



# Job interview advice for executives

Most career advice is aimed at starters or young professionals. People who are new to the job market.

For the senior professionals and executives in the 100k+ segment, other rules, pitfalls and areas of attention apply.

This guide was specifically developed for the higher segment.

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**TOP OF MINDS**  
EXECUTIVE SEARCH

# Job interviews for executives

The following issues deserve your full attention while preparing for the application process:

## #1. Your motivation

It's all about finding out what motivates you. What are you really looking for?

## #2. The company

Thorough research into the history, mission, and vision of the company you are applying to and the person who is going to interview you.

## #3. Questions you could have expected

"Man, I should've seen that coming" – a thought that should not cross your mind during or after the interview..

## #4. Your own questions

There is always room for two questions. But these questions need to impress.

## #5. Final rehearsal

Interviewing for a job is not something you do every day. It pays to rehearse.

## #6. Videocalls

As a result of the pandemic, an increasing number of job interviews take place in the digital realm. That calls for a specific set of preparations.



# #1. Your Motivation

It is all about finding out what motivates you. What are you really looking for?

## #1 What motivates your desire for change

Is your motivation to change jobs the result of a positive or negative impulse? If your desire to leave stems from dissatisfaction, it is extremely important that you do not take this negativity with you into a job interview. This will be picked up immediately and will impede a favorable outcome. You need to neutralize any possible frustrations beforehand.

## #2. What are your expectations

What do you expect will have changed and are you being realistic? It is entirely possible that after seven years you find yourself looking for 'something else'. Seven years is a long time so it makes sense that you might get bored. After all, variety is the spice of life. However, if you are looking for more recognition, you are more likely to be disappointed. There is a good chance that the problem is not in your surroundings, but in you. The best way to get more recognition is to be more successful.

That means you need a job that matches your core competencies. Then success will follow naturally.

## #3. Know your competencies

You are born with them. Your upbringing as well as your development naturally play a role, but generally speaking we must all play the cards we're dealt. Instead of constantly trying to change and reinvent yourself, the easiest way to become successful is to adapt your environment to your profile. Choose people to work with who are right for you, as well as tasks and responsibilities that you can concentrate on endlessly and effortlessly. Of course, this requires a lot of self-knowledge. Usually this comes with age, but there are plenty of tools to help you on the way: [Strengthsfinder by Gallup](#) or [Management Drives](#).

## #2. The company

Prepare for a strategic interview. Make sure you thoroughly research both the company you are applying for and the person you are interviewing with.

### Research sources checklist

- Company website (know the names of the board members)
- Annual report of the company
- News.google.com
- Fd.nl
- Wikipedia
- LinkedIn profiles of employees, including alumni and their follow-ups
- Google Search
- And most important of all: your interviewer's LinkedIn profile

### Form an opinion about the following topics

- Distinctive character of the company
- Economic outlook of the sector
- Trends and challenges in the industry
- News facts about the company, such as a recent takeover
- What you like about the competitor
- Three general, positive things you can say about the company
- Two compliments on the interviewer's track record (they're only human)



## #3. Questions you could have expected

Prepare answers to questions you can expect.

***What do you already know about me (the interviewer) and the company?***

Make sure you have the bullet points ready to go.

***Can you describe the common thread running through your career?***

Don't consider this a request for a long story built around one too many 'and then' constructions. Nor is it an invitation to sigh and share just how many different things you've done. This is a request for an abstract reflection in which you succinctly describe how you have developed in a focused way.

***Describe your leadership style.***

'Situational' is not good enough. You need to be able to go much deeper.

***Why do you want to leave your current employer?***

Important: remain positive. Refrain from blaming others for whatever may have occurred.

***How do you distinguish yourself from others? In other words, what are your strengths?***

Don't start with 'enthusiasm, drive and the ability to get people on board'. These traits are mentioned by everyone and their mother, so they're not distinguishing. It is better to start with traits you can immediately substantiate. For example, whenever you might be dreading something, you always get it out of the way as soon as possible. This is your opportunity to influence how the interviewer will remember you. This works best with one cultivated quality, like 'tactfully authentic'.

***Describe a successful situation.***

- o What was the situation?
- o What was your task?
- o What was your course of action?
- o What were the results?

***How does your experience match the vacancy?***

Select three themes that you know are topical for the company (e.g. commercial excellence or self-managing teams). Match your experience with these themes by providing one example for each theme.

***At which other companies are you currently applying?***

There are probably several direct competitors among them. Be ready to pinpoint the differences. More than three is not credible.



***What are your weaknesses?***

Often this question is presented in a more indirect way, such as 'what tasks should we not delegate to you?' The standard answers would be 'routine work, this would bore me sooner rather than later' or 'tasks in which I'm given too little freedom, and which include too much micro-management'. This is too generic, and it does not tell them enough about your personality. An example of a more revealing answer would be: 'Anything that would include me having to lie. My strong point is my authenticity. If necessary, packaged tactfully'.

Weaknesses are the same as areas of development. The latter framing has a more positive connotation. In any event, it's important that you can name at least one area of development - after all, no one ever really stops growing - and that this fits in seamlessly with the position.

***How well do you deal with disappointment? And criticism?***

First of all: no one likes disappointment. This holds true for criticism as well. But in both, there lies an opportunity to learn. It is not your knowledge but your ability to learn that determines your professional growth. Try to look at it from that perspective. But only after an afternoon of being thoroughly ticked off, you're only human after all.

***Where does your motivation for this position come from?***

The deeper your drive, the more powerful it will come across. Your answer must show that the organization and the position perfectly match your standards, values, and interests. And these are not superficial, but come from a strong conviction that has been instilled in you many years ago, but was less evident in other places.

## #4. Your own questions

Your questions say as much about you as your answers

### The aim of you asking questions

It shows interest, moreover it demonstrates that you have prepared yourself well and above all that you have listened carefully to the interviewer during the interview.

### Two is the magic number

The right amount of questions at the end of an interview is two. This is not the time to take out your notepad and say: 'I have so many questions for you, I wrote them all down. Where should I begin?'. There's usually ten minutes or less available for this part of the interview. You know these two questions by heart; you came up with five beforehand and three of them have already been answered during the interview.

### You do not need notes

You don't need notes to remember which questions you still have. After all, you are 100% focused on the interview. You possess the cognitive capacity to

remember five questions, three of which have already been marked off. Moreover, you have already adjusted them a little over the course of the interview because new information has come to light.

### They fit in with the interview

A good way to come up with questions that perfectly fit the interview is not to ask them the moment they spring to mind. Especially the larger, strategic questions you hold on to until the end. Not because you wouldn't want to ask them right away, but because it provides you with another ace up your sleeve later in the interview.

### You should not be able to find the answer on their website

'What is the company's strategy?' is not a strong question if this is stated at the top of their website. Besides, it is too generic. 'What opportunities do you see through the digitization of customer service?' already makes for a much more concrete question.

THE BEST QUESTION: HOW DO YOU LOOK BACK ON OUR INTERVIEW?

This is the best time to get feedback. Besides, there's a cunning psychological mechanism behind it.

Face-to-face, people unintentionally are always as nice as possible. Afterwards, they feel obliged to be consistent.

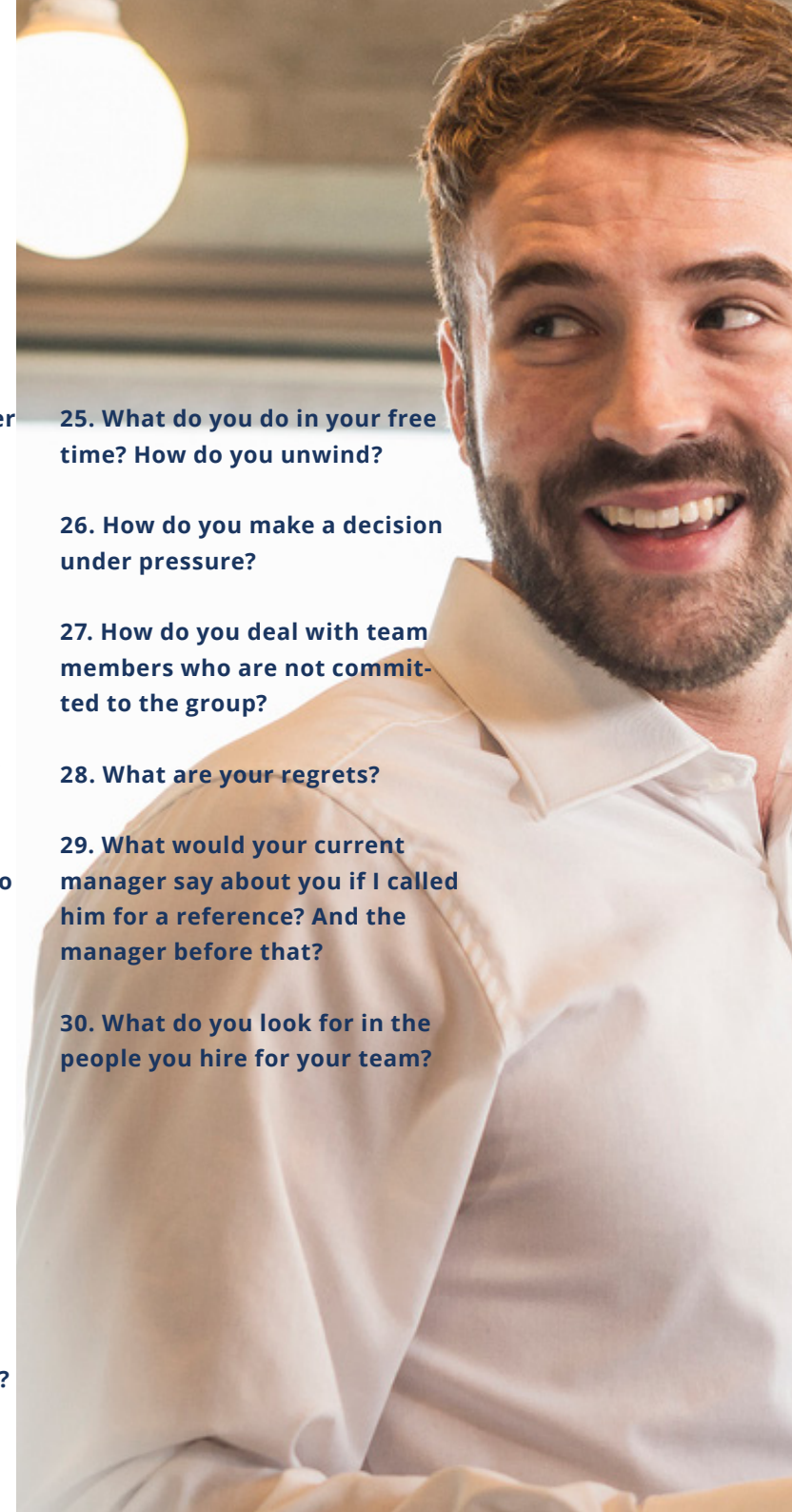
This means you increase your chances of a positive end result by a few percent by already asking the interviewer's opinion during the interview.



## #5. Final rehearsal

Get in front of a webcam and record yourself while you answer the thirty questions listed below. Power through the agony of watching yourself answering all these questions and do it again, only better.

1. What do you already know about me (the interviewer) and the company?
2. Can you describe the common thread running through your career?
3. Describe your leadership style
4. Why do you want to leave your current job?
5. How do you distinguish yourself from others? In other words: what are your strengths?
6. Describe a successful situation
  - a. What was the situation?
  - b. What was your task?
  - c. What was your course of action?
  - d. What were the results?
7. How does your experience match the vacancy?
8. At which other companies are you currently applying?
9. What are your weaknesses?
10. How well do you deal with disappointment? And criticism?
11. Where does your motivation come from?
12. If you could turn back time, what would you do differently?
13. Do you have any hesitations about this job?
14. Have you recently turned down a job offer?
15. When looking back in two years' time, what do you want to have accomplished?
16. Who is your favorite former boss and why?
17. How do you feel about the company culture at your current employer?
18. When or how does someone get on your nerves?
19. Where do you see yourself ten years from now?
20. What does success mean to you?
21. What do you do when you're very busy, how do you stay organized?
22. How do you handle delivering bad news?
23. How do you handle conflict?
24. Who has been your strongest influence, professionally?
25. What do you do in your free time? How do you unwind?
26. How do you make a decision under pressure?
27. How do you deal with team members who are not committed to the group?
28. What are your regrets?
29. What would your current manager say about you if I called him for a reference? And the manager before that?
30. What do you look for in the people you hire for your team?





## #6. Prepare for videocalls

As a result of the pandemic, an increasing number of job interviews take place in the digital realm. That calls for a specific set of preparations.

### #1 Do a tech check

Check in advance whether your equipment functions properly. Your check list:

- Sound internet connection - preferably with an Ethernet cable
- Don't depend on the browser's version; install the Teams/Zoom app
- Webcam
- Audio - use a proper headset

### #2. Steal the limelight

Pick a spot that is quiet and position yourself facing a window so that there's no shadow on your face. Make sure the background looks tidy. Maybe you should move some furniture for the duration of the interview. Make the effort. If you can't make it work? Test the blur-feature.

### #3. Eliminate distractions

Your email, other programs on your computer, your mobile phone, children running around or cute pets are a no go. Switch off everything and make sure the other family members are no longer present.

### #4. Make eye contact

When there's an interview online, it is even more important to keep track of your energy level and enthusiasm. There are specific things to be done to ensure eye contact is being maintained. Make sure there's enough distance between you and the camera. Place the window of the person you're speaking to close to the webcam, otherwise it may seem like you're looking somewhere else than at them. If it's necessary to take notes, say so in advance- this means you won't seem distracted.

### #5. Physical needs

Make sure you went to the bathroom before the interview and that you had a drink as well, so that this isn't needed during the interview. You may be able to take one or two sips. Don't forget to switch your microphone to mute when you have a drink or need to cough. Are you ill? Reschedule the interview.



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 Caroline is verantwoordelijk voor Select en Last Mile. Dagelijks werkt ze aan de nieuwste proposities die het leven van klanten makkelijker maken.  
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 Business Development Adviser  
 "Een juridische achtergrond helpt misschien wel om je in te kunnen leven, maar is niet nodig." - Andjenie Cheng-A-June  
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