your personality shine with these questions. Remember, each question is a new opportunity to impress the hiring manager, so during the interview, don't ruminate on the answer you gave to the prior question. Do your best to answer each and move on focusing on the question at hand.

How to handle it when you don't have a relevant example? Sometimes, employers will ask you to tell them about something you haven't had happen yet. For instance, if they ask you to provide an example of how you handled the situation when you worked in a group project and somebody wasn't pulling their weight, maybe you are lucky enough that your group experiences were harmonious or maybe you haven't worked in many groups before. When that happens, either select an experience that is somewhat related or you can answer the question as a hypothetical and walk them through the actions you would take if you found yourself in that situation. That way, you're giving them insights into your instincts and show how you deal with conflict and your communication, teamwork, and leadership skills.

Always have questions ready to ask the interviewer. It's another way to demonstrate interest and shows that you have taken the time to create thoughtful questions. Before the interview, I like to prepare about 10 questions. Although I typically only ask between two to four questions in the interview, make sure the questions you're asking are not something super obvious that you could easily look up. You want to show that you've done your research on the company. I try to read body language of the interviewers. If they seem like they are ready to wrap up, then I will ask fewer questions. If they seem open to a longer discussion, I will ask more.

Often, during daylong interviews, you will meet with smaller groups of people and then maybe a big group at the end of the day. I had that experience for my role at Vanderbilt when I interviewed to work at the career center. In each meeting, they were telling me about the organization along the way and answering some of the questions I had prepared. During those types of interviews, after each meeting, you will be asked if you have any questions. That's why it's a good idea to have that list of 10 questions ready, so you won't ask the same thing repeatedly.

Here are a few sample questions that you could ask. What's the greatest challenge the person in this role will face? How would you describe the company culture? What would you like to see this person achieve in the first 90 days? What is your timeline for making a hiring decision? These questions can be a great way to obtain clarity about the organization's priorities, to supplement the due diligence you have conducted so far, and to

gain valuable insights that will help you evaluate an offer if one should materialize. Look at the company website, job description, press releases, the company's LinkedIn page, and Glassdoor for inspiration to help you formulate your questions. Perhaps you ask about a recent product or service launch. In addition, you may get ideas through conversations with your networking connections at the company. In the show notes, I will include a link to an article on Indeed with additional ideas for questions to ask.

**Video interviews.** Video interviews were becoming increasingly popular, and then 2020 happened and Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Google chat, and other platforms became crucial for us to connect and continue our work. While the interview advice we have discussed so far applies to video interviews, there are additional steps to take to ensure you present your best self and make a great impression in this style of interview.

Familiarize yourself with the online meeting platforms used by the employers. Download and test your interviewing software in advance. Try the night before. Make sure your Wi-Fi is strong where you will interview. Don't run any system updates on your computer the same morning as your interview. Try that the night before. Those sometimes take longer than expected. Log onto your computer at least 15 to 20 minutes in advance and then the employer system about 5 to 10 minutes in advance. Even though they usually start right on time, you don't want to feel rushed and risk being late.

Ensure your background is clean, free from clutter, and professional. Optimize your lighting and sound. Have a backup plan if online does not work. Planning ahead will make you less anxious when the technology has a glitch. Have the contact information of the interviewer or HR person who scheduled the interview in case you need to reach out if there's a technology issue. Dress professionally both on and off camera. I once heard of an interviewer asking a candidate to stand up. The student was wearing a suit jacket, shirt, and tie with shorts and flip-flops. Wear the same thing you would to an in-person interview. It will help you feel more confident. Minimize distractions during the interview. Let your family, roommates, and friends know about your interview.

If you are student on campus and do not have a quiet space, check with your career services office or library about reserving an interview room. Do this in advance. Ensure your pets will not come running through or start barking. If they are in the same room, keep them out of the view of the camera, no matter how cute they are, and have a treat ready to keep them occupied. Put your phone on silent or turn it off, especially if notifications will come through your computer. Practice recording yourself ahead of time and consider your tone of voice. Think about how you might present examples of your work online, like portfolios, GitHub, et cetera. Most online

meeting platforms allow screen sharing, so plan ahead of time how you will show the interviewer your work this way.

If the position you are interviewing for has remote component, mention your experience working remotely and your ability to work without direct supervision. Offer solutions. Think about at the places where you are applying the kinds of challenges they may face currently and how your past experience could help them. Follow up with a thank you as you would for in-person interviews. A final consideration for video interviews is to make sufficient eye contact. You don't want to stare your interviewers down and never blink, but you do want to look at them like you would for a conversation in person. It's super distracting when the person you are video chatting with keeps looking away or staring at the bottom corner of the screen the whole time.

For most people, the WebCam is located at the top of the screen. Try to look at the middle or top-center of the screen and you should be fine. Sometimes people can't help but look at the little video of themselves. If you are doing that, move that square under your WebCam at the top so at least your eyes will be in the right place. That being said, try to keep your focus on the interviewer so you will be better engaged in the conversation.

HireVue, this refers to the asynchronous interviewing platform in which a person has been pre-recorded asking you questions. The length of time and number of questions asked depend on the organization. Many employers are now using HireVue. I recommend practicing on your own and by recording yourself answering interview questions with your phone or laptop. Like I mentioned in the quick tip at the beginning of this episode. It might feel awkward at first, but it will allow you familiarity with the format and you'll have more confidence going into the interview.

Here are additional HireVue tips. Prepare for this interview just like you would for your other interviews. Incorporating the best practices I have mentioned throughout this episode. Be yourself and speak in a natural manner. Make sure your environment is professional and check the lighting and sound. Practice, practice, practice so you can smooth out your answers and become more confident in relaying your success stories. Be sure you are conveying the value you will deliver based on your skills and past experiences. Have concrete examples ready. Remember to use the CAR method, challenge, action, results, and keep your answers concise.

Most of these interviews take 20 to 30 minutes, but allow an hour so you won't feel rushed and have time to test your connection and practice before officially beginning. In the show notes, I will include links to two

articles that appear on the HireVue site that are wonderful and have some fantastic general interview tips, as well as best practices for the HireVue format.

Follow up, the thank you note. After the interview, it's expected that you will email a thank you note within 12 hours. Even if you knock the interview out of the park, you hurt your chances of an offer if you skip this important step. Send a separate note to each interviewer and be sure to personalize it, so it's not the exact same one to each person. Keep it short, about six to eight sentences. Re-express your interest in the position and why, what did you learn in the interview that made you more interested in this job, include a line reiterating how your experience has uniquely prepared you for the specific role.

In the show notes, I have included a link to an article appearing on The Muse with solid thank you note samples. When writing thank you notes to several people, I find it's easier to outline them in a Word document and have three versions that I use as a template and then personalize them for each interviewer from there. Keeping them in Word and spellchecking will help you proof the document before pasting it into your email.

Networking, throughout the job search process, keep networking. That is connecting with people you've worked with before, talking to your family, friends, and their friends, and past coworkers as you identify target companies for your applications. Perhaps someone in your network will know someone working at that company and could facilitate an introduction. Speaking with this person could be helpful as you research the company and gain insights into the company culture. If it's someone you know, you could have a champion at that organization advocating for you. Remember, you are not asking someone you don't know well to refer you. That's just too much. Instead, you are asking for a few minutes of their time to hear about their experience at ABC company and then you send a thank you. These meetings, known as informational interviews, can provide lots of helpful insights that may help with the application and interviewing process.

In the next episode, I will talk about how to network and cultivate those meaningful connections with Lauren Obersteadt, the executive director of Vanderbilt University's Alumni Relations Office, and Sarah Whitney Anderson, assistant director of that office. They will share all the best tips because they network for a living. Specifically, they will outline the nuances of effective networking and how to avoid the pitfalls both for one-on-one meetings and big recruiting events.

Interviewing is part of the overall job search strategy. One thing to keep in mind is to diversify your search and be sure to keep applying to new roles, even when you are starting to receive interview requests. Many



companies hold multiple rounds of interviews, so that could take a few weeks and you want to keep your momentum in new opportunities in play if an offer does not materialize from interviews with the first company. Beware of putting all your efforts into one company. Consider applying to a few jobs a week and, as I've mentioned in other episodes, maintain a spreadsheet of all of your job search efforts so you can see what's working and identify areas where you may need more support.

For example, if you sent your resume to 10 places and received five interviews, then your resume is doing its job and getting you notice for the right reasons. If you are not making it past the first round of interviews, you want to evaluate the content and delivery of your answers you have been giving in those interviews. The key is to continually fine tune your approach and remain persistent in your search, so that an offer will eventually materialize. It takes time and consistent effort.

Remember, once you have accepted an offer with one company, it's time to notify the other companies with whom you are interviewing that you have accepted another offer and you are withdrawing yourself from the process. They will appreciate hearing from you and that will give them time to reach out to other candidates. Even though you did not go with their company at this time, handling yourself well throughout the interview process makes a positive impression and you may see that other recruiter or contact down the road. Your professionalism will make an impact and, who knows, you may even interview with them again in a few years.

Maintaining perspective through the interview and job search process. The job search process can be unnerving, but try to keep perspective. There are many opportunities out there and this is not the only job out there. Do your best, send a thank you note, and remember that, if this one doesn't work out, there will be others and eventually something will come through. If you are going on several first-round interviews and not advancing to subsequent rounds, then consider adjusting your approach.

Write down notes after each interview and think of how you would've changed your response with more time. Practice with friends and family members. Ask yourself it was a matter of preparation, was the actual job a stretch for your skills at this point in time, or is it a super competitive company with thousands of applicants? Write down the questions that seem difficult in interviews and map out answers, now that you have more time to think about a stronger response. Review the interview checklist in the show notes to see if you are incorporating best interview practices into your strategy. Consider connecting with a career coach for a mock interview session.

Here are some additional resources that will help you with your interview prep. For general information, there are great articles on The Muse, Glassdoor, and the Ladders newsletter. For video interviews, check out HireVue, has a lot of great tips. I've included the link to The Muse article regarding thank you notes. University career centers often have fantastic information to help you prepare for interviews. For example, University of Pennsylvania Vanderbilt and, a lot of times, the information is not behind a firewall.

For case interviews, I recommend the book *Case in Point* by Marc Cosentino. I do have a link in the show notes for that. That is an affiliate link. Meaning, if you go through that, I will get a small commission. I have recommended that book for at least the past 10 years. There is also Victor Chang has a website that is super helpful for case interview prep. For technical interviews, there's a book called *Cracking The Code*. I will have that in the show notes and that is also another affiliate link, where I will receive a small commission if you purchase it through that link. For financial interviews, check out Wall Street Oasis.

[END OF EPISODE]

**[00:52:58] TF:** Thank you so much for joining me today for Job Search Strategies with Tiffany Franklin. I really appreciate your time. For show notes, the interview checklist, a transcript, and additional resources from today, check out [tjfcareercoach.com](http://tjfcareercoach.com), where you can book a mock interview if you need additional support. I hope this has been helpful for you and that you will join us for Episode 9 on how to cultivate meaningful connections and network.

[END]