

Accounting – Corporate Finance

Question

Why should I hire you for the position of controller? (or Why are you the best-qualified candidate for this position?)

“Magic Words” Strategy

This response should be custom tailored to the company’s needs. Avoid repeating information verbatim from your resume. Instead, consider this winning answer:

Beyond my seven years’ experience in manufacturing as an assistant controller for a competitor of yours, the details of which are on my resume, I have three unique qualifications that I’m confident will help your company get where it wants to go over the next few years.

· First, I understand you’re contemplating expansion. I collaborated on the financial strategy that supported a doubling in revenue for my current employer over the past three years. Approximately 40% of that growth was organic.

· Second is my leveraged-buyout experience. I’ve helped two companies conduct leveraged buyouts and have experience with preparing extensive documentation to assist with the lender’s due diligence, as well as manage the subsequent additional reporting requirement – all with a flawless record for compliances.

· Third, my technology skills allowed me to put scalable systems in place that easily accommodated double-digit organic growth. In addition, I was able to offload much of the work from our IT department when we merged two disparate systems with the buy-out. We estimated a savings of more than \$100,000 in consulting fees based on my contributions and the technology cross-training I put in place for my staff.

The combination of financial strategy, LBO finance experience, and technology skills should give you everything you’re looking for in a controller, and more.

Question

What was the greatest challenge you were presented with when you became assistant controller of XYZ Corporation?

“Magic Words” Strategy

When you hear the word “challenge,” consider it synonymous with accomplishment. Mentally file through your SMART stories for a major accomplishment that was associated with some sort of obstacle or difficult odds, as this answer does:

The company had just acquired a new division, and because of my extensive experience with IT systems, I was brought in to lead the system conversion team to bring the business unit up to our company standards. In spite of numerous disparities and the pronouncement from our technology vendor that this task would take at least six months, our team accomplished this project within three months of the acquisition. I can offer some details on how that happened if you like. Follow with details using the SMART story format.

Question

Why is accurate and timely financial reporting important to an organization? (Several tabs too many)

“Magic Words” Strategy

The right answer here centers on supporting executive decision-making. *Senior management is dependent on timely and accurate financial reports to guide their decision (hyphenate) making in matters such as staffing, production, or sales forecasting. Any deficiencies in these reports can have far-reaching effects on other functions of the company as well as serious tax implications. Not only does the information provided need to be timely and accurate, it needs to be the right information in order to properly support senior management’s key decisions, meaning that it should also be clear*

(easy to assess and conclude) and concise (relevant to the question at hand and to the point). In my current position, I took some actions that improved the accuracy and detail of our financial reporting. Provide a SMART story.

Question

Tell me about a time when cash flow didn't meet projections and what steps you took to cover your credit obligation.

"Magic Words" Strategy

Note that this question requests a specific story, not a theoretical answer. At the same time, be cautious not to reveal confidential information.

I've certainly had experience managing just this type of situation. I'm not at liberty to provide too many details since it was for a privately held company, but I can tell you what steps I took. First, I assessed the timing requirements of key cash outlays and implemented specific short-term policies for prioritization of mission-critical items and release of funds. I then was able to negotiate with certain financial institutions to secure an additional \$3 million working line of credit. These steps allowed me the opportunity to streamline operations and reduce SG&A until our sales picked up the following year. We received continued benefit from the SG&A reductions even after the sales improvement, further enhancing our bottom-line growth by nearly x%.

Question

What experience do you have with inventory management?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Lead off with an umbrella statement that conveys your turnkey knowledge of inventory management. Then, offer a specific example of how those skills led to an increase in profit or reduction in costs, such as this:

The most recent economic downturn resulted in a build up of excess inventory before we could react to the reduced demand. While we had to liquidate our over (one word overstocked) stocked position, I did an analysis of inventory-to-sales ratio to measure how long it would take to sell the existing merchandise. I then instituted methods and procedures such as economic order quantity, reorder points, and safety stock to minimize the costs of inventory we were carrying on our books. As a result, once we were able to normalize our inventory position, we experienced solid increases in our inventory turnover rates from ___ to ___ and permanently reduced our carrying costs by \$_____.

Accounting – Entry-Level Staff Accountants in CPA Firms

Question

What draws you to the accounting profession?

"Magic Words" Strategy

The interviewer is looking at whether your personality is a good fit for your profession. Examples of answers an interviewer might like to hear include I like to make things balance ... I like this neat and tidy and orderly ... I'm a stickler for details, but can also step back and look at materiality – what is important to a job and what is not.

Question

Tell me about a recent situation where you had to juggle multiple projects.

"Magic Words" Strategy

The ability to prioritize is the key competency sought here, since you'll have to do this as a staff accountant supporting partners or managers with various engagements. Your answer should include descriptions of how you don't wait to the last minute and that you apply a system (accountants love systems!), such as, *I regularly make lists with daily A-B-C priorities, where A stands for Absolutely must be completed today, B stands for Best if*

completed today, and C stands for Can wait until tomorrow. Then, back up your system with a real-life example of how you used it.

Question

Why have you chosen public accounting over private or governmental accounting?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Answers that will be acceptable include themes such as liking the variety afforded in public accounting where there is opportunity to work on different clients’ projects, as well as a personality that is suited to meeting and interfacing with a diversity of clients.

Question

What was your GPA?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Most accounting firms recruiting new graduates prefer at least a 3.5 GPA. The Big Four firms (PricewaterhouseCoopers, Ernst & Young LLP, Deloitte & Touche LLP, and KPMG International) often want higher than that. If your GPA is close to a 4.0, you’re in good shape. Mention that you are particularly proud of this accomplishment, given you achieved it while also _____ [fill in the blank with something relevant, such as *serving as president of the on-campus accounting group* or *working a three-quarter-time concurrent job*].

If GPA isn’t your strong suit, you have a few options. First, point to a higher GPA in your major, if true. Then, without appearing as though you’re making excuses, state that you are confident the existing GPA is not truly reflective of your ability, as you were concurrently working 20 hours per week to finance your education (or committing extensive time to co-curricular activities or commuting to school with a 3-hour round trip, etc.). Be cautious that any extenuating circumstances mentioned are no longer an issue. For instance, if commuting was the issue, say, *I’m looking forward to this position, since I can get to the office in just 15 minutes.*

Question

What area of accounting do you most prefer? Tax or work with audits and financial statements?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to gauge whether you’ll be best assigned to individual work or team work. Those preferring audit and financial statement work must work well in collaborative, interactive settings. These people are often good candidates for supervisory responsibilities down the road.

Question

What professional organizations are you involved in?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Most public accounting firms require some sort of community service. If you are already contributing your time to some organization, it will demonstrate to the interviewer that you understand the importance of community service. An added benefit is that you will bring good public relations to the firm and have a setting for developing new client relationships.

Administration – Executive Assistant

Contributed by [Melanie Noonan](#)

Question

How do you view the role of an executive assistant?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond that you see yourself as a valued contributor who supports an executive by staying a step ahead of anticipated needs, keeping work flowing smoothly, following up on projects, and representing the firm professionally when interacting with clients or customers.

Question

What knowledge, skills, and abilities do you consider necessary to be a successful assistant to a high-level executive?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Themes to address here include a solid understanding of business (profit, processes, protocol), superior written and oral communication skills, appropriate technology skills, along with the ability to set priorities and demonstrate initiative, mature judgment, and confidentiality.

Question

Tell me about a time when your position contributed to the overall goals of the company.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a SMART story, with the T (tie-in or theme) being that you understand the importance of being a team player and contributing to the bottom line. One executive assistant wrapped up her response to this question with, *although my functions were primarily behind the scenes, my boss regarded me as the ‘backbone of the company.’*

Question

Tell me about a time when maintaining confidentiality was a challenge.

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question requests a specific SMART story. In concluding the story, tie-in that you always avoid discussion of confidential matters with coworkers and associates (even those considered close friends), are cautious when photocopying or handling documents, and password protect computer information.

Question

Tell me about a situation in which you had to handle conflicting priorities.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The strategy here is to keep executives in the communications loop and take the initiative to offer solutions. Melanie Noonan’s suggested SMART story goes like this:

At Prestige Corporation, I supported two vice presidents. Under normal circumstances, I was able to complete month-end reports required by each executive on time and with accuracy. In the fourth month of working there, the office relocated, which caused everyone to lose several days of productivity. I recognized that it would be difficult to do both (move and get the reports completed), so I spoke with the executives and offered some suggestions. One option I proposed was to put another less important project on the back burner for a week, which they both agreed to. This enabled me to move my and my boss’ offices, as well as generate reports. Two weeks after we settled in the new offices, I sat down and analyzed how I could cut down the time it took to generate the reports. I came up with a standardized format that was approved by both VPs, which has reduced the time it takes to generate reports by at least 30%.

Administration – Executive Assistant

Contributed by CMI Member [Daisy Wright](#)

Question

Describe a time when you took on a task that was outside your job description.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer may be probing for time management skills (to add additional work to your desk), attitude (are you willing and motivated to do so), and evidence of additional skill sets. Offer a SMART story and tie it to these themes.

Question

Tell me about a time when you submitted a good idea to your boss and s/he didn't take any action on it. How did you respond?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a SMART story, including the idea, how you researched or fleshed out the idea, resources required to implement, and what the benefit or return-on-investment to the organization would be. Indicate that you followed-up in an appropriate amount of time to check on the boss' decision. Convey the respect you have for your boss regardless of his or her decision to not act on the idea.

Question

Why do you feel you are a better executive assistant than some of your co-workers?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Avoid language that puts down your co-workers (for instance, *If I were to put myself on a pedestal above my co-workers, it would contradict my belief that 'no one is an island' and that collectively we are stronger than we are individually*). Follow with, *what makes me uniquely qualified to excel in this position is ...* (list your 3-point marketing message or other key point).

Question

Tell me about a time when a customer gave you a compliment.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Emphasize your commitment to customer service and offer a SMART story. Here's Daisy Wright's suggestion: *I currently work in the customer service department of an electricity company. One day an irate customer came in to query an amount on her bill. She threw the bill on my desk, then, arms akimbo, asked why her bill was mounting each month. I offered her a seat and told her that together we would review her billing history. I showed her the month when her usage drastically started to rise and asked if she had added any new appliances to the home. She emphatically said 'No,' and demanded I send someone to check the meter. I told her that was one option, but she should think back to see if she had done anything that could have triggered the rise in usage. She said the only thing different was the addition of a tenant who had arrived around the same time, but she was sure he alone could not have consumed so much electricity. By questioning her further I discovered that the tenant brought his own refrigerator, which was being fed from the same meter. That solved the mystery. She apologized for her initial behavior, thanked me for the meter reading lesson, and complimented me on my professionalism and patience. In summary, I find that patience, probing questions, and problem-solving go a long way in winning customers' trust.*

Advertising

Submitted by [Evelyn U. Salvador, NCRW, JCTC](#)

Question

What type of advertising campaigns, marketing programs, or classified advertising have you devised or sold and how well were these campaigns received?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Be prepared to list your range of experience by first identifying those programs which are most applicable to the field of the prospective employer. Highlight various types of campaigns you have developed or effective classified advertising you have sold for your firm or its clients.

After your summary list, you can use a SMART story that is relevant to the employer's needs and offers how well the campaign was received by your firm's customers or the customers of its clients. In the Situation and More, describe what the campaign entailed including the challenges you faced to get it off the ground and other steps you took to make it a success.

For the Action section, describe how you effectively developed and handled a campaign from concept to completion including the strategies and techniques you used which made for its success, such as how the utilization of various communication media; proper coordination of audience, message, and medium; effective advertising script or copy writing; corporate image projection and branding; resolving client concerns; etc. have all been received well by clients.

For the Result, include actual comments you received from clients, dollar amounts in terms of the cost of advertising and/or sales achieved as a result thereof, or other results, such as how you helped increase your firm's competitive advertising edge, how the campaign resulted in targeting a new niche market, etc. Consider offering a "leave-behind" sheet that outlines a number of successful campaigns which you spearheaded or Testimonials which provides statements made by your clients, employers, or other professionals in the industry.

Question

When interviewing clients, what type of information do you uncover in order to best promote their products and services through effective advertising and marketing?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know the extent of your client interaction experience, such as whether you assess client needs and goals, ascertain their advertising budget, understand their business and competitive edge, discover the desired image they wish to project, define target audiences, the features and benefits of their products or services, previous advertising successes and failures, defining project scope and challenges, making presentations, brainstorming and providing alternative means to solve challenges and best meet their advertising goals through various media options, recommending themes and ideas for client campaigns, developing and collaborating on advertising plans, determining format and direction, establishing quick concepts for client approval, etc.

After your summary list, consider shifting the conversation toward what the interviewer is most interested in: "I understand you do a lot of radio advertising. I can show you some scripts that were particularly successful for our clients." And, "What other advertising needs does your firm have right now that I would be working on?" By asking what type of client interaction this position calls for and knowing the prospective employer's needs will allow you to more precisely target them later when you relay additional SMART stories.

Question

Are you able to persuade clients to make an investment in the future of their business by selling high-cost advertising or long-term campaigns?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is trying to determine if you can help them increase sales and profits by maximizing their clients' return on investment for their advertising dollars.

Lead in by explaining how and why you are successful at persuading clients to make an investment in their future and thereby increasing sales for your employer. You can offer, for example, that you have provided clients with advertising projections which includes how many sales are needed based on advertising dollars spent where they will make a high return on their investment or other successful measures you take.

Here's a good opportunity to provide a SMART story where you can show firsthand how you have been successful in increasing client investments and your employer's sales. Weave into your story the dollar amount they previously spent on advertisement, what their budget was, the Action you took and methods you used to increase that amount, and the ultimate dollars you were able to sign them up for annually (the Result).

For the Tie-in, you can add that you were able to similarly increase other clients' budgets and by what percentage overall. This is where the prospective employer can help answer the question, "What's in it for me?"

Question

What is your involvement with print ad advertising? website design? Radio and television advertising? Retail ads? Multimedia campaigns?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Understanding the "back-office" operations of the business is important in selling advertising; and your familiarity with various media options makes you more of an asset to a firm utilizing or considering various means to promote their or their clients' business.

From your research, you should know what media options your prospective employer uses. Lead in by listing all of the medium you are familiar with, honing in on the particular options which targets your prospective employer first.

For example, if you have developed successful radio or advertising campaigns for your clients or have been successful at helping firms increase business through effective website design and hosting, or other medium, and this is the primary medium the prospective employer uses, provide a SMART story showcasing one such client's success. For the Action section, describe the techniques and methods used, along with how you interacted with other individuals in the process. The Result should include numbers to describe how the campaign benefited the client/employer.

Your Tie-in can describe how you can effectively help do the same for the prospective employer for a product that you understand from research has had some quality issues.

Question

How have you helped increase client satisfaction and referrals or expand client base?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Lead in with several ways you have satisfied existing clients which brought them back for additional advertising, such as by providing innovative design, cost effective advertising which met their needs, effective client proposals, dynamic presentation layouts, fresh and unique design concepts, several ideas to select from, a sensitivity to meeting client deadlines and project requirements, or assigning client projects based on staff's unique talents, etc.

You can also offer various methods you have developed or used to measure campaign success such as developing and implementing client customer surveys or monitoring direct mail responses, etc. Be sure to include the dollar amounts. Consider offering methods you use to build long-term client relationships, maximize campaign dollars, and receive repeat business and referrals for your firm and how successful you are at this.

You might consider adding that you are effective at ensuring quality control which further increases client satisfaction, such as by performing prepress flight checks on print media to ensure all files are accurate before running jobs; hiring a Proof Reader to catch and eliminate copy errors; conducting press checks to keep a tight variance on ink density, registration, pressmen, and other variables to ensure they are within acceptable tolerance; utilizing a keen knowledge of all production and printing processes, phases, and variances and how each impacts the end product; etc.

Question

Have you increased sales or profitability for your firm or otherwise spearheaded growth of the business?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead in by highlighting some of the ways you find most successful in increasing sales/profitability for your employers. You can highlight, for example, that you increased inside classified sales or outside retail sales through new business development efforts, created and implemented successful ad campaigns, generated new business for clients, developed strategies which targeted a niche market, or ways you have helped undercut the competition through effective press releases, after-sale account follow-up and servicing, successful cross-selling of other services, future advertising planning and strategizing, etc.

You can further elaborate by including strategies you used to obtain large dollar advertising which brought in a high return on investment for your clients and as a result, higher sales for your firm; how you sought out high quality and lower cost vendor pricing; building client and vendor relationships based on honesty, integrity, and trust resulting in stronger and lasting relationships and increased sales; etc.

Here, again, you can provide a SMART story by selecting a large account you obtained (perhaps a Fortune 100/500/1000 firm?), what the challenges were that you were faced with, and (for the Action) how you went about landing this sale. For the Result, indicate the dollar amount of the sale. Or you can use a SMART story which exemplifies how you recommended any advertising, marketing, public relations, or other efforts to help your firm or its clients increase business, market share, or its competitive edge.

If you are seeking a position in a company where you would be advertising directly for the firm, for example, you can show ways in which you have spearheaded the company's direction and objectives, what initiatives you have put in place to do so, and the Results of those Actions. Tie this in, for example, with an idea for a niche market that perhaps the prospective employer might not have otherwise tapped into.

Question

How do you successfully handle and meet hectic client deadlines?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Since meeting hectic deadlines is a norm for the profession, it is important to show how you can effectively handle deadlines during stressful situations and meet them head on with a calm and professional demeanor.

This calls for another SMART story. Describe one or two situations where you have worked under extreme stress or against adverse conditions, but still met deadlines. For example, for the Action you could explain how the main server went down on deadline night and how you were able to either troubleshoot and resolve the problem, worked or got the production staff to work overtime, brought in on-call freelancers to pitch in, etc. For the Result, show how these efforts were able to meet a rigorous deadline regardless.

Tie this in with how you can do the same for the prospective employer due to an excellent computer troubleshooting knowledge, through effective people and supervisory skills, or proactive planning, etc.

Agribusiness

Question

What have you done to ensure that California (or any other state) agriculture is competitive with global competition?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Acknowledge that we need to be competitive on all key levels, such as materials, energy, and labor. Offer a SMART story about how you’ve reduced expenses in one of those key areas.

Question

Tell me how you’ve prevented violations in state labor laws.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story to describe the systems you have put in place to ensure that violations do not occur.

Question

What would you do to curtail workers’ compensation costs?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Emphasize safety in the field or processing/production facility. Offer a SMART story about how you created a group incentive program that reduced injuries.

Question

What have you done to increase profitability at your current (or past) employer?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Describe new production methods or management systems used to boost profitability. Labor, a big line-item in most budgets, may be something you can highlight. For instance, a 5% labor savings on several hundred employees can translate to a stronger profit margin.

Question

What have you done to increase productivity at your current (or past) employer?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Management of production agriculture is sometimes structured too vertically. In contrast, more of a horizontal approach can give foremen or crew leaders more authority and accountability, freeing managers to be more productive. If you have a SMART story that illustrates this or any other productivity enhancement, use it.

Architect/Engineer

Submitted by [Evelyn Salvador](#), NCRW, JCTC

Question

What type of structures do you conceptualize and design and what systems and components do your architectural drawings include?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Before answering this question, you need to know whether the prospective employer's firm designs a wide variety of structures, such as a design and build or construction management firm might, or if it specializes in building one type of structure, such as residential homes, commercial buildings, environmental structures, public works, manufacturing plants, etc. This is where your pre-interview research becomes essential.

If the firm's clients are varied, the interviewer wants to know how flexible you are with and how much experience you have in designing a wide variety of buildings. If the firm specializes in one type of structure, concentrating too much on other projects would be detrimental. This is especially true if your concentration is in residential homes versus commercial buildings versus public works.

Lead off with a summary statement of your overall experience. Then concentrate on identifying the types of structures you have designed which match the employers needs, such as corporate office buildings, hospitals, hotels, industrial parks, residential homes, building complexes, churches and temples, clean rooms, universities, college campuses, landmark restorations, manufacturing plants, office space planning, private buildings, public buildings, restaurants, retail stores, schools, shopping malls, universities, etc.

If for public/civil projects include all types you have been involved in: highways and roadways, bridges, government buildings, municipal projects, museums, dams, airport terminals, agricultural systems, flood control projects, docks and marinas, pipelines, powerplants, public utilities, river basins, sewage systems, transit systems, transportation systems, urban centers, water distribution systems, etc.

Identify what components your architectural designs include: structural, electrical, plumbing, air conditioning, heating and ventilation, topography, landscaping, building materials, etc.

Question

What factors do you take into consideration in your designs?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is looking for your ability to consider many factors within which those you list should include what they require in the type of projects you would be architecturally rendering for them such as aesthetics; functionality; environmental; reliability; climate; safety; effectiveness; location; cost; integration; accessibility; ease of use; availability of transportation; using the power of the sun, earth, and water; etc.

Then provide a SMART story of how you integrated many of these components into one project. Lead off with "One such project I worked on, for example, which included many of these considerations was..." Describe how your Actions helped the end Result and Tie-in with why these considerations made the project a success.

Question

When meeting with clients, what functions do you cover?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know the extent of your client interaction experience, such as how well you assess client needs and goals; determine project scope and budget; determine space, resources, and other requirements; generate and exchange ideas; provide architectural design options to solve challenges; offer energy efficiency, environmental safety, and/or technical advise; conduct feasibility and/or environmental impact studies; generate on-the-spot sketches to obtain input; provide postconstruction services to determine how well design adapts to client needs; etc.

Get a feel for the prospective employer's client base and needs so that you can relay how you can target them more precisely.

Question

What architectural/engineering functions do you perform?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Again, lead in with a summary statement which includes your primary functions. Then tie them into what your research has shown your employer needs in the applicant they seek by listing other functions you have

performed that relate to those required in the open position. If during your research, you were not able to determine this precisely, you can ask, "As you know this list can be long, can you tell me what primary areas you seek, so that I can target your question more closely?"

You could highlight some of these functions which targets the employer's needs: performing research and analysis; defining issues; assessing air, water, and pollution control methods; drafting working drawings, working plans, and/or architectural renderings; working closely with specialists; drawing thumbnail sketches; preparing dimensions; plotting profile sheets; developing 3D and sectional views; preparing horizontal and vertical grounds design; creating client presentations; estimating drafting project time and costs; establishing priorities, scheduling and deadlines; making prints, mylars and sepias; plotting cross-sections and topographical overlays; directing and coordinating building construction; providing technical assistance; writing technical reports; conducting inspections; planning and organizing projects and assignments; developing budgets; anticipating and evaluating hazardous conditions and developing hazard control methods; coordinating field work; preparing and enforcing contracts and agreements; preparing contract change orders; coordinating trades; managing building construction; etc.

Question

What building codes, ordinances, laws, and regulations must you ensure compliance with?

"Magic Words" Strategy

The interviewer wants to know your ability to handle all compliance issues as they may arise in the projects they handle. First list the codes and regulations in which you are experienced in (such as zoning regulations, electrical codes, Uniform Building Code, fire regulations, plumbing codes, International Code Council laws, Federal regulations, life-safety codes, state and local building codes, Environmental Safety Codes, detailed contract specifications, etc.), then provide a SMART story of how you tied these all into an architectural project you designed. Show how your expertise in these matters provided for a smooth workflow process, minimal quality/compliance concerns, and a timely completion.

Question

Describe to me the most difficult design challenge you have had to tackle. Explain the challenge, how you met it, and the end result.

"Magic Words" Strategy

This is a wonderful opportunity to showcase your talent in various areas. By now, you should have a good handle of the type of work the prospective employer needs and you would be performing. Select a targeted project you successfully performed which had a number of challenges or one major one and provide a SMART story of how you tackled it. Tie in the Action you used to resolve these challenges, and provide the Result of how the project was a success.

Attorneys

Question

How many trials have you had?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Offer a straightforward answer, including whether you served as lead attorney, along with a SMART story about a complex, challenging, or relevant case. If you served as second chair, do not immediately volunteer this information. Wait for the interviewer to ask whether you were lead or second chair.

Question

Describe the extent of your experience with law and motion.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Describe the types of motions you have filed and highlight a success with an aspect of your pre-trial work.

Question

Describe your experience with discovery.

“Magic Words” Strategy

List your number of years’ experience, the various areas of discovery in which you have experience, and for what areas of law you have discovery experience. After reciting these facts, offer the interviewer the option to hear an example (SMART story) regarding an area of discovery that underscores your investigative and analytical skills.

Question

Do you prefer going to court of (or?) doing research?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The firm wants to know where you prefer to spend your time. If you have a strong preference, state it (remember, you want your next position to be a good FIT.) If you don’t have a strong preference, explain that you like the balance that comes from doing both research and court work.

Question

What was your billable rate and production last year? What do you anticipate these to be in the future?

“Magic Words” Strategy

For attorneys interviewing with law firms, the ability to churn out billable hours is critical. If accurate, reference a steady increase in production over the past few years.

Question

What kinds of clients have you personally brought to your current (or more recent) firm? How many of your clients might follow you if you left your current firm?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question will apply to more experienced attorneys. The ability to bring in new clients (rainmaking) is important. Describe work you do in the community, as well as presentations/teaching you do to increase your visibility and bring good public relations to the firm. If you’ve brought in a significant number of clients in the past, mention the cumulative billable value those clients have represented.

Question

Tell me about a time when you had difficulty asking a client for a fee.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Clients who are going through bankruptcy or a divorce are often short on cash. The firm wants to know whether you can ask for a fee up front! If appropriate, explain that you do a certain amount of pro bono work yet still generate billable hours that are among the highest of the firm.

Question

Have you ever had a malpractice claim against you?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This will be a straightforward yes-or-no answer. If it’s yes, describe the situation in the most positive light possible and explain what systems were put in place to prevent another occurrence. If it’s no, explain what proactive or preventative measures you take to lessen this risk.

Question

How would you rate your writing ability?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Although many firms will ask you to submit a writing sample, they may still ask this question. If you filed briefs where an appeal was accepted, reference this as evidence of your writing ability. You might also point to papers published or relevant awards.

Banking (Management)

Question

What have you done to initiate or implement fee-based services?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Acknowledge the trend toward fee-based services and offer a SMART example of how you did so for a current or former employer, with the corresponding increase in revenue. Include information about how marketing was done in a way that was appealing and palatable to customers.

Question

What are your thoughts on consolidation?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Explain that you understand the benefits to both centralization and decentralization of services and support and, if appropriate, have worked productively in both. Give specific examples.

Question

What do you see happening with interest rates?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Crystal balls aside, demonstrate your knowledge of what the financial pundits are saying about long-term interest rates. Offer examples of how you regularly read and research to keep up on this and other critical information.

Banking (Customer Service)

Question

Describe the range of banking functions with which you’re experienced.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Transaction processing, check processing, proof procedures, payment processing, vault operations, foreign exchange, as well as new business development, new accounts, cross-selling for consumer lending, insurance sales, mortgage financing, etc.

Question

Describe the range of your transaction processing experience.

“Magic Words” Strategy

List any of the types of experience, such as processing deposits, withdrawals, return items, ATM transactions, cashiers checks, money orders, traveler’s checks, loan payments, insurance payments etc. Make this response come alive by not simply mentioning a laundry list but adding an accomplishment to it. For instance, *I was asked by my manager to take the lead on handling the more complex transactions. Or, I learned each of these in about half the time of most new reps. Or, I was selected by my manager to train new hires on these issues.*

Question

Tell me about a time when you handled an account discrepancy that involved an angry customer.

“Magic Words” Strategy

There are two issues to address here: One is problem-solving/analytical skills and the other is customer service skills.

Question

What kind of record do you have with secret shoppers?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The competency being measured here is customer service. If your secret shopper numbers have not been stellar, offer a SMART story about a time when you had a difficult customer to work with and how you resolved the customer’s issue with professionalism and grace.

Question

Tell me about your business development experience.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Emphasize that you comfortably operate in sales-driven environments while maintaining excellent customer service ratings. Mention any training in cross-selling, as well as your specific results in any contests or internal promotions. *It’s all about satisfying customers’ needs while increasing revenue and profit to my employer.*

Question

Describe your performance as it relates to accuracy and productivity.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Point to performance evaluations that provide solid evidence of your skills in these areas. Provide specific data, such as *I rank among the top 5% among tellers for accuracy and the top 10% for productivity – my manager is quite pleased with my performance given I’m the youngest member of the team.* Be cautious about listing before-and-after numbers for your accuracy; you don’t want interviewers questioning why before numbers were low. If your numbers aren’t terrific, try something like this: *I’ve continually improved my accuracy and productivity numbers over the past two years, with 3-5% increases in both areas every year.*

Collections

Contributed by [Evelyn Salvador](#), NCRW, JCTC

Question

What collection functions have you performed?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead off with a summary statement about your primary collection functions, then follow with other functions you believe will be an asset to the prospective employer (depending on their industry). You should know what type of collections the interviewer's company handles and state your experience with them.

Primary functions you might highlight include: analyzing delinquent account records, calculating and verifying amounts due including interest and penalties, locating debtors, performing skiptracing, handling accounts receivables, preparing and sending collection letters and overdue notices, interviewing debtors, soliciting payments, handling customer inquiries, granting extensions, terminating customer service, starting repossession proceedings, negotiating payment terms, executing legal agreements, enforcing judgments, referring cases for legal action, preparing wage withholding orders, preparing court documents, making court appearances to provide testimony, etc.

You can also offer that you are familiar with the administrative supportive functions such as performing and verifying data entry, creating client computer files, sending client itemized statements, researching billing errors, resolving account discrepancies, preparing overdue notices, documenting collection activities, recording customer commitments, issuing customer receipts, monitoring accounts, making account adjustments, closing paid and/or uncollectible accounts, preparing statistical summaries, and recording court disbursements, etc.

Question

What is the number and dollar amount of your caseload of accounts?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to determine how many and how much you have handled simultaneously and equate that with what is required in their firm to determine if you can handle their collections successfully.

Provide the information requested, that is, your caseload number and dollar amount. Elaborate by comparing your number with the normal caseload for your company (if higher); and for the Action, describe how you are able to handle a larger caseload successfully either through effective organizational methods, performing skiptracing on multiple accounts simultaneously, having a large network of resources, etc. Be sure to include the Results of your efforts.

Question

What type of payment plans do you negotiate with customers to bring them current or pay their debt?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Think in terms of how you can successfully resolve debt without giving away the store. In other words, are you more often than not successful at resolving collections before you settle at the fifty percent mark to close out the account? (This is a loss for the company and the prospective employer will see it as that.) And in what timeframe can you accomplish this?

Lead in with the various effective payment plans you use to help customers pay their debt. For the Action section, describe the methods and techniques you use which are most successful at bringing in the most money for your firm. Use percentages in terms of what is owed and what you were able to salvage. The Result should include numbers to describe how much money you actually saved the employer.

Your Tie-in can describe how you can effectively help do the same for the prospective employer with a large Accounts Receivable and if you used your methods you might be able to recapture that percentage for them. (They'll do the math on this one!)

Question

What sources and skiptracing methods do you use to locate debtors and which methods have you found most successful in collecting delinquent accounts?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Help the interviewer be able to envision how resourceful you are. Lead in by describing effective skiptracing methods you use and follow that by adding any methods you have tried and found successful that may differ from the norm. This may be informative and helpful for the employer, as you may have come up with ideas they have not previously thought of.

This calls for a SMART story where you may have used out-of-the box thinking for a particular client who was having financial difficulties but genuinely wanted to pay their debt or another unique situation you handled. You might consider showing how through patience, understanding, and persuasive communication skills, for example, you were able to align with the debtor, help them make smart decisions which didn't negatively affect their credit rating, and successfully collect what was owed the firm. Be sure to follow up with the Result by stating the amount you saved your employer.

Question

By how much have you reduced outstanding collections/accounts receivable and how did you accomplish this?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to determine if you were able to save your previous employers money through effective collections. Lead off by stating what the original collections amount due was when you started your position, and follow with the amount you were able to bring collections down to. Describe the Actions you took and methods you used to accomplish this, such as utilizing effective skiptracing methods, correcting large account discrepancies, effectively locating debtors, having persuasive interviewing skills, using successful negotiation tactics, and the like.

Use a SMART story of one of your biggest collection accounts where you received a large dollar collection amount, and how you were able to accomplish this. Your Tie-in can describe how you can help do the same for the prospective employer for a large firm that you may understand from research is having financial problems.

Customer/Client Service

Question

What type of services do you provide and to whom? (Or, describe a typical day.)

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is gauging whether you are accustomed to a workload and responsibility level that is similar to the position at hand. From your research, frame your answer in a light that parallels the scope, pace, and responsibility of the new position.

Question

How is your performance measured?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If your past positions had goals or metrics associated with them, describe your performance relative to these numbers. If you worked in companies that had no goals, describe how you personally set and met individual goals for yourself. Or, perhaps you established a system that was adopted for the customer service department. If none of these apply to you, consider how you might go about establishing baseline data so that you can measure and improve your performance. Another direction you can go with this answer is to describe

how your department supported regular increases in sales (be specific). If sales did not increase and layoffs in your department ensued, describe how you managed additional work volume.

Question

How have you increased customer satisfaction levels?

“Magic Words” Strategy

A SMART story will be just the vehicle to illustrate how you’ve taken customer satisfaction levels from Point A to Point B.

Question

Describe your call volume and level of service.

“Magic Words” Strategy

For call-center client support professionals, describe personal increases achieved in revenue per call, calls logged, work accuracy, average speed of answer (ASA), etc.

Question

Describe the call-center technology you are familiar with and your skill level with each of these.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond with your range of call-center technology experience, such as ACD, IVRU, CTI, predictive dialers, Web-based customer service, or Web-based live interface. If you completed training more quickly than the norm, mention this. If you have taught others, use a SMART story to convey this. If you don’t have an official training capacity but are called on by peers to explain advanced functions, mention that you are the unofficial resident expert for certain software.

Question

Do you supervise any aspects of providing customer service?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know if you have leadership qualities or are a candidate for promotion.

Question

Who do you regularly communicate with in your daily work?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Provide the key internal or external clients you work with, such as customers, sales reps, production, distribution/warehousemen, transportation, etc. The interviewer will want to know if you service key accounts. Also, describe what steps you take to ensure open communications with these individuals.

Question

What do you do to increase customer referrals?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If your company has put into place a program to increase customer referrals, describe this program in a SMART story format. If no such program or system exists, describe what initiative you personally took to increase referrals, along with specific numbers-driven results that prove the system worked.

Question

Envision the following scenario: your company's largest customer has just informed you that the order for their Labor Day weekend special is short with numerous incorrect items – they're threatening to find another vendor if you don't fix this today; you've also just received an email from the distribution center about a significant initial order for a new time customer will be delayed; and you have a potential customer with a large order that is contingent on it being shipped within 24 hours. Meanwhile, your boss is on a plane, unavailable for the next five hours. What would you do?

"Magic Words" Strategy

This is about your ability to prioritize, demonstrate problem-solving skills, and provide customer service. Elements of your response might include these phrases: *Sounds like a fun day! I've had quite a number of days where there were pressing priorities, and find that I am energized by this type of environment.*

I'd start with the key customer and assure them that I would be back to them within the hour with some solutions. I'd then talk with the distribution center manager, explain the urgency, and learn what stock is available and what combinations of stock we could send them. While I've got the DC manager on the line, I'd double-check that we have stock to meet the new customer request and can meet the 24-hour shipment deadline without compromising our commitment to the existing key account. If needed, I would contact one of our external delivery vendors to inquire about their availability. If the costs to remedy the problem were beyond my normal scope of authority, I would run the options, recommended solution, and numbers by my boss's boss prior to calling the key account back. All the while, I'd be watching the clock to make sure that I returned my call to them in under the hour promised.

For the new customer, I would find out how much of the order would be delayed and for how long, and then phone the customer with this information and inquire whether they prefer to receive a partial order or wait for the full order.

I'd then call the potential customer back with an answer about their 24-hour shipment request and state that I'd double checked with the distribution center so that they know I've gone to extra measures to ensure their satisfaction.

Education (Administration)

Contributed by [Edie Rische](#)

Question

What philosophies do you embrace that set you apart from other school administrators?

"Magic Words" Strategy

The interviewers are judging your depth of thinking and whether you can come up with something new. *I have core philosophies for leadership, programs, and relationships that have enabled the schools I've led to improve their academic performance.* Describe briefly the philosophies. Then offer a SMART story that illustrates one of the philosophies. End by pointing to how this led to an increase in scores for the school, an award, special recognition, and adoption by other schools.

Question

What money-saving enhancements have you contributed to your school or school system?

"Magic Words" Strategy

This question probes whether you are budget-minded and can be creative in stretching dollars. A SMART story will drive home your point.

Question

Tell me about a time when you contributed learning-centered enhancements to your school or school system?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewers want to know whether programs you implement have strong outcomes. You can present a result, such as *I increased TAAS/TAKS scores 7% through tutor programs*. Then follow with a question, *Would you like more details on how that was accomplished?* If they say yes, offer the details in SMART format.

Question

Describe how you win support from teachers.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The theme to this answer should be team-building. If you inherited a situation where there was distrust and enmity among the teaching staff, tell a SMART story that describes how you unified the environment (of course, without belittling anyone).

Education (Teachers)

Contributed by [Louise Garver](#)

Question

Why did you select the profession of teaching?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The panel is trying to determine your level of dedication. Do you have a passion for children and creating lifelong learners? How will your skills benefit students? Keep your answer simple and to-the-point. Don't over-exude. If you come from a family where many members are teachers, be cautious in referencing this as it may not score points. Consider telling a poignant story about an impact you made in a student's life or pointing to a special moment in time that provided early evidence that you would be a great teacher.

Question

What is your philosophy of classroom discipline?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewers want to know if you have a classroom management plan, how you will implement it, why it's important, and if you know how to control students. Offer a SMART story that uses, for example, a discipline ladder or classroom management plan.

Question

What steps would you take with a student who is disruptive in your classroom?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This is a key concern for most hiring panels. Similar to the prior question, they want to know whether you handle disruptive students yourself or send them to the principal's office. Describe how you've managed disruptive students in the past (include a positive outcome) and what system you would put in place for the new position.

Question

What are your goals in education?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewers want to know two things: are you a goal setter and will you stay for the long haul or jump to a new position a year from now. You can tell them: *I have one clear goal in mind: to be the best teacher possible. I want to continue to grow as a teacher and a person. The best way for me to accomplish that is to immerse myself in*

reading professional journals, networking with colleagues, and attending professional development conferences. This past year, I volunteered to serve on the planning committee for the National Teachers Association conference, which exposed me to some of the top leaders in the field of language arts.

Question

What are some trends or issues that relate to your specific curriculum area or grade level?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Prepare for this question by being up on your reading of educational journals, talking with peers in your field, attending seminars and association meetings, and visiting schools to observe the latest teaching methods. For example, *One key trend in the area of math and science education is “constructivist learning.” I not only read articles on the subject in the American Educator journal, but also attended a seminar at the recent annual teachers’ association convention. This method is based on children constructing their own learning rather than copying what the teacher models. I have incorporated this concept in my math classes with successful results. For example, instead of teaching a standard algorithm, I encourage my students in group settings to find their own methods for solving math problems. Through this method, I have noticed that they are more engaged in learning math and learn the subject more quickly. The grades certainly reflect this enhanced learning, as well as their achievement scores.*

Question

What is your philosophy of team teaching?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Interviewers want to know if you are flexible, work well with others, and have experience in team teaching or know about the methodology. Speak to the subject in a positive manner.

Question

What would we see if we walked into your classroom?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your answer will depend to some degree on the grade level of the children. Describe a classroom that’s alive with color and the personalities of the children, with students under control yet enjoying a healthy amount of interaction and activities that support different learning modalities. Describe a comfortable environment that facilitates interactive learning, learning centers dedicated to the various content areas, bulletin boards throughout the room displaying student work, and an area for show-and-tell or storytelling.

Question

Would you be willing to teach at a different grade level or teach a different subject?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Show your self-confidence, flexibility, and positive attitude by letting them know you are adaptable to their needs. A positive response to this question can also give you a distinct advantage over the competition. For instance, *If you have a need for someone who is versatile and flexible to meet the needs of the school, I can assure you I am. My training has equipped me to teach various disciplines, including math and science. For example, although I was initially hired to teach American History, when two of our teachers retired this past year, I stepped in to teach Math and Phys Ed.*

Engineering (Civil)

Question

For new graduates: What specialization did you take in college? Tell me about your senior project. When do you plan to take your EIT (Engineer In Training) Exam?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If the firm specializes in projects similar to your specialization and senior project, provide details with interest and enthusiasm. Most new grads take the EIT exam prior to finishing their degree, which gives interviewers the confidence in your cognitive abilities to be able to pass this 8-hour exam.

Question

How long have you had your P.E. license?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This is a simple data-delivery question. You might add that you passed the test the first time, when the first-time pass rate is only 40% passing.

Question

Walk me through the projects listed on your resume.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer will be probing to find out whether you’ve inflated your resume. Be prepared to state your specific role in those projects. Specifically, were you a project manager or team member? What did you actually design? Which parts? If your resume says you worked on the design (add the word, for) a 2-million-gallon water plant and yet you only designed the drive approach, interviewers will question your credibility. Did you develop the scope of work on your own or was it always given to you? Did you have direct contact with clients? Did you write specifications? Did you file applications? Did you do grant work to obtain funding or grant funds? These are the details interviewers are looking for.

Question

Describe a situation where you encountered a problem on a project and what you did about it.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know if you have the initiative to find solutions to problems without a lot of assistance from your supervisor. Most interviewers will want to hear you describe the problem you ran into, who you called and what questions you asked to gather information, and what solution you proposed.

Question

Tell me about a time when you resolved project issues with a government agency?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know if, in addition to your engineering skills, you’ve got the polished communication skills necessary to interface with government and regulatory agencies. This response calls for a SMART story.

Question

In general, what are the purposes of environmental laws and review processes? What are the environmental governing acts in your locality that must be followed?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond that environmental laws are intended to ensure that impacts to the environment and to communities are considered and mitigated, that the public has a say in the project development process, and that sufficient alternatives have been studied and considered prior to proceeding. The federal regulation is NEPA, National Environmental Policy Act, and the state environmental regulations are contained in [California, for example] CEQA, California Environmental Quality Act. Then, offer a SMART story that describes a project where environmental governing acts were followed.

Question

You're design calls for a certain type of PVC pipe, and you run into a situation where you have to transition to a different diameter pipe and a different type of material. What connection would you propose?

"Magic Words" Strategy

This or any other technical question is posed to determine whether you're just tossing out buzzwords or you really know your stuff. Interviewers would prefer you to be honest and not bluff your way through a question. If you don't know the answer, say, *I've not run across that yet in my experience but this is what I'd do to find the answer.*

Question

A contractor is requesting a change order for what he considers as work outside the contract. How would you protect the project from cost overruns by minimizing change orders while staying on schedule?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Problem-solving skills are being evaluated with this question. If you're dealing with soils or underground work, change orders are inevitable. The theoretical response should include these elements: Evaluate whether the change order is legitimate; if so, is it a fair price (compare the price to similar work on another contract or call another contractor to get a second opinion); then, negotiate to keep costs to a minimum. For instance, pay the contractor time and materials and put an inspector on the job to make sure the contractor stays on track. A SMART story would illustrate this well.

Graphic Design

Contributed by [Evelyn Salvador](#), NCRW, JCTC

Question

What primary graphic design programs do you use to create effective visual communications and how much experience do you have in each?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Lead off with a summary statement about your technology skills which are specific to the industry, then offer the interviewer your level of experience (intermediate or advanced or number of years) in each, such as QuarkXpress, Adobe Photoshop, Adobe Illustrator, Adobe Pagemaker, MultiAd Creator, Microsoft Publisher, etc. You should know what programs the interviewer's company uses and state your experience with these programs primarily.

You can also offer that you are familiar with a number of other programs and/or filters, such as Adobe Photoshop Filters, Adobe Freehand, KPT Bryce, Quark Publishing System, Corel Draw (if a PC environment), and/or Acrobat Writer/Reader, etc.

Consider offering a "leave-behind" sheet that outlines all of your graphic design program experience (if it is not already in your resume) and/or some sample projects you have worked on using them. These should be samples of your best work selected from your portfolio which you might prepare as a media kit in a professional folder (a half dozen is sufficient). When showcasing your work, indicate the programs you used and creative effects you developed using them.

NOTE: If this question comes early on in the interview, you might add, "I have some samples of my work which shows how I used these programs. I'd like to show them to you later when I review my portfolio with you." It is best to hold off showing your portfolio until such time as you have learned exactly what type of work you would be doing for this company. In this way you can concentrate on those items which best meet the prospective employer's needs.

For example, *I had an Art Director client applying for work at an ad agency. I coached him to bring his portfolio and include only samples of his corporate work. Unfortunately, he was also so enthused by his fine art work involving science fiction and comic books that he showed these as well. Unfortunately, this immediately pigeon-holed him and excluded him from consideration.*

Question

What type of visual communications, corporate identity, marketing campaigns, etc. do you layout, design, and/or produce?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Be prepared to list your range of experience by first listing those items which are most applicable to the field of the prospective employer.

For example, if you are applying at an ad agency, you could highlight some of these possibilities: corporate identity pieces, advertisements and advertising campaigns, logos, annual reports, brochures, direct mail pieces, trade publication ads, package design, postcards, and website design (if experienced in that as well).

If for a corporate in-house marketing department, include marketing campaigns, presentations, photographs of trade show exhibits, manuals, news releases, media presentations, etc. If you are applying for a position with a newspaper, you would include retail display ads, newspaper layouts, newsletters, magazine article layouts, etc. For a printer, you could include stationery, business cards, catalogs, flyers, forms, and signage as well as more upscale projects if you have them.

After your summary list, consider shifting the conversation toward what the interviewer is most interested in: "I understand you do a lot of Valpac coupons. I can show you some that were particularly successful for our clients." And, "What other advertising and design needs does your firm have right now that I would be working on?"

Question

Describe your production and prepress experience.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Begin with a summary statement, such as I have six years' experience in production and prepress, the last two of which I supervised a team of seven from concept to finish. Then, offer a SMART story that illustrates these skills: "One of our recent projects illustrates the range of functions I oversaw..." Be sure to weave into the Action of the story items such as digital color correction, knowledge of various file formats and trapping, the use of style sheets,

Additional experience working with printers is usually always helpful (whether you would be doing this directly for the firm or just knowing how to prepare the files correctly when they do get to the printer). If you have expertise in print coordination, four-color processing, film and matchprint making, press checks, etc. be sure to include that information.

Show how you met tight deadlines and are adept at project prioritizing, scheduling, and/or workflow management as well as having a critical eye toward cost effectiveness.

Question

When meeting with clients, what functions do you cover?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know the extent of your client interaction experience, such as whether you assess client needs and goals, determine budget, define project scope, generate and exchange ideas, collaborate on

advertising and marketing plans, prepare cost estimates, provide alternatives to solve challenges, generate on-the-spot thumbnail sketches to obtain input, determine printing/paper/binding needs, review proofs, etc.

Be sure to ask what type of client interaction this position calls for. Know the prospective employer's needs so that you can target them more precisely. Get a feel for their client base and relay how you can target them.

Question

What design project have you worked on which you are most proud of?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story that is relevant to the employer's needs. In the Situation and More, describe what the work entailed, including the challenges involved with the project, such as how this series of ads was the centerpiece for turning around customer perception on a product that had quality issues. For the Action section, describe the techniques and methods used, along with how you interacted with other individuals in the process.

The Result should include numbers to describe how the project benefited the customer/employer. [NOTE: This is something most Graphic Designers do not find out, but it is important information to know and relay. So go back and ask the Account Executive how your projects have helped your firm's clients.]

Your Tie-in can describe how you can help do the same for the prospective employer for a product that you understand from research has had some quality issues.

Question

Tell me about a time when your creative efforts increased sales for your company or clients, helped increase client satisfaction, or expand client base.

“Magic Words” Strategy

This calls for another SMART story. Again, make sure the result offers some sort of before-and-after number associated with customer response or sales.

For the Action section, show how you accomplished this, such as through innovative design and cost effective advertising, by developing and presenting dynamic presentation layouts, providing clients with several design concepts / options per project, by meeting all of the client project requirements, by turning out quick and accurate client proofs, delivering fresh / unique design concepts, designing visual communications which satisfy clients on their first proofs, decreasing client revision turn-around time and meeting all deadlines, etc.

Question

Have you ever been solely responsible for any specific clients, design projects, or production processes? If so, which ones?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is looking for your ability to take a project or process from concept through fruition and the process you use to do so. You can describe a marketing, advertising, or direct mail campaign in which you handled all or most all of its components, who it was for, the pieces you designed, etc.

Be sure to ask the interviewer what type of projects or processes this position calls for and describe how you can effectively prioritize, schedule, design, and handle everything in between. For the Result, explain your client satisfaction, how the campaign was received, if it increased sales, etc.

Healthcare (Clinical)

Contributed by [Melanie Noonan](#)

Question

What patient populations have been most challenging for you, and how did you deal with them?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Avoid describing medical situations, as the interviewer might conclude that you don't have the depth of knowledge required. This response from a physical therapist, which showcases her attitude, is a winner: *I rarely find patients challenging because I take the attitude that this could be ME receiving treatment. To answer your question, though, what comes to mind are people who became incapacitated suddenly because of a stroke, head trauma, or spinal cord injury. Since they knew they were in for a long and slow recovery period, it was difficult for them to adjust psychologically to their limitations. I had one gentleman who was uncooperative and angry, often greeting me with expletives, but I never took any of this personally. I always approached him in a cheerful and patient manner, using humor judiciously. He soon became receptive to treatment and actually looked forward to it.*

Question

Describe actions you took in a treatment situation that was out of the ordinary.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a response that underscores your thoroughness and ability to work as a multidisciplinary team member. A good example would be how you worked with a particular patient who was routinely being treated for _____ (fill in your appropriate discipline, such as a respiratory therapy illness or burn treatment) but suspected the patient had developed other medical complications. Describe the steps you took, including what other medical team members you alerted, how you followed up, and what the early notice may have prevented.

Question

How have you handled an increase in your patient load recently?

“Magic Words” Strategy

With the changes in healthcare, it seems that every institution is asking its clinical staff to do more. A SMART story can convey how you accommodated an xx% increase in patient load while maintaining quality of care. You might also point to how your technology skills have contributed to making this possible. Or, perhaps there is a committee or team you served on that addressed productivity/cost-savings issues.

Question

What factors do you consider before deciding on a particular treatment for a patient?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question might be asked of nurse practitioners, respiratory therapists, physical therapists, occupational therapists, or other healthcare professionals. Walk the interviewer through the appropriate protocol you'd follow. For instance, *I would first look at the patient's chart and take note of his diagnosis, medical history, and age. I would then evaluate the patient's physical condition and take into consideration his treatment goals. If I discovered anything questionable in this process, I would consult with the patient's physician or colleagues before deciding on a treatment modality to ensure maximum safety and benefit to the patient.*

Question

What has been most rewarding for you in your career?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is looking for what motivates you. This response indicates that relationship and respect (both externally from physicians and internally from himself) are motivators: *Over the past four years that I have been at Mercy Health Care Systems, I considered myself fortunate to interact and work with physiatrists, (haven't heard of that one – is it spelled correctly?) orthopedists, neurologists, and other physicians. As their confidence in me increased, they gave me opportunities to see patients for early evaluations and to recommend initial therapy. It was tremendously*

gratifying to earn the respect of medical professionals and be able to broaden my horizons as a health care practitioner through exposure to various patient conditions.

Question

Tell me how you contribute to the interdisciplinary team at your facility?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Teamwork is the key theme to this question. Describe a tangible or measurable contribution you have made to your team. Did this lead to special recognition or increased responsibility, such as training others or serving on a special committee? If so, be sure to include these details.

Healthcare (Management)

Question

How have you engaged physicians to help manage healthcare costs in your institution?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story. Provide details, such as how you influenced a dozen orthopedic surgeons to standardize inventory by using the same hip replacement implant, or how you worked with the docs to improve the discharge rate of patients.

Question

What steps have you taken to improve quality in your institution?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story. Include increases in quality assurance (QA) or quality improvement (QI) scores, or mention glowing feedback from JCAHO surveys. You might also address an initiative that addressed patients' *perceived* quality of care.

Question

Describe a situation where you noted Medicare fraud or abuse.

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question can apply to virtually any healthcare worker, from laboratory administrator to healthcare executive. Describe how you addressed the situation, emphasizing that it was done in a politically sensitive manner and that systems were put in place so the particular abuse could not reoccur.

Question

What suggestions or solutions would you recommend to a health insurance company that is developing a new product?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Acknowledge that healthcare premiums are increasing at double-digit rates, and that HMOs and health insurance companies are changing their products to create the right incentives to make patients more responsive about costs. Give an example of how you have done so in the past, if appropriate. If no example is applicable, describe what others have done based on your research or professional development experiences. Or, offer several hypothetical solutions.

Question

What innovations have you recently made to your internal business office operations to address changes in contracting?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Since the business office is the linchpin in collecting and processing patient data and insurance information, the interviewer likely wants to hear about smooth and timely procedures for reimbursement. Be ready to state before-and-after data that documents how efficient the improvements in your institution’s reimbursement has been.

Question

Tell me about your knowledge of Stark II.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Stark II governs the relationships between healthcare entities and physicians or referral sources. The interviewer wants to know 1) whether you’re aware of the law, and 2) to what degree you are familiar with it. Describe your experience, such as having identified a violation of the law, consulted with in-house legal counsel about a physician contract issue, attended a Stark II seminar, or read a brief by outside counsel on a specific issue.

Human Resources (Generalist)

Contributed by [Barbara Safani](#)

Question

Tell me about your HR experience.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Focus on what the interviewers need to know to determine that you’re the best investment they could make. Describe how your HR function has been aligned with business goals. Your discussion must focus on business results. Business leaders are not seeking HR professionals interested in planning the company picnic – they demand strategic business partners who can speak their language and recommend proposals that impact the bottom line. Position yourself as a strategist who listens to business needs and advises senior management on programs/incentives that increase productivity and quality or decrease expenses, project time, or employee absenteeism.

Question

How do you leverage technology to meet business needs?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question gives you the opportunity to indicate you possess both creative problem-solving skills and Internet/database savvy. Options for SMART stories might include researching and negotiating an HRIS or benefits reporting system or an e-learning program implemented via intranet. Or, perhaps you’ve sourced new hires through on-line networking groups or professional organizations. Tie these samples to cost reductions or time savings.

Question

What change management initiatives have you been involved in?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Change management issues include company mergers and acquisitions, outsourcing, offshoring, downsizing, or implementation of flexible work assignments. Offer the range of your change management experiences, then ask the interviewer which initiative he’d like more details about. Provide a SMART story, such as this: *One initiative centered on implementing flexible work assignments. Employee termination survey data revealed that the company was experiencing a 10% turnover rate due to a lack of flexible work arrangements. This translated into a*

recruiting and training cost in excess of \$100,000. I proposed a review of current work arrangements to senior management and secured their buy-in on the project. I collaborated with six managers and numerous employees to develop feasibility studies and eligibility criteria. The program was piloted with 50 employees. A follow-up employee survey indicated a 5% decrease in employee turnover, essentially cutting recruiting and training costs in half. The program is now being rolled out to all seven locations with a project savings of more than \$1 million over the year (either the year or 12 months, but not both) 12 months.

Question

What recommendations have you made regarding employee incentive programs?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Divide your response into two parts: 1) Monetary incentives – this could include your role in the implementation of formal compensation programs, bonuses, or spot rewards; and 2) non-monetary incentives – employee achievement awards, training opportunities or selection for special projects. Discuss the rationale you used for choosing incentive plans and offer a powerful SMART example where performance was enhanced without the use of money.

Question

How do you assess the corporate climate?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Convey that your antennae are always up and that you have a systematic, multi-platform approach. Climate assessment tools may include focus groups, employee surveys, one-on-one meetings, manager meetings, and site visits. Discuss an initiative that reviewed metrics and various statistical data.

Question

With respect to recruiting, what strategies do you use to ensure a good job-fit?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Describe your range of recruiting experience and initiatives implemented such as identifying competencies, emphasizing behavioral-based interviewing, requiring skills-based assessments as part of the interview process, etc.

Question

How have you lowered your recruiting costs?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story that describes the strategies used to lower costs, such as employee referral programs, online recruiting, enhancements to your website that allow for one-click submission of resumes by job applicants, etc. Conclude with a result that captures the savings achieved, then tie-in the response with a question such as *Would you say that lowering your recruiting costs is a priority in this position? Or, What strategies have you found most effective in getting a handle on your recruiting costs.*

Question

How have you addressed retention and/or lowered staff turnover?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Interviewers will be interested in knowing what your retention numbers are, so be ready. If the before-and-after numbers are not positive, focus on programs and initiatives recently implemented that are projected to increase retention, for instance a program based on some of the traditional and nontraditional strategies outlined by Beverly Kaye and Sharon Jordan-Evans’ (don’t think an apostrophe is called for here; there is no possessive) in *Love ‘Em or Lose ‘Em*.

Question

What is your record for compliance?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Briefly describe your knowledge of and record of compliance with OSHA, Title 22, JCAHO, EEO, AA, ADA, FMLA, Equal Pay Act, etc. Select and describe one or two highlights that indicate how you attacked improving a compliance issue that you inherited.

Question

What are your thoughts on outsourcing or off-shoring human resources functions?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This can be a politically sensitive issue, so handle it with diplomacy. Consider offering some pros and cons, examples of how it has worked well in the past for your companies, and how you read publications such as SHRM’s *HR Executive* to stay abreast of trends.

Question

Tell me about a time when you mediated a human resource complaint or grievance.

“Magic Words” Strategy

If possible, describe how complaints have been reduced or how complaints no longer escalate to grievances under your watch, as well as the new systems established to accomplish this. Then offer a particular SMART story since the interviewer is requesting a specific instance.

Human Resources (Training & Development)

Contributed by [Beverly Harvey](#)

Question

What do you feel uniquely qualifies you for our Director of Global Training & Development position?

“Magic Words” Strategy

For this open-ended question, present your 3-Point Marketing Message or Mini-Bio (see Chapter 4). Tailor the message toward the company’s specific problems or projects and be sure to include numbers-driven results that will convey the return-on-investment an employer will receive because of your skills.

We’re planning to implement a learning management system for our 28,000-employee workforce. Tell me about how you’ve handled projects of similar magnitude.

“Magic Words” Strategy

If appropriate, immediately convey that you have had relevant experience: *Absolutely, my experience qualifies me to manage that.* Then, launch into a SMART story. If you have not had projects of a similar scope, use a SMART story that addresses how you have helped implement a learning management system. Your tie-in at the end of the story should mention any modifications you would make to implement a system of larger scale, as well as how you’ve consistently succeeded in managing progressively larger projects.

Question

Tell me about your experience with e-learning systems.

“Magic Words” Strategy

If you have experience with several systems, briefly state the name of the company and the system you used there, i.e. *At Hughes Supply we managed our e-learning program using Generation21 and at Widget company we used LearnPoint.* If you know which e-learning system the company you are interviewing with is currently using, offer a SMART story about your experience with their system. Your tie-in should mention improvements in functionality, content, utilization and performance improvements that in turn reduced costs and improved revenues.

Question

Describe the range of your experience with respect to content design, development and delivery?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Convey here your turnkey knowledge of content design, development, and delivery. Describe your ability to create best-in-class training, instructional methodologies, and materials, as well as execute programs using various delivery methods. Provide an overview of the types of training programs (technical, sales, management) you have designed, developed, and delivered including the number of people that have received training and their locations (nationwide, worldwide). Communicate the positive outcomes associated with the training. After hearing this, the interviewer will likely ask for a specific example, or you can wrap up your overview response with the phrase, *Would you like a specific example that outlines what was accomplished at XYZ Company?*

Question

Do you have experience in blended learning systems?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Communicate your experience in integrating a combination of learning systems, including various multi-media systems, classroom training, and instructional aids to facilitate learning at various skill levels throughout the organization.

Question

Tell me about your international experience with e-learning systems.

“Magic Words” Strategy

If applicable, tell about your experience rolling out systems to diverse cultures. Describe how you overcame issues regarding colloquialisms, idioms, and cultural sensitivities and how that resulted in increased utilization. Also include details about how you coordinated the roll-out in multiple countries/locations.

Information Technology (IT) – CIO, VP, Director, Knowledge Officers

Question

Describe a situation in which you led a technology initiative that helped add value or profitability to the company.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond that *any technology initiative should serve and not restrict business. If it doesn't add value to the company, it shouldn't be deployed.* Indicate your knowledge of the entire lifecycle of systems, speak to the cost vs. benefit of implementing a new technology, the financial justifications and financial management options (whether to lease, buy outright, how to fund and for how long, etc.), and how to mitigate risks (e.g., obsolescence issues, long-term stability of vendor). Then, provide a SMART story that illustrates these points.

Question

How would you approach implementing a technology initiative that impacted multiple functional areas?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is likely probing for how well you can integrate your management skills into the rest of the corporation. Respond with a SMART story that includes details about how you fostered communications between departments, won cooperation from other departments, and implemented a cost-effective technology initiative under a tight deadline.

Question

Tell me about a time when you implemented a new technology that didn't accomplish the goals you thought it would.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Interviewers will be looking for character here, judging whether you admitted the mistake or shifted the blame to someone else. If you had bottom-line responsibility, acknowledge it and move on: *The responsibility rested at my desk. These are the steps I took to salvage the situation and ensure it didn't happen again.* Then explain, for instance, that the decision was right at the time but wasn't right six months down the road, and how you called a huddle to reassess the situation before any further money was spent, developed strategies to recoup losses, and put systems in place so that a similar situation can't happen.

Question

Tell me about a time when you turned on a new system ahead of your business rivals.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Display your business acumen by acknowledging how technology should be harnessed to give a competitive edge. Then relate a SMART story that describes how a particular initiative allowed your most recent employer to gain a market advantage.

Question

Describe a situation where you maximized the capabilities of your existing infrastructure.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know whether you can get more from your existing assets rather than pour more money into new technology. Be ready with a SMART story that describes, for instance, how you halted a substantial capital outlay and, based on your experience and insights, determined how to tap the unrealized potential of your deployed hardware and network.

Question

What do you think about outsourcing/offshoring?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond diplomatically, assuring the interview that as an IT executive, your responsibility is to add value to the organization. In some cases, that means maximizing the capabilities of your existing infrastructure. In others, it means outsourcing so that you don't have to constantly upgrade infrastructure. If you have experience with outsourcing, describe the strategy and systems you used to implement an off-shore solution, along with the results/outcomes associated with the initiative.

Information Technology (IT) – Managers, Assistant Directors

Question

Tell me about a time when you handled a security intrusion and what steps you took to improve system security?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to gauge your ability to strategize the resolution processes, recognize pulse points in a crisis situation, and leverage experience, skills, and wisdom from prior encounters. Impress on the interviewer your broad span of knowledge at the user level, department level, company level, or enterprise-wide level; however, scope your answer to the size of company with which you’re interviewing. For instance, some companies’ security concerns extend only to firewalls, anti-virus software, and spam control. Larger enterprises are concerned with denial of service attacks, distributed denial of service attacks, perimeter defenses, and other security concerns. If applicable, convey to the interviewer your experience involving state and federal law enforcement agencies to bring security perpetrators to justice and shore up any financial implications from the security breach.

Question

What is your experience in ensuring the integrity and safety of your IT investments/assets?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The heart of this answer centers on asset management and inventory control software. For a small company with a handful of PCs, this will not be an issue. In a larger organization, asset management and inventory control will be important. Explain that inventory control is foundational – if you are not first aware of who has the assets and where they are, they cannot be protected. Many businesses don’t have a formalized method of approaching asset management, causing them to lose money as incidental theft, losses, or breakage adds up. Then, speak to asset protection, including factors such as optimal protection and obsolescence. Perhaps you implemented or managed an enterprise solution that, for example, bundled asset management, troubleshooting, database control, and call-center ticket problem resolution processes.

Question

Tell me about a time when you were directed by the upper echelons to implement a technology initiative that would take you over budget and how you handled it.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Before responding to the question, first assure the interviewer that you have an excellent record for managing budgets because of your strong forecasting and monitoring skills.

Then, convey that you would first analyze whether this initiative was aligned with the company’s strategic plan. The interviewer should appreciate that you’re looking at the big picture. If it is not aligned with the company’s strategic plan, indicate that you would take into consideration the current internal political landscape. If it is aligned with the long-term strategic direction of the company, explain that you would next proceed to analyzing the financial implications, developing options (will this require an RIF, salary freeze, budget freeze, elimination of commissions, is leadership open to implementing the project in phases over a multi-year time period, what level of support can be provided by the vendor, etc.), and implementing strategies.

This process will show you know the technical aspects, financial implications, and business realities associated with the question.

Question

The company has asked you to adjust headcount down. How would you handle this?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Respond that you would first seek to understand why the adjustment is being made. Is it shrinking to prepare to be acquired, shrinking to acquire financing to recover, or shrinking to save money?

Then, develop options and consider the ramifications of any actions six to 12 months down the road. Layoff of a higher-salaried employee may cause more significant losses in terms of knowledge, skills, and time to bring new knowledge workers on board. Alternatives should be considered, such as a reduced workload for higher-salaried employees in order to retain valuable human capital. Finally, execute the option best aligned with the company’s strategic goals.

Question

Tell me about a time when you handled an IT crisis.

“Magic Words” Strategy

This question probes, first, what you consider to be a crisis and, second, your decision-making skills under stress. First overview what you consider to be a crisis. For instance, *Crises can come in many forms and typically translate to a loss of revenue – bad publicity, criminal intent (selling trade secrets), lawsuits, financial blows, and operational crises. If technology goes down for an extended period of time so that you cannot collect money and fund payroll, that’s a crisis. A severe security breach is a crisis. A virus attack that paralyzes the company’s ability to transact business is a crisis.*

Then, launch into how you handled a crisis using a SMART story.

Question

What would you describe as a complex technical environment?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know what you consider complex. Most technology executives would agree that a complex technical environment is one that involves multiple disparate systems with hundreds or thousands of users, many processes, and urgent business needs. Indicate your ability to operate in Windows, Unix, and mainframe shops, your experience with proprietary and open-source systems, and the alignment of the systems with business objectives.

Information Technology (IT) – Technical Staff, Help Desk, Analysts

Question

Tell me about the type of environment you prefer to work in.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Demonstrate your adaptability! Don’t limit your reply to merely Microsoft platforms. The response should include reference to Unix/Linux, open source, and mainframe environments.

After overviewing the range of your experience, turn your answer toward the predominant infrastructure at the target company.

Question

Where would you consider your skill sets in a typical help desk environment?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Typically, the three levels that you might point to are:

- Front-line technician: someone with basic skills where issues are resolved in a 3 to 5-minute timeframe.

- Second level: someone with intermediate technical skills where issues affect a wider scope of knowledge
- Third-tier: someone with high-level certifications

If your goal in the interview is to land a position that moves you to a higher level or if you don't have a desired certification but have equivalent experience, use the strategy of offering a skills inventory to highlight:

- # of years working with certain technology
- # of people you supported
- how recently you worked with that particular technology
- how frequently you worked with that particular technology (daily, monthly, weekly)

Then, be ready with a SMART story that describes how you resolved, say, a third-tier issue while you were still a second-tier technician.

Question

What would you do when a user cannot log into a network?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is looking for your thought process for getting to the best solution. Offer a SMART story that steps the interviewer through the information you would gather, such as whether the user is local to the site, if this is for a particular type of user (contractor, full-time employee), if it is a physical connectivity issue or a software-related issue, or whether it's a user lack of knowledge.

Insurance Claims & Investigations

Contributed by [Evelyn Salvador](#), NCRW, JCTC

Question

I can see from your resume that you handle insurance claims (or investigations). What type of insurance policy claims have you processed or investigated?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead off with an overview of the various types of claims you have processed in your career, and then hone in on the type of claims the prospective employer's company handles in more detail. For example, "During my career I have processed health insurance claims, workers compensation claims, long- and short-term disability insurance claims, as well as accidental death and dismemberment claims. My particular experience in handling workers compensation claims has involved..."

Similarly if you have handled automobile, life insurance, property and casualty, fire, flood, marine, medical malpractice, credit card, or product liability insurance claims, be sure to tie in your experience with the prospective employer's needs.

Question

How many claims do you process and finalize in a week?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead off with the average number of claims processed by claims examiners in your unit or firm and state (if true) that you meet or exceed this number and by how many. If you process more claims per week than the

average or have ever been recognized for the highest productivity rate in your unit/firm, be sure to include this and provide these numbers. For your Action statement, indicate how you are able to surpass the norm.

At this point, you can turn the conversation to the interviewer by asking what the average is at this firm and what is expected from a claims processor or examiner who works here, if there are stated goals, etc. You can tie this by adding that your expertise and knowledge would allow you to do the same for this firm.

Question

What criteria or methods do you use to analyze claims, determine compensability, and process their disposition?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know the methods you use to ensure liability accuracy, compliance with procedures, and possibly your awareness of any negative impact on reserves.

If you review health-related claims, for example, explain the methods you use to determine if medical expenses are reasonable based on patient diagnoses, period of disability, treatment, and/or hospital stay and what sources you use to obtain this information.

If you handle automotive claims on the other hand, you can provide the equipment or techniques you use to inspect accident vehicles for auto damage, write accurate repair cost estimates, and negotiate with shop owners. Explain the criteria you use to decipher automotive repairable versus replacement parts to determine repair feasibility via after market parts, old parts, or new parts.

If you review life insurance claims, provide the criteria you use to review causes of death, particularly accidental deaths, before processing disbursements on life insurance policies, etc.

Here you can also offer the type of technical expertise you can bring to the firm which helps in the analysis and disposition of claims, such as applying legal terminology knowledge, familiarity with medical diagnoses, workers' compensation law, current court rulings pertaining to claims, third-party liability identification and recovery, expert court testimony, knowledge of insurance contracts and provisions compliance, etc.

Question

What processes do you use to investigate claims and calculate damage estimates to determine extent of the company's liability?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Though this question is similar to the one before, it differs in that the interviewer wants to know the actual steps you take in the process. Start off by providing a summary indicating the primary functions you perform, including such steps as interviewing claimants, examining claims for payment liability, reviewing insurance contracts and provisions, determining coverage eligibility, investigating and determining validity of claims, reconstructing events, gathering written or taped statements, preparing cost analysis and estimates, making reasonable cost determinations, calculating benefit amounts, ensuring liability accuracy, negotiating settlements, authorizing payments to claimants, etc.

From your pre-interview research, you should have a good idea of the type of claims the prospective employer processes. Offer additional information which targets the employer's needs depending on the type of claims it processes, such as reviewing hospital records; inspecting property damage; consulting with police or other professionals; interviewing witnesses, victims and suspects; conducting physical surveillance or using surveillance cameras; determining repair feasibility; etc.

Question

How do you identify controversial claims and what do you do when you suspect foul play? What investigative techniques have you found most successful?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Explain your abilities and skills which helps you determine if foul play is suspected or was possible. Depending on the position you hold, you might determine if an investigation is warranted and refer the suspicious claim to an investigator or conduct the research and field investigations to determine if, in fact, it is insurance fraud.

Follow with how you identify controversial claims, process investigative requests or orders, conduct legal claims issues research, make claims validity determinations, make suspicious claims referrals, problem claims closure, etc.

A SMART story can be provided here where you can identify a claim or two that you handled which was controversial, why you suspected it as possible fraud, the investigative techniques you used, and the successful outcome you attained. Tie this in with how you can do the same for the prospective employer.

Question

What type of settlements have you negotiated and for what amounts did you settle?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Explain any ways in which you have saved your firm money by negotiating low settlement amounts and how much you saved the firm.

Here is a good opportunity to use a SMART story. Select one or two examples of claims where you settled for far less than expected. Provide details on the actions you took to handle these cases, with whom you negotiated, how you were able to achieve low settlements, what the possible liability amount could have been compared to what you were able to settle at, etc.

At this point you can ask the prospective employer what insurance amounts they have on their pate right now. Your Tie-in can describe how you can help do the same for the prospective employer by negotiating lower settlement amounts with their claimants.

Question

What type of field investigations do you conduct and what type of information do you uncover in your investigations?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Be prepared to list the various ways in which you conduct your field investigations and explain your success in uncovering required information critical to making an informed determination, such as conducting physical surveillance, inspecting documents, reviewing and analyzing financial records, locating and verifying assets, analyzing witness statements, substantiating investigative findings, detecting discrepancies, determining if a violation has occurred, calculating the magnitude of fraud, etc.

You can also offer how you investigated misleading information and uncovered the possibility of fraud in XYZ cases.

Question

What do you do when you discover that the outcome is, in fact, insurance fraud?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The prospective employer is looking for your knowledge of handling fraud investigations and your expertise in taking difficult claims through to completion in this regard.

You can provide the steps you take for these claims such as determine the likelihood of the case being prosecuted, issue subpoenas, develop reports of findings, prepare investigative affidavits, research laws and court decisions, gather and present photographic and other evidence in court, participate in criminal prosecutions, prepare cases for litigation, assist prosecutors with presenting cases, provide guidance to legal staff, testify in court as an expert witness, coordinate collection of restitution payments with courts, identify third-party liability and seek recovery, etc.

Here again you can use a SMART story to explain the largest fraud you uncovered, how you uncovered it, the actions you took, and the end results of your investigation. You can also offer your expertise regarding the type of insurance fraud cases you have testified in court as an expert witness which might be helpful to the employer from the research you have uncovered for the firm. Tie this in to the prospective employer by showing how you can do the same for them with their cases.

Management

Contributed by [John O'Connor](#)

Question

Describe a time when you implemented a change initiative and encountered resistance. What did you do?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a SMART Story™ that illustrates your leadership influence, as does this example:

Just before the Y2K concerns surfaced in 1999, many of our technology directors at the national level presented a \$49 million solution to our division. This so-called solution meant that our division would lose 17 employees. I politely but seriously objected after two weeks of careful competitor analysis. Our industry rivals all put forth the same solution. What did I find out? The solution served the hysteria of Y2K but did not help the company gain revenue or reduce costs. So I wrote a detailed, five-page memo. Several directors privately e-mailed me to thank me for my research; however, two were not convinced. It took six meetings at our corporate offices in New Jersey, six more detailed papers, and multiple private phone calls to convince all the directors. The result? The multimillion-dollar plan was scratched, Y2K happened and the company saw no burden to the software, and we saved 17 jobs in our division alone. In most of my writing and speaking I acknowledged each director’s concern but made sure that each person’s point of view and concerns were considered. That helped me build consensus and not alienate anyone. If I had rammed through the change initiative, I would have been right but I would have made a lot of people mad. Instead, we all achieved our main goal: what was best for each division and the company. The big-picture result, of course, was that for the next few years we had a clear edge over, and a lot more cash than, our competition!

Question

How have you gone about conceiving and implementing a new vision for companies/departments in the past?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a SMART Story™ that illustrates your ability to conceive and execute a vision:

I can readily think of several examples over the past five years. Let me focus on one. As Division Manager for ABC Company, our chief competitor had taken 23 percent of our market share in the six months prior to my coming on board. This presented great anxiety for our Southeast division, my division. Tasked with turning around this problem, I turned to what I call my “master mind” team. My master mind team consists of people

I work with and also a few trusted colleagues from my past leadership assignments. With their help, I clarified my vision for the division, which was to not only turn it around but make it, over the next five years, the leading provider of widget products in the manufacturing market. I wrote, and with the team, edited the business plan. The buy-in nationally was 100 percent, partly out of necessity and partly out of desperation. Nine months after components of the business plan were implemented, we regained market share. Each month succeeding we added market share until we once again dominated market share. New products were introduced and cycle times were reduced by 56 percent. These successes continue to today.

Manufacturing

Contributed by [Melanie Noonan](#)

Question

How are you able to control volume and quality in the offshore production of apparel?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead with a statement such as *I have 10 years’ experience in offshore production and have become quite an expert at customs, tariffs, import quotas, foreign currency, letters of credit, freight forwarding, and insurance issues.* Then offer a SMART story.

Question

Tell me about a situation in which you had to make a difficult decision on whether or not to ship possibly defective product that was urgently needed by a key customer.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The phrase “Tell me about...” cues you that this is a behavioral interviewing question that demands a SMART story such as this: *To fulfill an urgent customer requirement for certain component parts, we did a rush production run, but time did not allow for the full QC inspection process. Since no defects were immediately noticeable, the product was loaded onto the trailer. Just before the truck was to leave, my shop supervisor informed me that there was a 1% failure rate in a test sampling of the parts. Knowing that a complaint from this customer could cost us the loss of their business, I stopped the shipment immediately, called the customer’s purchasing manager and explained the situation. He thanked me for alerting him and gave me the go-ahead to ship anyway. He said he would make sure the product would undergo a thorough inspection before it was used. Meanwhile, I reviewed our production process to find the cause of the defect to prevent further such recurrences.* Then, consider a tie-in question, such as *What challenges are you having with quality?*

Question

What systems have you put in place to address any deficiencies in quality and on-time shipments?

“Magic Words” Strategy

A SMART story is in order. Convey your ability to quickly note and analyze the situation (if not, questions may arise about why the situation went on as long as it did). Also, indicate how you communicated with key internal contacts, offered solutions with return-on-investment calculations, and implemented those solutions. Remember to provide before-and-after numbers to underscore positive results.

Question

What actions have you taken to ensure a safe workplace?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If you inherited a situation with a poor safety record and turned it around, speak to the before-and-after numbers and how the “after” numbers were achieved. If safety violations occurred on your watch, use caution in answering this question. Avoid mentioning specific safety violations, instead referring to actions that you

put in place and the positive numbers for that timeframe. A smart interviewer may ask point-blank what safety violations occurred under your leadership. If so, don't point fingers at someone else. State briefly what happened and then focus the response on what has been put in place to improve the situation.

Question

How do you deal with staff shortages?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Your response strategy can center on how you have contingency plans in place to deal with staff shortages, such as succession planning, cross-training, as well as maintaining relationships with temporary services firms that can provide qualified staff on short notice. Give a SMART example of how this planning was actually put into place.

Marketing

Question

Describe the scope of your marketing experience.

"Magic Words" Strategy

Begin with an umbrella statement, such as *I've consistently delivered above-average return-on-investment during my 12 years of experience. During that time, I've led the strategy and conceptual development for corporate marketing, branding, consumer messaging, image, publications, and advertising campaigns.* Then, follow with a query, such as *Which of these areas would you like me to provide more details on first?*

Question

How have your marketing projects contributed to corporate goals?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Offer a SMART story that illustrates how a specific project or initiative you worked on helped to drive sales for a product or service. Include before-and-after sales numbers for the product. Always link your marketing stories to the bottom line.

Question

What kind of external resources do you work with?

"Magic Words" Strategy

State that you have an extensive network of resources, including writers, designers, photographers, illustrators, translators, service bureaus, and printers, then describe a SMART story that illustrates how you coordinated a project involving a number of external resources or how you sourced new resources that provided comparable quality at lesser fees.

Question

Describe a time when you analyzed market research to influence a marketing initiative.

"Magic Words" Strategy

The interviewer wants to know about your research and analytical skills. Use a SMART story that illustrates how you accessed and analyzed market data, and then made appropriate recommendations. Finish with the bottom-line outcome.

Question

Tell me about a time when you exceeded your marketing budget.

“Magic Words” Strategy

First, assure the interviewer that the majority of your projects have stayed within or under budget and yielded a strong return-on-investment, as evidenced by sales increases or a demonstrably improved public image. If there is a situation that falls within the realm of “exceeded budget,” briefly describe how it happened and explain what systems were put in place so it wouldn’t happen again.

Question

Describe some of the marketing materials you have written.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Provide an overview statement, such as, "I wrote, developed, and produced annual reports, interim financial disclosures, letters to shareholders, press releases, and all promotional materials for the parent company and its subsidiaries...." Offer the interviewer a glimpse of your portfolio to make these items come to life.

Question

What kind of press coverage have you gained?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Obtained news media coverage and business television interviews in major cities; secured print and broadcast feature stories in industry and national publications and on network television via the use of special events, publicity, radio, and television advertising and an acclaimed franchise brochure

Pharmaceutical Sales

Question

What classes of pharmaceuticals have you sold?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If your product experience isn’t perfectly aligned with the company’s product, consider a response like this: *I have a range of experience with multiple classes, including anti-obesity, antibiotic, antiviral, loop diuretic, and beta-blockers, where I’ve called on family practitioners, pediatricians, OB/gyns, cardiologists, gastroenterologists, allergists, and internal medicine physicians. In researching your company, I’ve familiarized myself with your and your competitors’ HRT (hormone replacement therapy) products and talked to several gynecologists in the area. I understand there are both some challenges and some opportunities to move market share for your newest product. I’m anxious to hear your thoughts and share some of my own about how to accomplish that.*

Question

What is your current district sales ranking for your primary product?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer will want to hear both the ranking number and how many reps are in the district. If you’ve moved up since beginning with the company, say so. If your numbers have been high but recently took a dip, reference both numbers: *For the majority of the past two years, I’ve ranked #2 among 12 reps in our district; the last quarter that ranking was #4. I attribute that to ... To counter this, I have aggressively pursued gaining formulary approval for our newest product.*

Question

What kind of market-share increases have you delivered for your company?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Again, be ready to spout figures for market-share gains for each product you represent.

Question

Tell me about a time when you took on extra responsibilities in your district?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is probing for both initiative as well as special skills you might bring to the team. Themes might be leadership, technology, analytical skills, competitive market research, etc. For instance, if you took on coordinating POA meetings for the region, you might say: *My regional director frequently looked to me for team leadership. For instance, I coordinated the POA meeting for the last quarter, which was attended by 80 reps. It was a challenge to do so because we all had to leave our territories and go to Los Angeles for a week of unexpected meetings to learn about the upcoming merger. I managed everything from the conceptual development of a Super Bowl theme to coordinate with the upcoming football playoffs to bringing in physician guest speakers who were thought leaders in orthopedics. One had even been a physician for one of the pro teams, so it tied in nicely with our theme....* (continue SMART story).

Question

Tell me about a time when you differentiated yourself from your competitors. (Or, describe a situation where your physician relations skills came into play.)

“Magic Words” Strategy

This calls for a SMART story. For instance, *Several instances come to mind, as I develop specific strategies for every account. One group of seven doctors in the south valley was using a competing product. This was an influential practice, and I knew if we could shift them it would definitely impact our numbers. In thinking about how to differentiate myself and my product, I learned that the office had recently started Saturday morning hours for patients but that most of the staff weren't thrilled about coming in on Saturdays. One of my side talents is gourmet cooking, so I offered to bring in heart-healthy breakfasts for the group every other Saturday. This went over really well with the staff, as well as with the docs. I have some pictures here that capture the fun we had. This strategy opened the doors I needed to shift these seven doctors' prescription habits. Because of it, I had the largest market-share growth for my primary product in the district. My district manager has always complimented me for my account strategy and physician relations skills. I can offer some other examples that worked for different accounts if you'd like to hear more.*

Question

For candidates breaking in to pharmaceutical sales: Why do you think you'd be a good pharmaceutical rep?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This would be an excellent place to offer your 3-Point Marketing Message. For instance, *In researching the field, I did ride-alongs with experienced reps, talked with physicians, and did quite a bit of reading. I learned that the most successful reps have three key strengths:*

- *First, a strong internally motivated drive for sales with an ability to plan account-specific strategies, implement proven sales techniques, and request physician action that will lead to improved market share.*
- *Second, excellent physician relation skills to quickly win the physician's attention and confidence, communicate key points, and influence prescribing habits.*
- *And third, the intellect to analyze sales data and synthesize and present clinical studies.*

I can offer some specific examples that document my skills in each of these three areas if you like. Wait for the interviewer to give you the nod or make a comment, then offer SMART stories that tangibly bring these skills to life.

Procurement/Purchasing

Contributed by [Evelyn Salvador](#), NCRW, JCTC

Question

What buying/purchasing functions do you manage, oversee, and/or handle?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Lead in with a summary of what your primary functions include, such as procurement, category management, merchandising, capital equipment acquisition, market research and identification, order processing/fulfillment, customer service, new item identification, product development, bid specifications and evaluations, vendor selections, contract/price negotiations, cost analysis, inventory control, warehouse management, etc.

Follow up with additional functions as they pertain to your prospective employer, such as marketing campaigns, manufacturing coordination, product setups, merchandising plans, new item offerings value analysis, purchase orders, vendor relations, etc.

Question

What type of purchasing/procurement expertise and knowledge do you have?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know what areas of expertise you have in the functions you have just cited that you handle or oversee. Be prepared to explain your realm of expertise by listing those areas in which you are most skilled and that you learned from research directly targets your prospective employer's needs.

Highlight such areas as competitive bid evaluations, contract negotiations, cost and value analyses, merchandising plans, product packaging and pricing, preparing purchase orders and requisitions, targeting new markets, vendor selections and performance evaluations, vendor relations, barter arrangements, blanket orders, client interface, delivery scheduling, distribution management, high volume purchasing and processing, international trade, utilization of barter arrangements, leasing, materials replenishment ordering and management, merchandise components pricing and purchasing, sales projections, overseas importing, supplier management, trade shows, etc.

Question

What methods do you use to analyze and calculate bids?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is looking for your expertise in this area and how it may relate to the methods the prospective firm uses. Explain the methods you use and those which you are also familiar with, such as life-cycle costing, weighted value, value analysis, or other methods.

This is a good opportunity for a SMART story if you have, for example, changed the methods used to better meet your current or a past employer's needs. For the Action and Result, you can explain the method your employer previously used, why a different method was more cost effective, what steps you took to make the change, and how much the revised method of analyzing and calculating bids saved your employer.

You can tie this in with how a knowledge-based evaluation of bids received for the prospective employer might save them money as well. If you have an overall percentage of how much you saved previous employers (and you should!), use it. The interviewer can quickly (and silently) put a dollar number on their own procurement. This, by the way, is how employers answer the question, "What's in it for me?" When they can see possible high returns for their own firm, this generally allows more flexibility for you in the later stage of negotiating your salary!

Question

What factors do you use to select vendors and issue awards?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know how you effectively evaluate vendor proposals/bids, on what your decisions are based, and ultimately how you can keep costs down. You can highlight such factors as product quality, value, source, usefulness, unique features and benefits, broad target market, copyrights, pricing, payment terms, delivery dates, shipping charges, packaging, final cost, etc.

You can also offer, if applicable, that you perform value analysis criteria on product purchases by researching the cost and value of your purchases.

Here is a good opportunity to use a SMART story where you performed this type of analysis on a particularly large purchase you made for your employer where you utilized this criteria and saved the firm money. For your Action statement, explain the process you used for your analysis to come up with a successful vendor selection which might not have previously been thought of. For the Result, provide before and after costs, and how much you saved the firm.

For your Tie-in, you can identify some vendors who from research you know the prospective employer uses to purchase materials, supplies, or equipment and how using various factors and value analysis criteria can cut their costs as well.

Question

How do you conduct vendor searches to obtain opportunity buys?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know how resourceful you are obtaining low cost, high return opportunity purchases which can increase margins. Be prepared to lead in with a list of ways you have used during your career and that many of those have resulted in profit increases for your employer.

Offer a SMART story which exemplifies various ways you conducted vendor searches in the past which resulted in opportunity buys, such as obtaining new patents information from the government, researching advertisements, contacting vendors directly, or utilizing other resources where you were able to learn firsthand of new products on the market and make opportunity buys.

For the Result, show how making opportunity buys has increased margins for your employer by providing the bulk purchasing cost, sales price, and profit margin.

Retail (Store Management)

Contributed by [Edie Rische, NCRW](#)

Question

Tell me the philosophies that have made you a successful store manager?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer will gauge your core values with this question, in addition to whether you can express your viewpoint articulately. What values do you espouse? Here’s what one store manager offered: *I can list 3 core philosophies that are key to my success as the #1-ranked store in our 12-store region: 1) The customer is the boss, always comes first, and should be treated in a manner that I would like to be treated, were I shopping in your store. 2) Ultimately, the floor sales team determines whether the customer has a positive shopping experience. To that end, I build respect, camaraderie, and unity among my staff by working side-by-side with employees. And 3), mediocrity will never be accepted. High expectations and first-rate training equate to positive outcomes.* Then launch into a SMART story that provides numbers-driven results to substantiate your philosophies.

Question

What have you done to improve the profitability of your store?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The real question here is will you increase my store revenues? Offer a SMART story or two, the subjects of which might be about incorporating sales incentives and employee recognition that boosted sales 10%; or, using great promotional ideas from marketing and advertising interns rather than spending money on a consultant; or, conducting market research that showed the largest customer profile to be 50-something business professionals and then updating the store’s persona to reflect and appeal to that clientele.

Question

Tell me about a time when you reduced employee turnover.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Turnover in retail environments is often an issue. Lead off with, for example, how you inherited an operation with 55% turnover and brought that number down to an historical low of 15%. Describe how you accomplished that, such as using a participative management style, working side-by-side with employees to build respect and connectedness, supporting staff and empowering them to become leaders, building loyalty, listening to employees, or promoting based solely on merit to eliminate prejudice or favoritism.

Question

A customer is angry over the way he was treated by a sales person. What steps would you take (or have you taken in the past) to resolve this type of complaint?

“Magic Words” Strategy

This is a two-part question: how do you resolve the customer complaint and how do you manage the sales person. Start by resolving the customer complaint, for instance, taking the customer to a quiet place, using laser listening to ensure the customer feels heard, providing options for resolution, and assuring the customer the situation won’t be repeated. Then, explore what happened and why with the sales person, initiate appropriate consequences, and seek methods to make sure the sales person is motivated to exceed future customer satisfaction goals.

Sales (Outside)

Contributed by [Jane Roqueplot](#)

Question

What is the most important part of the sales process?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a response along these lines: *While I believe that “closing” the sale is the definition of a successful sale, the most important part of the sales process is identifying how to solve the customers’ problems and meet their needs. After I’ve identified how to address their needs and solve their problems, the presentation is the component which provides the opportunity to close the sale. If I don’t understand what they need to solve a problem, nothing else is going to take place, so I’d say meeting the customers’ needs is the most important part of the process. I can offer a story about how this philosophy played itself out and won my company a crucial contract.* Then recite a SMART story.

Question

Your prospect’s secretary says to you, “Mr. Jones is not interested in new products at this time.” How would you react to that statement?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Explain that this is not unusual, and then offer a SMART story that explains how you overcame this objection in real life. For instance, *My experience is that this is not an unusual challenge when making cold calls. I can give you an example of how I managed this very situation on a recent cold call. I expressed appreciation to the secretary for making me aware of his wishes. I then asked if she knew why he was not looking at any new copier products at this time and learned that he had recently purchased a competitor’s product. I indicated I’d like to check back with him later to learn whether the product was fully meeting his expectations, and added that into my follow-up plan. I then inquired who else in the company investigates new products and proceeded accordingly with a new prospect. In meeting with that individual, I uncovered needs for new service contracts. The sale closed just last week and put me at 107% of goal for the year when we’re only in the third quarter.*

Question

Of all the people you encounter through your sales process, who is the most important to you?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Admit that there are a number of important people in the process! For instance, *The user of the product is very important to me because I want a thorough understanding of his/her needs; and, I’ve discovered that the liaisons inside the organization – those people who can open doors to the right people for me – are also very important. Because my priority is to close the sale, ultimately the most important person in the sales process is the decision maker. Regardless of whom I encounter in the sales process, I treat each person with respect. Because of my relationship skills, I’ve had several instances where a secretary or purchasing clerk gave me an important insider tip that helped influence the buying decision in favor of my company.*

Question

We have a lot of competitors in our business, how do you feel about that?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If you come from an industry that has stiff competition already, indicate this. Mention you thrive on competition and believe it is the force that drives you to create better value for your products and services. Indicate that you thoroughly research the competition to understand their strengths and weaknesses. And, use a SMART story to comment on how your networking and involvement in industry associations has allowed you to win market share from competitors.

Question

How do you use data to influence your sales strategy?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Mention the types of data you are familiar with, such as in-house data or data from sources such as IRI, Nielsen, Polk, or Retail Link. Speak to your analytical skills and ability to apply fact-based selling. *Good sales strategy must be driven by accurate data. I’ve worked in companies where their IT systems captured rich customer data that enabled me to note trends, identify seasonal opportunities, and leverage key account activity. For instance, in my most recent position I was analyzing prior year sales activity for a key account and noted a double-digit drop for a particular line item. I immediately investigated what was happening in the store and discovered that a new assistant store manager was not rotating product properly, which had caused the drop in sales. I worked with the manager and had the problem resolved within days.*

I’ve also worked at a company that was lacking in its historical data. I was instrumental in proposing new systems that captured baseline data, which helped us to grow sales 20% the following year.

My business analysis skills have served me well in consultative selling and fact-based selling. Could you tell me what type of data sources you’re using now and how they’re working out for you?

Question

Sell me this pen.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Before launching into the features and benefits of the pen, find out what the interviewer really *needs* in a writing implement. Once need is established, express the value of the pen based on the interviewer’s needs. Close by offering a promotional option or volume discount.

Sales (Outside)

Louise Garver

Question

How much of your time is spent cold-calling new accounts versus servicing existing ones?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Virtually all sales positions require some combination of these two skills. Be honest, and don't exaggerate your skills. For instance, *I spend about 70% of my time developing new accounts through prospecting and referral business from clients. Because I opened a record number of new accounts last year, I hired and trained a sales assistant to efficiently handle routine requests from existing accounts. The remainder of my time is spent maintaining regular contact with clients by phone and periodic in-person visits. My clients feel that their needs are being attended to immediately when I am out of the office, and territory sales from existing clients have grown in the last 10 months by 25%.*

Question

How many new accounts did you acquire last year?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Tell the interviewer your ranking because it clearly will demonstrate your skills. You should also relate your answer to the business as a whole to place it in perspective. For instance, saying *I opened 12 new accounts in two years* would be virtually meaningless in a company with 5,000 existing accounts. Better to say, *I ranked #1 for opening new accounts, with 12 in two years that accounted for more than 40% of the company's entire portfolio. We have a lengthy sales cycle based on our type of product, so this feat earned special recognition from the president.*

Question

Give me an example of what you have done in order to close a difficult sale

“Magic Words” Strategy

Use a SMART story to tell the interviewer how innovative you can be when faced with a challenge. However, be wary of giving examples of situations where you went over the buyer’s head.

Question

How have you performed relative to your goals or quotas?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Mention specific figures; don’t simply say you finished “above your goals.” If you did not reach your goals, briefly explain why *without* sounding defensive. Never state that you didn’t meet your goals and then leave it at that. Note how this example offers goal performance for both new and existing accounts. *Last year I surpassed my sales quota for new accounts by 32%, the highest out of 25 sales reps in our company. Sales to my other existing accounts were strong, but because of a shortfall at my largest account I came in slightly under my goal – by 5%. My largest existing client made a business decision to narrow their supplier base, and our company was dropped as an approved vendor. I have some ideas that I am working on now that may lead to recapturing that account.*

Question

What lead sources have you found most productive?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Discuss your methods for developing sales leads, including your existing accounts, networking contacts, industry/tradeshows involvement, and cold calling, as well as how those methods have yielded an annualized xx% sales increase over the past few years. Mention that your industry experience has enabled you to build up an extensive network of professional contacts. Emphasize that, as the company’s newest sales representative, the employer will not only gain your wealth of experience, but your extensive network of industry contacts as well.

Question

Tell me about a sales-related learning tool that you read, listened to, or attended recently.

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer wants to know whether you are dedicated to your profession and continuous learning, since the best salespeople are constantly learning new techniques, trying new ideas, and expanding on tried-and-true sales strategies. *To continue to succeed, I recognize how important it is to keep on top of my game through ongoing learning. I regularly read Sales & Marketing magazine, attend several conferences annually (some on my own dime), and always having a Tom Hopkins or other sales tape in my car. My favorite authors are Zig Ziglar, A.L. Williams, Peter Hirsch and Alan Weiss – I especially enjoyed his Million Dollar Consultant book, which I actually read a few years ago and just pulled from my bookshelf to read again. That, and Purple Cow by Seth Godin, are the two books I read in the last month. I’d like to tell you about an idea I adapted from the Purple Cow book that worked beautifully with a prospect I’ve been targeting...*

Question

Give me an example of how you deal with rejection.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Explain that, although you’d rather hear “yes,” the occasional “no” can lend valuable insight into how to improve your technique with a particular type of client. And, perhaps, that you find having multiple prospects in the pipeline helps keep you focused and full of momentum.

Social Services

Contributed by [Freddie Cheek](#)

Question

What certifications or licenses do you hold? Do you have the ability to bill Medicaid/Medicare for your services?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer will likely have this information based on your resume. Be ready to list your certifications and licenses and any positives associated with them, such as earning them more quickly than most people or attending an interesting conference recently to keep your certification current. If you are able to bill for Medicaid/Medicare, list your “R” number.

Question

Describe your internships.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Frame your answer in terms of what the employer might be most interested in. Indicate where, when/duration, major responsibilities, populations served, and programs in which you participated. Then, guide the conversation toward what the interviewer is interested in. For instance, *I believe your population in the outpatient facility would be quite similar to the population I worked with at my last internship.*

Question

What are your areas of specialization?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If a generalist, indicate what mental health conditions, medical diagnoses or relationship/personal problems have you treated using DSM references. Indicate whether you have dealt with both chronic and acute problems.

Question

What experience do you have with the criminal justice system?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If appropriate, mention any experience with ex-offenders, parolees, juveniles mandated to treatment, prisoners, or the courts, including experience testifying or consulting as an expert witness.

Question

What specific modalities or special therapies have you used?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your response may include some of these: Time-limited or brief therapy, art therapy, dance therapy, music therapy, journaling, comprehensive/ongoing therapy, solution-focused therapy, cognitive or behavioral therapy.

Question

What types of populations or issues have you experience with?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your range of experience may include experience working in the field of chemical or substance abuse; familiarity with 12-step programs; working with people in inpatient rehab programs, outpatient recovery programs, half-way houses, or methadone treatment; children of alcoholic parents; individuals in denial; co-dependents and enablers, etc. Offer the broad range of experience in your response, but tie it back to the population most relevant to the interviewer’s needs.

Question

What experience do you have with women’s issues?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The range of experience may include birth control/family planning/infertility/abortion, eating disorders (anorexia, bulimia, obesity), survivors of sexual/physical/verbal abuse, domestic violence, breast/uterine/ovarian cancer, pregnancy and post-partum depression, sexual harassment, infidelity, etc. Again, tie your response back to the population most relevant to the interviewer’s needs.

Question

Tell me about a time when you participated on a collaborative or multidisciplinary treatment team.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Offer a SMART story that includes details of the types of professionals on the multidisciplinary treatment team, as well as the populations/issues addressed, along with outcomes.

Question

What type of services have you provided?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your response may include any combination of these elements: case management, intake/admissions, psychosocial assessment, treatment/care planning, advocacy, crisis intervention, referral/linkage to community resources, discharge planning, etc.

Question

Tell me about your experience with grants.

“Magic Words” Strategy

Indicate the specific experience you have with solicitation of funding from government, community or private sources, including investigating, identifying, and submitting grant proposals, along with outcomes for the above. Include your grant reporting experience and compliance record.

Question

Have you supervised staff or interns in field placements?

“Magic Words” Strategy

If you have, indicate the extent of your experience, such as recruiting, training, assigning and supervising. Include positive outcomes, such as supervising someone who was promoted quickly or went on to win awards or served a patient/client in a positive manner.

Question

How would you go about improving consumer satisfaction?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your response might be tied to a time when you served on quality management/improvement committees and monitored quality of internal and external services. Be sure to indicate before and after results.

Social Services (Program Manager)

Contributed by [Freddie Cheek](#)

Question

Describe your experience developing budgets for new, existing, or expanded programs? What was the scope of the budget?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Overview your budget responsibilities with this type of response: *I have overseen annual budgets of more than \$1.5 million for four programs. I have also reviewed and monitored billing practices and purchases to maintain budgetary control. For the past four years, I finished the fiscal year at or under budget. I can provide you with more details if you'd like.*

This last sentence allows you to be brief but provide more details should the interviewer be interested.

Question

What has been your participation in revenue generation activities?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Start with a philosophical statement, such as *I recognize how critical it is to create and implement revenue generation activities to enable programs to remain economically viable*. Then, describe your experience.

Revenue generation activities I initiated included developing a referral program that increased the census for our day and rehabilitation programs and instituting a menu-style roster of programs. The referral program helped exceed service goals by 30-50 participants for my current employer. I also instituted a plan to share professional services, which reduced our expenses by 40%.

I have also investigated, identified, and submitted grant proposals from government, community, and private sources and most recently secured grant funding totaling more than \$_____ from Arts Council, Paul Armstrong Trust, and the Children’s Foundation.

Question

Tell me about your supervision of professional staff members, interns, and/or volunteers. Did this supervision include field placements? What human resources functions did you handle?

“Magic Words” Strategy

During my five years at XYZ Facility, I managed recruitment, training, scheduling, professional development, evaluation, and disciplinary activities. I have supervised a 65-member team providing integrated treatment services. I trained and supervised bachelors- and masters-level students participating in field placements. My supervisory and HR efforts have resulted in boosting staff retention by more than 15%, enhancing productivity – my team managed a 20% increase in caseload without adding additional staff, and enhancing quality of services. This last metric was measured by a client satisfaction survey conducted by a third-party organization. My department earned the highest customer satisfaction ratings – all in the 90th percentile – among 12 departments throughout the region.

Question

Were you involved in the presentation of in-service training? What about community presentations or public education at health fairs, etc.? If so, who were the attendees and what topics did you cover?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer is gauging the depth and breadth of your public speaking skills. If true, lead off with something like: *I thrive on making presentations and training, and view it as an important element in outreach and public relations for my organization.*

Then, delve into the specifics, such as: *I have developed and presented inter- and intra-agency in-service training to improve staff knowledge and service delivery. These have covered a variety of topics, including: Dealing with Difficult Clients, Using the MBTI, Case Management, Teaming for Success, Reflective Listening, and Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution. I have been invited to address professional staff members at community agencies to promote Stress Reduction/Pain Management. I facilitated present-moment growth and development among workshop participants by maintaining a stable and safe atmosphere in which to voice their thoughts and feelings.*

Question

Do you have any experience writing for professional journals, textbooks, or other publications? Did you participate in any research or professional studies?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Your written communication skills are being judged. Start off with a statement made by someone else about the quality of your writing skills, such as: *In all my performance evaluations, I have received the highest possible*

marks for my written communications. Or, My written communication skills are excellent, as evidenced by the number of grants we have received funding for.

Then, offer examples. *I created a Job Search Handbook that is distributed to job readiness workshop attendees. This 27-page booklet covers such topics as résumé writing, networking, identifying prospective employers, interviewing, and record keeping. Several chapters of information have been published in the career section of our local newspaper. I have also created and distributed agency newsletters for consumers, community members, and staff personnel. I participated in researching and writing a study of consumers' needs and expectations as part of a 5-year strategic plan for our organization. This study was shared with several funding sources.*

Question

Describe the statistical or programmatic reports that you have prepared. What did they cover and how frequently did you submit them? To whom did they go for review?

“Magic Words” Strategy

The interviewer would like to hear the type of reports prepared, the technology used to prepare them, your record for timely submittal, the quality of the reports, and the level of person the reports went to.

Question

Have you served on quality management/improvement committees and have you monitored quality?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Describe the range of your experience. For instance, *I have monitored the quality of internal and external services, resulting in service integration and outstanding marks for customer service for a culturally diverse population, as measured by customer surveys. I have evaluated and redesigned programs, on an ongoing basis, to respond to the changing needs of insurance providers, consumers, the community, and funding sources.*

I have led or served on numerous committees: Standards Compliance Committee, Utilization Review Committee, Policies and Procedures Committee, Code of Conduct Review and Implementation Committee, Performance Evaluation Committee, and Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Recovery Interdisciplinary Task Force.

After providing this type of a list, offer one specific and impressive quantifiable outcome that resulted from service on one of those committees, then ask if the interviewer would like to hear more examples.

Question

Tell me about a time you led a program development initiative.

“Magic Words” Strategy

This response first indicates the candidate is experienced with the full lifecycle of a program, and then offers a specific example.

I have conceptualized and managed half a dozen new initiatives over the past few years for a variety of funded and self-sustaining mental health programs, including psychiatric rehabilitation, continuing day treatment, vocational rehabilitation, chemical dependency, employee assistance, and case management services.

Most recently I created a year-long Recreational Program for Alzheimer's patients that improved interpersonal socialization, promoted individual creativity, and effected cognitive gains. I obtained \$200,000 in funding through community and private sources, established program goals, identified future trends in the delivery of services and hired and trained a 10-person multidisciplinary staff. I promoted the program through my network within the medical community and had a waiting list for the program within six weeks. As I mentioned, the program has been well-received by patients, their families, and gerontologists. I'm most proud of the cognitive gains we've been measuring, with 80% of participants improving scores over baseline by at least 10% and some as high as 30%. Because of the success of the

program, I am currently looking at ways to increase the funding and expand the program. I have a copy of the original grant proposal and some pictures from a recent special activity at the center if you'd like to review those.

Warehousing / Distribution

Question

What size inventory do you manage?

"Magic Words" Strategy

Offer the dollar-value or case-number range of inventory you've managed over your career, then hone in on a situation most relevant to the interviewer's situation. Mention one numbers-driven accomplishment, followed by an offer to explain more. *Similar to your DC operation, my current inventory value is \$80 million. I've taken our DC ranking from #7 among 12 in the region to #2 in less than 12 months. If you'd like more details about how I accomplished that, I can offer them now.*

Question

What kind of a record do you have for inventory variance? Tell me what you've done to lower that number.

"Magic Words" Strategy

Compare your distribution center's inventory variance to the company average or the industry average, provided your numbers are lower than these averages. Offer a SMART story about how you accomplished the reduction and the dollars represented by the savings.

Question

Tell me how you've implemented technology innovations in the warehouse.

"Magic Words" Strategy

Describe a before-and-after scenario, leading off with something like, *I inherited a situation where 90% of our loads were going out short. and implemented technology that completely eliminated any shortages.* Then, tell the full SMART story.

Question

Tell me about a time when you handled a labor relations issue.

"Magic Words" Strategy

Offer tangible evidence, such as negotiating one of the company's few five-year union contracts, when in past years the contracts had only been of three years' duration. Tie the response to a theme about your leadership style or your record for maintaining open communications and developing win-win scenarios.

Question

How has your distribution center handled a strike by employees of the stores it services?

"Magic Words" Strategy

If you don't have experience with this, describe what you would do based on your knowledge of how others have handled it successfully. Address systems put in place, as well as leadership given to employees to keep morale high during such a challenging period.

Question

How have you worked with the sales team to achieve revenue goals?

“Magic Words” Strategy

Describe how you’ve worked with the sales department on strategies such as SKU rationalization and sell-thru maintenance, as well as issues such as open communications regarding sales forecasting and required inventory levels.