



**VUT**

Vaal University of Technology

CO-OPERATIVE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT

# TOP TIPS FOR JOB HUNTING



*Your world to a better future*

# INTRODUCTION



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**You want a job. And you believe that somewhere, some employer has precisely the job you want – one that fully utilizes your knowledge and abilities and provides a challenge with opportunities for advancement.**

To find that job, you need to perform a well-planned job search. You have a product to sell – your knowledge, skills and experience.....YOURSELF! What you need to know is how to market yourself most effectively.

Whether you are just out of school and ready to start your career or looking for a new position after 20 years of experience, the techniques presented in this booklet will help you navigate all aspects of the job search process from beginning to end.

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# 1. Job Search

Job hunting, job seeking, or job searching is the act of looking for employment, due to unemployment, discontent with a current position, or a desire for a better position. The immediate goal of job seeking is usually to obtain a job interview with an employer which may lead to getting hired. The job hunter or seeker typically first looks for job vacancies or employment opportunities.

## 1. Contacting head-hunters

Head-hunters are not impressed by unsolicited CV's, but they may be impressed by a personal recommendation. So, instead of making direct contact, see if a former boss, colleague, friend or family member will recommend you to appropriate recruiters.

## 2. Business cards

Unemployed job seekers should have business cards printed with their name and contact information. But to take your card to the next level, include a summary of experience on the reverse side. For more space, get a folding card. Then give them to everyone you meet.

## 3. Social Networking Sites (i.e. LinkedIn)

Employers are increasingly checking our professional applicants on LinkedIn. But LinkedIn can do more than present your credentials and experience. For an immediate reference, get a colleague or contact to write a recommendation. To provide a "work sample" of your expertise, answer relevant questions in the "Answers" section. Get your colleague or contact to recommend you for specific skills and abilities. Join relevant interest groups and explore all the other ways that LinkedIn can help.

## 4. Update your training

If your last educational experience was more than a year ago, consider updating your credentials. Start working towards a professional certificate, attend workshops and seminars or even sign up for a couple of webinars or audioconferences.

## 5. Advanced opportunities search

You can search for opportunities through visiting JSE registered companies to access information on:

- Practical's for WIL students
- Learnerships
- Internships
- Scholarships

NB: JSE Listed companies has more opportunities than medium and small size companies

### What to do:

- Visit [www.jse.co.za](http://www.jse.co.za)
- Click listed companies
- Register your profile on a company that is relevant to your course
- Regularly visit the companies you registered your profile with for updates and application of opportunities advertised and status of previous applications

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## 2. Your CV

CV stands for curriculum vitae, which is Latin for 'course of life'. It is a summary of your experience, skills and education.

### 1. How long should a CV be?

A CV is a quick snapshot of you. Recruiters spend their day receiving and reading CV's. They do not have 30 minutes to spend on each one. If your CV is too long, it will discourage them and chances are that they won't read it until the end.

Write short sentences and go straight to the point. Explain concisely what you did and the results you got. Do not go into details and do not write more than 3 pages. If they like what they read, they will call you for an interview where you will have more time to develop your experience and talk about yourself.

### 2. What should I include in my CV?

Your CV needs to be adjusted to the position that you are applying for. You have to show the recruiter that you are the perfect candidate and to do so, he/she has to find relevant information in your resume. Whenever you try to develop a "one-size-fits-all" resume to send to all employers, you almost always end up with something employers will toss in the recycle bin.

Employers want you to write a resume specifically for them. They expect you to clearly show how and why you fit the position in a specific organization. Your CV needs to be packed with relevant information to help an employer make the decision to hire you. It should include:

- Contact details - include full name, address, mobile phone number and email address;
- Education - list and date all previous education, placing the most recent highest up the page.
- Include any professional qualifications;
- Referees - two people who can provide positive comments on your previous employment or experiences;
- Skills - for example, the ability to work in a team, manage people, customer service skills, or specific IT skills;
- Work experience - this can be internships, voluntary roles or previous jobs. Add the most recent/relevant positions and examples of tasks.

### 3. What should I leave out of my CV?

If you put too many skills and knowledge in the "expertise section" the recruiter won't remember any of them and the ones that matter will be lost. Tailor your resume to each job offer by selecting the most relevant skills for the role that you are applying for. Do not hesitate to organise them by groups. Your CV will look more organized and will be easier to read.

You should exclude the following information from your CV:

- The term curriculum vitae or résumé - CV will suffice;

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- A photo - unless you're applying for an acting or modelling job;
  - Date of birth or place of birth - this is unnecessary and can lead to identity theft.
  - Emoticons – If you think that using smiley faces in your CV will make it seem more friendly and open to prospective employers, think again. Research has found that people who use emoticons are viewed as unprofessional and lacking leadership qualities.
  - Home address – for those posting their CV's online: don't include your home address, as you could be targeted by fraudsters.
  - No fancy fonts - If your CV is wall-to-wall text featuring five different fonts, it will most likely give the employer a headache. So show your CV to several other people before sending it out. Do they find it visually attractive? If what you have is hard on the eyes, revise.
  - No creative bullet points – resist the temptation to get creative with bullet-point symbols because not all computers have all fonts. If you email your CV using a font that your prospective interviewer doesn't have, their computer will simply substitute your font with something else. And you have no idea what that will be.

#### **4. Do I need to add a profile?**

You don't have to add a personal profile but it will help your CV stand out.

It must focus on the sector you are applying to, as your cover letter will be job-specific. You should keep it short and snappy - 200 words is the perfect length for a personal profile.

This section of your CV is also known as a personal statement, career summary, career aim or simply a profile.

#### **5. Do I list work experience or education first?**

If you're a recent graduate and don't have much relevant work experience then it will be best to begin with your education. The opposite would apply if you have plenty of relevant experience.

#### **6. Should I include hobbies in my CV?**

It's not compulsory to include hobbies in your CV, but you may want to mention any that are relevant to the job you're applying for. An example might be volunteering as a sports coach, or learning a language in your spare time. Generic examples such as reading, going to the cinema, or listening to music are not worth including.

#### **7. How do I write a great CV?**

There are many ways to create an exceptional CV, but for a solid foundation, concentrate on four main points:

- **Grammar** - there should be no mistakes in your CV. Use a spell checker and enlist a second pair of eyes to check over the text. Try and include as many active words as possible to increase the impact of your CV. Use active verbs to replace passive verbs and nouns wherever possible. For example, you could include targeted words like 'created', 'analysed'; and 'devised' to present yourself as a person that shows initiative.
- **Layout** - place your most attractive skills and talents towards the top of your CV to boost your chances of impressing an employer. The same rule applies to listing grades -

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always place your highest grade first.

- **Presentation** - keep your CV neat and make sure it is easy on the eye. Bullet points should be used to tidy up any lists. Your choice of font can have more impact than you might think. The University of Kent careers service suggest using 10 point Verdana or Lucida Sans with a larger typeface for headings and sub-headings. You should always avoid Comic Sans.
- **Style** - there are various types of CV you can employ. Think carefully about what style will suit your needs.

### **8. What are the consequences of lying on my CV?**

Never lie on your CV or job application. Not only will you demonstrate your dishonesty to a potential employer, but there can be serious consequences too. For example, altering your degree grade from a 2:2 to a 2:1 is classed as degree fraud and can result in a prison sentence.

### **9. Do I need to write a cover letter?**

You should always include a cover letter unless the employer states otherwise. It will enable you to personalise your application to the job. You can draw attention to a particular part of your CV, disclose a disability or clarify gaps in your work history.

If you have glowing written recommendations or references, consider extracting a few brief, impressive quotes to include in your cover letter.

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## 3. The Interview

Even the smartest and most qualified job seekers need to prepare for job interviews. Why you ask? Interviewing is a learned skill, and there are no second chances to make a great first impression. It is about demonstrating confidence: standing straight, making eye contact and connecting with a firm handshake. That first non-verbal impression can be a great beginning – or quick ending – to your interview.

### 1. Dress for the Job or Company

It is important to know what to wear to an interview and to be well-groomed. Whether you wear a suit or something less formal depends on the company culture and the position you are seeking. If possible, call to find out about the company dress code before the interview.

### 2. Listen

From the very beginning of the interview, your interviewer is giving you information, either directly or indirectly. If you are not hearing it, you are missing a major opportunity. Good communication skills include listening and letting the person know you heard what was said.

### 3. Don't talk too much

Telling the interviewer more than he needs to know could be a fatal mistake. When you have not prepared ahead of time, you may ramble when answering interview questions, sometimes talking yourself right out of the job. Prepare for the interview by reading through the job posting, matching your skills with the position's requirements and relating only that information.

### 4. Don't be too familiar

The interview is a professional meeting to talk business. This is not about making a new friend.

Your level of familiarity should mimic the interviewer's demeanour. It is important to bring energy and enthusiasm to the interview and ask questions, but do not overstep your place as a candidate looking for a job.

### 5. Use appropriate language

It's a given that you should use professional language during the interview. Be aware of any inappropriate slang words or references to age, race, religion, politics or sexual orientation – these topics could send you to the door very quickly.

### 6. Don't be cocky

Attitude plays a key role in your interview success. There is a fine balance between confidence, professionalism and modesty. Even if you're putting on a performance to demonstrate your ability, overconfidence is as bad, if not worse, as being too reserved.

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## **7. Take care to answer the questions**

When interviewers ask for an example of a time when you did something, they are asking behavioural interview questions, which are designed to elicit a sample of your past behaviour. If you fail to relate a specific example, you not only don't answer the question, but you also miss an opportunity to prove your ability and talk about your skills.

## **8. Ask questions**

When asked if they have any questions, most candidates answer "no". Wrong answer. Part of knowing how to interview is being ready to ask questions that demonstrate an interest in what goes on in the company. Asking questions also gives you the opportunity to find out if this is the right place for you. The best questions come from listening to what you're asked during the interview and asking for additional information.

## **9. Don't appear desperate**

When you interview with the "please, please hire me" approach, you appear desperate and less confident. Reflect the three C's during the interview: cool, calm and confidence. You know you can do the job, just make sure the interviewer believes you can, too.

## **10. Interview questions & answers**

Typical interview questions:

### **Why do you want to work for this company?**

The interviewer is trying to determine what you know and like about the company, whether you will be willing to make a commitment to the job, and if your skills match the job requirements. Your research will be a big help in formulating your answer to this question. Say as many positive things about the company as possible. Show your interest in whatever products/services they sell and explain why the position fits with your career goals. You can read the company's "About" page on its website to get more information about the company, its mission and vision and goals.

### **How did you hear about this position?**

Another seemingly innocuous question, this is actually a perfect opportunity to stand out and show your passion for and connection to the company. For example, if you found out about the position through a friend or professional contact, name drop that person, then share why you were so excited about it. If you discovered the company through an event or article, share that. Even if you found the listing through a random job board, share what, specifically caught your eye about the role.

### **Why are you interested in this job? Why do you want this job?**

Companies want to hire people who are passionate about the job, so you should have a great answer about why you want the position. First, identify a couple of key factors that make the role a great fit for you e.g. "I love customer support because I love the constant human interaction and the satisfaction that comes from helping someone solve a problem" then share why you love the company e.g. "I've always been passionate about education, and I think this company are doing great things and I want to be part of it".

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### **Have you done this kind of work before?**

The interviewer wants to know if you can learn to do the job in a reasonable time and how much training you will need. Never say “no” to this question. Instead, stress the experience you do have that will assist you in learning the new job quickly and efficiently. No two jobs are alike and you never do exactly the same work. In all jobs, new skills, rules and details have to be learned. Be sure to mention the following:

- Your past work experience
- Your education and training related to the job
- Volunteer work that might relate to the job
- Any transferable skills e.g. organizational skills, people skills
- Your ability to learn quickly and how quickly you learned the type of work in the past

### **What kind of training or qualifications do you have?**

The interviewer is trying to find out what school credentials you have. If you have no formal school qualifications but have a lot of experience, you might say:

- I didn't get formal school training for this job but I have (number) of years' experience in the field. I am willing to learn new skills or go to school to get further training if I am offered the job. I learn quickly and I like to keep upgrading my skills.
- If you have just completed a training course but have little work experience, you might say:
  - I took a one year training program in (name of program) at (name of school) which is related to the job I am applying for. I look forward to working in the field and putting into practice what I learned. I don't have a lot of work experience in this area but I learn quickly. I know you will be happy with my work.

### **Tell me about yourself.**

The interviewer really wants a quick, two- to three minute snapshot of who you are and why you're the best candidate for the position. Don't give your complete employment (or personal) history. Instead give a pitch – one that's concise and compelling and that shows exactly why you are the right person for the position. Start off with the 2 – 3 specific accomplishments or experiences that you most want the interviewer to know about, then wrap up talking about how that prior experience has positioned you for this specific role. State your best qualifications for the job. Be specific and include examples to support your statements. Try to show that you meet the employer's expectations. For example:

- Talk about what you've done to prepare yourself to be the very best candidate for the position. Use an example or two to back it up. Then ask if they would like more details. If they do, keep giving them example after example of your background and experience.
- Always point back to an example when you have the opportunity.
- I am punctual, dependable and can be counted upon to finish what I start. I get a great deal of satisfaction from knowing that I have done something well and on time. For example, at my present job, I was given different work orders every day.
- It was my responsibility to finish the orders and make sure they all met quality and safety standards within a specific deadline. On occasion, I had to familiarize myself with the product and the production process. I was always able to learn quickly and carry out my

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job responsibilities. Our company was known for making excellent processed food products. In 1990 it received an award for being one of South Africa's top companies in the field. I feel I can use the same skills and hard work to do well on this job too.

### **Why should we hire you?**

The question seems forward but if you are asked it, you are in luck. There is no better setup for you to sell yourself and your skills to the interviewer. Your job here is to craft an answer that covers three things: that you can not only do the work, you can deliver great results, that you really fit in with the team and culture, and that you'd be a better hire than any of the other candidates.

### **What do you do in your spare time?**

Interviewers ask this question to see if your activities and hobbies might help the company and to get an idea of what kind of person you are outside your work life. Describe any volunteer work you do and any hobbies or interests that might relate to the job in some way. Stick to active hobbies, such as playing sports, carpentry, gardening, etc. Avoid mentioning inactive and non-creative activities such as watching television.

### **What do you think of working in a group? Are you a team player?**

Almost everyone says yes to this question. But it is not just a yes/no question. You need to provide behavioural examples to back up your answer. For example:

- Yes, I am very much a team player. In fact, I've had opportunities in my work, school and athletics to develop my skills as a team player.
- The interviewer is trying to find out about your ability to get along with others. Focus on the following:
- The advantages of working in a group. Explain how the various individuals in a group complement one another in carrying out certain tasks.
- Give specific examples of your personal experience in a group.

### **How do you react to instruction and criticism?**

The interviewer is trying to find out how you get along with Supervisors and how you feel about authority. You might say:

- I appreciate getting instruction and criticism when it is done fairly and constructively.

### **With the kind of work experience you have had, do you think this job would bore you?**

The interviewer may think you are over-qualified and want this job only until something better comes along. Stress that no job is ever boring because you always learn new skills. Mention how you would benefit by working for the company and vice-versa.

### **Why did you choose this line of work?**

The interviewer is trying to find out about your commitment to your career choice. In other words do you do it because you love the work or just take any job you can get for the

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money. If you did this work for many years and stopped due to a layoff, you might say: o I have done this for (number) of years. I like my work. The only reason I left my last workplace was because I was laid off.

### **How well do you work under pressure or tight deadlines?**

This question indicates that the job you're applying for will involve working under pressure. Give examples of volunteer and paid work that involved pressure and deadlines. You could mention that we are always faced with pressure and deadlines in our lives and you do not mind the stress. Stressful situations are a learning and challenging experience. You might mention the following:

- How you handled large rush orders at your last workplace.
- How you prepared for exams and homework assignments while working full-time and attending school part-time.
- How you managed a crisis situation. (For example: a car accident)

### **How often were you absent from work in your last job? Have you ever had any serious illness or injuries? Do you have any health problems?**

The interviewer is trying to find out if you have any health issues which will cause you to take a lot of sick days. You do not have to go into your health history for the interviewer. If you have health problems that do not interfere with your work performance, do not give the interviewer details about them. If you had a previous health problem that interfered with your work in the past, but is no longer a problem, do not volunteer this information. It no longer affects your work, therefore the employer does not have to know.

If you have a health problem that will affect your work performance, explain your situation briefly and stress the positive points. I will be helpful to have a positive reference letter from your previous employer. This letter should explain the type of duties you did and stress that you are a steady worker who is responsible, hardworking and punctual.

### **Are you bondable?**

This question indicates that the job involves working with money or valuable merchandise. Very likely the employer's insurance company requires that only bondable people be hired as a condition of their insurance policy. As long as you do not have a criminal record, and you have not previously been denied a bond, you should answer "yes" to this question. Caution: If you answer yes when you are not legally bondable it is very likely that the employer will discover this.

### **Have you ever been fired or quit a job?**

The interviewer is looking for clues to any problems you have had in previous jobs and if you may have the same problems in a new job. Try to:

- Avoid saying anything negative about yourself or your previous employer. If you had problems, explain them without being negative.
- Be careful not to use the word "fired" or "quit". Instead use words such as: "I changed jobs", "I was laid off", or "I needed a more challenging job".
- If you were fired and are not on good terms with your previous employer, explain the reason why you were fired. Stress that you learned something from the previous situation.

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### **Why haven't you worked recently?**

The interviewer is looking for clues to serious problems or job difficulties that could carry over to a new job. You might say:

- Since I was laid off from my previous employer, I have been actively looking for a job. However, as you know, there are many people looking for work and applying for the same jobs. I have always worked steadily but I haven't been able to find a job in the present job market.
- After I got laid off from my previous employer, I decided to go back to school to upgrade my skills so I can get a better, more secure job.

### **What are your long-term goals or career plans?**

The interviewer may want to know if you are ambitious, plan ahead, or if you set goals for yourself. The interviewer may also want to know what expectation you have of the company. You might say:

- I hope to become very good at my job and perhaps take some schooling to become more skilled in my field of work.
- I intend to learn (name of area or skills) very well so that I can be promoted to a higher position in (name skill or department).

### **What do you feel are your greatest strengths?**

This is your opportunity to brag a little bit. It is important that you have done your research about the type of work that you are applying for. For example if you are applying as a production labourer and from your research you understand that this type of work required people that have the ability to meet quotas, work as a team and make improvement suggestions, then it is important for you to incorporate this into your strengths. Example:

- My greatest strength is that I have a lot of initiative. I am always looking for a better way to do things at work that I feel would save the company money and I can always achieve my production quotas. For example one time I was working at my station and I felt that I was wasting time by always having to walk to the other side of my station to get some parts. So I reorganized the station and my supervisor was really impressed as it increased my quota.

### **What do you feel are your weaknesses?**

Most career books tell you to select a strength and present it as a weakness. Such as "I work too much. I just work and work and work". Wrong. First of all, using a strength and presenting it as a weakness is deceiving. Second, it misses the point of the question. You should select a weakness that you have been actively working to overcome. For example: "I have had trouble in the past with planning and prioritizing. However, I am now taking steps to correct this. I just started using a pocket planner....." then show them your planner and how you are using it. Talk about a true weakness and show what you are doing to overcome it.

### **How would you describe your last employer?**

Never run down or say anything negative about anybody or anyone. The employer will feel

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that you will do it to them. You should state the positive things such as he had high expectations and I really respected him for that. He was down to earth and really knew the job I was doing, if I had any problems he was approachable and would always give me suggestion or he gave the responsibility to do a good job.

Example:

- I liked my employer. He/she treated me fairly and respected my work
- Or:
- I appreciated my previous employer having given me the opportunity to acquire a lot of skills and experiences in (name area of work skill).

### **Why are you leaving your current job?**

Keep things positive. You have nothing to gain by being negative about your past employers. Instead, frame things in a way that shows that you're eager to take on new opportunities and that the role you're interviewing for is a better fit for you than your current or last position. For example: "I'd really love to be part of product development from beginning to end, and I know I'd have that opportunity here". And if you were let go? Keep it simple: "Unfortunately I was let go" is a totally OK answer. If you were laid off simply say so, if your company downsized, simply say so. Do not go into a lot of detail. If you were terminated you will have to say you were let go but always follow up that as a result you have learned how to overcome this and feel it will not affect you in the future.

### **Why were you fired?**

Your best bet is to be honest. But it doesn't have to be a deal-breaker. Share how you've grown and how you approach your job and life now as a result. If you can position the learning experience as an advantage for this next job, even better.

### **What five words would describe you?**

These should be your transferrable skills such as reliable, punctual, organized, friendly, honest, cooperative, outgoing, easy to get along with, hardworking, energetic, take pride in my work, responsible, respected, and dedicated.

### **What did you like about your last job?**

Say only positive things that you feel could transfer across to the position you are applying for. Example:

- I liked my last job because I got along well with my co-workers and the work was challenging, fast paced and I was given a lot of responsibility to do a good job.

### **What are your long range goals?**

The interviewer is trying to figure out whether or not you are going to be a long term employee or whether or not you will be using this job as a stepping stone to another objective. So, you should try to assure him/her that your intention is to stay with the company and to grow in your career within the company. You should respond "I am looking for a position with a company where I can stay and grow with and I feel this position would give me this opportunity."

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### **What kind of machines or equipment have you worked with?**

This is your opportunity to give some detail of what actual work skills you have. Don't be vague, supply all of the information that you have to offer.

### **What type of salary are you looking for?**

Do not get into this subject unless you are forced to. Even then you want to leave an impression that you are flexible in this area.

### **What's your dream job?**

The interviewer wants to uncover whether this position is really in line with your ultimate career goals. Talk about your goals and ambitions and why this job will get you closer to them.

### **What do you know about our company?**

This is your opportunity to show them that you have taken the time to research their company in particular.

### **Do you have any other skills or experiences that we have not discussed?**

List any other skills that you have that are related to the position. You can also discuss any hobbies or volunteer experience you have and discuss any interest courses or educational upgrading you have.

### **Why should I hire you?**

The easy answer is that you are the best person for the job. And don't be afraid to say so. But then back it up with what specifically differentiates you. For example:

- You should hire me because I'm the best person for the job. I realize that there are likely other candidates who also have the ability to do this job. Yet I bring an additional quality that makes me the best person for the job – my passion for excellence. I am passionately committed to producing world class results. Give examples.

### **How has your education prepared you for your career?**

This is a broad question and you need to focus on the behavioural examples in your educational background which specifically align to the required competencies for the career.

Focus on behavioural examples supporting the key competencies for the career. Then ask if they would like to hear more examples. For example:

- My education has focused on not only learning the fundamentals, but also on the practical application of the information learned with those classes. For example, I played a lead role in a class project where we gathered and analysed best practice data from this industry. Let me tell you about the results.....

### **Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How was it resolved?**

Note that if you say no, most interviewers will keep drilling deeper to find a conflict. The key is how you behaviourally reacted to conflict and what you did to resolve it. For example:

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- Yes I have had conflicts in the past. Never major ones, but there have been disagreements that needed to be resolved. I've found that when conflict occurs, it helps to fully understand the other persons perspective, so I take time to listen to their point of view, then I seek to work out a collaborative solution, for example.....

**If I were to ask your professors (or your boss) to describe you, what would they say?**

This is a threat of reference check question. Do not wait for the interview to know the answer. Ask any prior bosses or professors in advance. And if they're willing to provide a positive reference, ask them for a letter of recommendation. Then you can answer the question like this:

- I believe she would say I'm very energetic, that I am results oriented and one of the best people she has ever worked with. Actually, I know she would say that, because those are her very words. May I show you her letter of recommendation? So be prepared in advance with your letters of recommendation.

**If you had to live your life over again, what one thing would you change?**

Focus on a key turning point in your life or missed opportunity. Yet also tie it forward to what you are doing to still seek to make that change. For example: "Although I am overall very happy with where I am at in my life, the one aspect I likely would have changed would be focusing earlier on my chosen career. I had a great internship this past year and look forward to more experience in the field. I simply wish I would have focused here earlier. For example, I learned on my recent internship.....(then provide examples).



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## 4. Professional & Entrepreneurial Skills

Some experts think of entrepreneurs as people who are willing to take risks that other people are not. Others define them as people who start and build successful businesses. Thinking about the first of these definitions, entrepreneurship doesn't necessarily involve starting your own business. Many people who don't work for themselves are recognized as entrepreneurs within their organizations. Regardless of how you define an "entrepreneur," one thing is certain: becoming a successful entrepreneur isn't easy. So, how does one person successfully take advantage of an opportunity, while another, equally knowledgeable person does not? Do entrepreneurs have a different genetic makeup? Or do they operate from a different vantage point that somehow directs their decisions for them? Though many researchers have studied the subject, there are no definitive answers. What we do know is that successful entrepreneurs seem to have certain traits in common. We've gathered these traits into four categories:

### Personal characteristics

First, examine your personal characteristics, values, and beliefs. Do you have the mind-set that's typical of successful entrepreneurs?

- **Optimism:** Are you an optimistic thinker? Optimism is truly an asset, and it will help get you through the tough times that many entrepreneurs experience as they find a business model that works for them.
- **Vision:** Can you easily see where things can be improved? Can you quickly grasp the "big picture," and explain this to others? And can you create a compelling vision of the future, and then inspire other people to engage with that vision?
- **Initiative:** Do you have initiative, and instinctively start problem-solving or business improvement projects?
- **Desire for Control:** Do you enjoy being in charge and making decisions? Are you motivated to lead others?
- **Drive and Persistence:** Are you self-motivated and energetic? And are you prepared to work hard, for a very long time, to realize your goals?
- **Risk Tolerance:** Are you able to take risks, and make decisions when facts are uncertain?
- **Resilience:** Are you resilient, so that you can pick yourself up when things don't go as planned? And do you learn and grow from your mistakes and failures? (If you avoid taking action because you're afraid of failing, our article on [Overcoming Fear of Failure](#) can help you face your fears and move forward.)

### Interpersonal skills

As a successful entrepreneur, you'll have to work closely with people – this is where it is critical to be able to build great relationships with your team, customers, suppliers, shareholders, investors, and more.

Some people are more gifted in this area than others, but, fortunately, you can learn and improve these skills. The types of interpersonal skills you'll need include:

- **Leadership and Motivation:** Can you lead and motivate others to follow you and deliver

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your vision? And are you able to delegate work to others? As a successful entrepreneur, you'll have to depend on others to get beyond a very early stage in your business – there's just too much to do all on your own!

- **Communication Skills:** Are you competent with all types of communication? You need to be able to communicate well to sell your vision of the future to investors, potential clients, team members, and more.
- **Listening:** Do you hear what others are telling you? Your ability to listen can make or break you as an entrepreneur. Make sure that you're skilled at active listening and empathetic.
- **Personal Relations:** Are you emotionally intelligent? The higher your Emotional Intelligence, the easier it will be for you to work with others. The good news is that you can improve your emotional intelligence!
- **Negotiation:** Are you a good negotiator? Not only do you need to negotiate keen prices, you also need to be able to resolve differences between people in a positive, mutually beneficial way.
- **Ethics:** Do you deal with people based on respect, integrity, fairness, and truthfulness? Can you lead ethically? You'll find it hard to build a happy, committed team if you deal with people – staff, customers or suppliers – in a shabby way.

### Critical and creative thinking skills

As an entrepreneur, you also need to come up with fresh ideas, and make good decisions about opportunities and potential projects.

Many people think that you're either born creative or you're not. However, creativity is a skill that you can develop if you invest the time and effort.

- **Creative Thinking:** Are you able to see situations from a variety of perspectives and come up with original ideas
- **Problem Solving:** How good are you at coming up with sound solutions to the problems you're facing?
- **Recognizing Opportunities:** Do you recognize opportunities when they present themselves? Can you spot a trend? And are you able to create a plan to take advantage of the opportunities you identify?

### Practical skills

You also need the practical skills and knowledge needed to produce goods or services effectively, and run a company.

- **Goal Setting:** Do you regularly set goals, create a plan to achieve them, and then carry out that plan?
- **Planning and Organizing:** Do you have the talents, skills, and abilities necessary to achieve your goals? Can you coordinate people to achieve these efficiently and effectively? (Here, effective project management skills are important, as are basic organization.) And do you know how to develop a coherent, well thought through business plan, including developing and learning from appropriate financial forecasts?
- **Decision Making:** How good are you at making decisions? Do you make them based on relevant information and by weighing the potential consequences? And are you confident in the decisions that you make?

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- You need knowledge in several areas when starting or running a business. For instance:
  - **Business knowledge:** Do you have a good general knowledge of the main functional areas of a business (sales, marketing, finance, and operations), and are you able to operate or manage others in these areas with a reasonable degree of competence?
  - **Entrepreneurial knowledge:** Do you understand how entrepreneurs raise capital? And do you understand the sheer amount of experimentation and hard work that may be needed to find a business model that works for you?
  - **Opportunity-specific knowledge:** Do you understand the market you're attempting to enter, and do you know what you need to do to bring your product or service to market?
  - **Venture-specific knowledge:** Do you know what you need to do to make this type of business successful? And do you understand the specifics of the business that you want to start? (This is where it's often useful to work for a short time in a similar business.)

You can also learn from others who have worked on projects similar to the ones that you're contemplating, or find a mentor – someone else who's been there before and is willing to coach you. While the debate rages on as to whether entrepreneurs are born or made, one thing can't be disputed: polishing certain skills can help you be a better entrepreneur. Whether you're already great at the following skills or could use a few pointers, these are the areas you should focus on for success.

## 1. Communication

When you're a solopreneur, you may think communication is less of an issue, since you don't have staff to interact with. But you've still got to maintain clear lines of communication with your customers via email and phone, as well as ensure that the message you send through your website and social-media profiles is the one you want. If you do have staff, communication is even more important. After all, poor communication skills can lead to decreased productivity with your staff, as well as low morale and opportunity for them to make more mistakes if they don't understand your instructions.

**Tips for improvement:** Even if you're not a skilled communicator, paying attention to how people react to you can clue you in to how well (or not) you're reaching them. Getting puzzled looks whenever you speak? Ask the person you're talking to if what you said makes sense, and give them the opportunity to ask for clarification.

## 2. Branding (personal and business)

Whether you're striving to brand your business or looking to establish yourself as an expert in your industry, knowing how to do so online is essential to your success.

Branding starts with being active on social media, and is shaped through content publication, whether on or off your website. Be aware, though, that poor content can lead to negative branding. It's important to know how to deliver content and resources that your target audience wants and will find valuable.

Tips for improvement: Not a born writer, or feel like social media is too difficult? Take it in bite-sized portions. Start by writing one blog post a week, or hire a writer to do it for you. Ramp up as you gain confidence, and you'll boost your following and web traffic. These articles provide fantastic resources, as well: "5 Ways to Build Your Brand in Short Chunks of Time" and "The Definitive Guide to Marketing Your Business Online."

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### 3. Sales

You may not identify with salespeople, but the fact is, if you run a business, you're involved in sales. You might have a sales team that handles all of your company's sales, but every time you deliver your elevator pitch about your business, negotiate with a vendor, or even just persuade anyone to do anything, you're tapping into sales skills.

**Tips for improvement:** There are plenty of strategies for selling without selling. Think about conversations you have with potential customers. The ones that resulted in a sale probably weren't really hard pitches to get them to buy from you. They probably centred on helping the potential customer find a solution to a problem.

If you focus on helping, rather than selling, you'll feel more confident about the sales process, and make more sales, too.

### 4. Strategy

It's easy to think about the "right-now" aspect of your business, because the results are easy to see. But what about the bigger picture, long-term challenges and goals? How often are you thinking about those? Without a constant eye on your business' strategy and skilled assessment of that strategy relative to the industry and your competition, you can't hope to grow it over time and remain competitive in the marketplace.

**Tips for improvement:** Dedicate time to simply dreaming about what you want for your business. Where would you like to take it? What's your vision for it? Now, how can you get there from here? Set your goals, then develop an actionable plan to make them a reality. Then, don't forget about those goals. Keep them front and center to everything you do.

### 5. Finance

While you don't need to be a CPA to run a successful business, you should still have a decent understanding of your finances, profit margins, cash flow and funding. The more comfortable you are with all of these numbers, the more confident you'll be, and the better decisions you'll make.

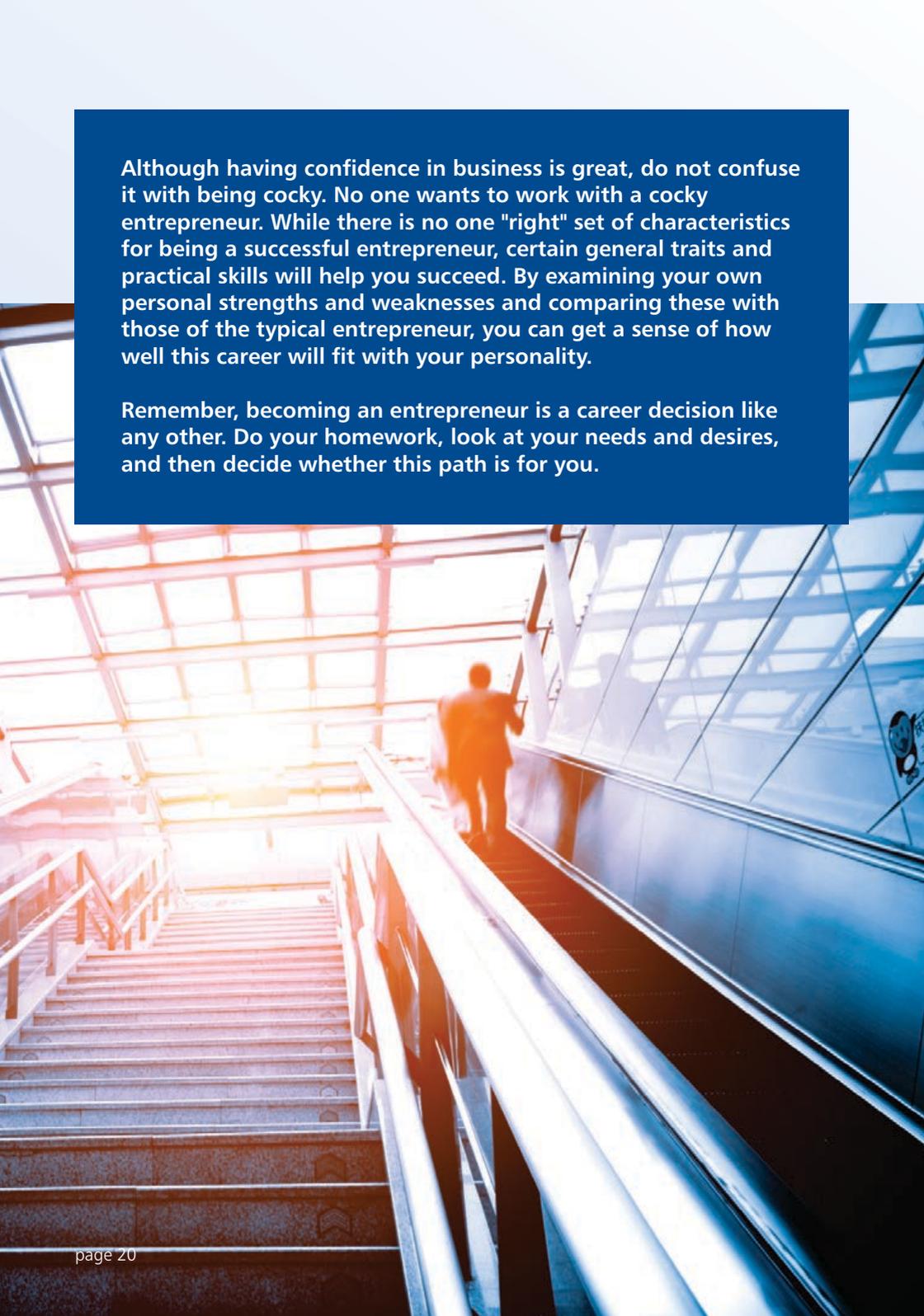
If you have an accountant to handle all the number crunching, that's great, but don't use them as a crutch to keep you from digging in and really understanding where your money's going. It's your duty to rein in costs, optimize efficiency and find ways to grow revenue.

**Tips for improvement:** Start by spending some time in your accounting system. You can learn a lot about your profit and loss, average client revenue and expenses from reports.

### 6. Confidence

Confidence will get you far in business. When you have confidence, you are able to sell your products and services because you have the ability to talk your customers into believing in what you are selling.

If you aren't confident in what you're selling, why should anyone else be confident in it or feel the need to make the purchase? A potential customer can always tell when a business owner is shy and lacks confidence in what they are selling. Be sure you are comfortable with your products, services, and pricing because if you aren't, it will show in the way you present your business.



Although having confidence in business is great, do not confuse it with being cocky. No one wants to work with a cocky entrepreneur. While there is no one "right" set of characteristics for being a successful entrepreneur, certain general traits and practical skills will help you succeed. By examining your own personal strengths and weaknesses and comparing these with those of the typical entrepreneur, you can get a sense of how well this career will fit with your personality.

Remember, becoming an entrepreneur is a career decision like any other. Do your homework, look at your needs and desires, and then decide whether this path is for you.

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## 5. 29 brilliant questions to ask at the end of every job interview

Here are 29 questions you should always ask in a job interview - if they weren't already answered - to help you get a better sense of the role and the company, and to leave the interview with a positive, lasting impression:

### 1. Have I answered all of your questions?

Before you begin asking your questions, find out if there's anything they'd like you to elaborate on. You can do this by saying something like, "Yes, I do have a few questions for you - but before I get into those, I am wondering if I've sufficiently answered all of your questions. Would you like me to explain anything further or give any examples?" Not only will they appreciate the offer, but it may be a good chance for you to gauge how well you're doing, says Bill York, an executive recruiter with over 30 years' experience and founder of executive search firm Tudor Lewis.

If they say, "No, actually you answered all of my questions very well!" then this may tell you you're in good shape. If they respond with, "Actually, could you tell me more about X?" or "Would you be able to clarify what you meant when you said Y?" then this is your chance for a re-do.

### 2. Who do you think would be the ideal candidate for this position, and how do I compare?

Hoover recommends this question because it's a quick way to figure out whether your skills align with what the company is currently looking for. If they don't match up, then you know to walk away instead of wasting time pursuing the wrong position for yourself, she says.

### 3. Who would I be reporting to? Are those three people on the same team or on different teams? What's the pecking order?

It's important to ask about the pecking order of a company in case you have several bosses, Vicky Oliver writes in her book, "301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions."

If you're going to be working for several people, you need to know "the lay of the internal land," she says, or if you're going to be over several people, then you probably want to get to know them before accepting the position.

### 4. How has this position evolved?

Basically, this question just lets you know whether this job is a dead end or a stepping-stone.

### 5. How would you describe the company's culture?

Hoover says this question gives you a broad view on the corporate philosophy of a company and on whether it prioritizes employee happiness.

### 6. Who do you consider your major competitors? How are you better?

This question is not for the faint of heart, but it shows that you are already thinking about how you can help the company rise to meet some of its bigger goals, says Peter Harrison, CEO of Snagajob.

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### **7. Beyond the hard skills required to successfully perform this job, what soft skills would serve the company and position best?**

Knowing what skills the company thinks are important will give you more insight into its culture and its management values, Hoover says, so you can evaluate whether you would fit in.

### **8. Do you have any hesitations about my qualifications?**

While this question puts you in a vulnerable position, it shows that you are confident enough to openly bring up and discuss your weaknesses with your potential employer.

### **9. What do you like most about working for this company?**

Hoover says this question is important because it lets you "create a sense of camaraderie" with the interviewer because "interviewers — like anyone — usually like to talk about themselves and especially things they know well." Plus, this question gives you a chance to get an insider's view on the best parts about working for this particular company, she says.

### **10. Can you give me example of how I would collaborate with my manager?**

Knowing how managers use their employees is important so you can decide whether they are the type of boss that will let you use your strengths to help the company succeed.

### **11. Can you tell me what steps need to be completed before your company can generate an offer?**

"Any opportunity to learn the timeline for a hire is crucial information for you," Hoover advises.

Asking about an "offer" rather than a "decision" will give you a better sense of the timeline because "decision" is a broad term, while an "offer" refers to the point when they're ready to hand over the contract.

### **12. How would you score the company on living up to its core values? What's the one thing you're working to improve on?**

Harrison says this is a respectful way to ask about shortcomings within the company — which you should definitely be aware of before joining a company. As a bonus, he says it shows that you are being proactive in wanting to understand more about the internal workings of the company before joining it.

### **13. What are the challenges of this position?**

If the interviewer says, "There aren't any," you should proceed with caution.

### **14. What have past employees done to succeed in this position?**

The main point of this question is to get your interviewer to reveal how the company measures success.

### **15. If you were to hire me, what might I expect in a typical day?**

Obviously this shows your eagerness about the position, Harrison says, but it also gives you a better idea about what the job will be like on a daily basis so you can decide whether you really want to pursue it. "A frank conversation about position expectations and responsibilities will ensure not only that this is a job you want, but also one that you have the skills to be successful in," he advises.

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**16. What type of employee tends to succeed here? What qualities are the most important for doing well and advancing at the firm?**

This question shows the interviewer that you care about your future at the company, and it will also help you decide if you're a good fit for the position, Oliver writes. "Once the interviewer tells you what she's looking for in a candidate, picture that person in your mind's eye," she says. "She or he should look a lot like you."

**17. Is there anyone else I need to meet with?/Is there anyone else you would like me to meet with?**

Hoover says knowing if they want you to meet with potential co-workers or not will give you insight into how much the company values building team synergy. In addition, if the interviewer says you have four more interviews to go, then you've gained a better sense of the hiring timeline as well, she says.

**18. How do you help your team grow professionally?**

Harrison says this question shows that you're willing to work hard to ensure that you grow along with your company. This is particularly important for hourly workers, he says, because they typically have a higher turnover rate, and are thus always looking for people who are thinking long-term.

**19. When your staff comes to you with conflicts, how do you respond?**

Knowing how a company deals with conflicts gives you a clearer picture about the company's culture, Harrison says. But more importantly, asking about conflict resolution shows that you know dealing with disagreements in a professional manner is essential to the company's growth and success.

**20. Will I have an opportunity to meet those who would be part of my staff/my manager during the interview process?**

Getting the chance to meet with potential teammates or managers is essential to any professional interview process, Hoover says. If they don't give that chance, "proceed with caution," she advises.

**21. How do you evaluate success here?**

Knowing how a company measures its employees' success is important. It will help you understand what it would take to advance in your career there — and can help you decide if the employer's values align with your own.

**22. What are some of the problems your company faces right now? And what is your department doing to solve them?**

Asking about problems within a company gets the "conversation ball" rolling, and your interviewer will surely have an opinion, Oliver writes. Further, she says their answers will give you insights into their personality and ambitions and will likely lead to other questions.

**23. What's your timeline for making a decision, and when can I expect to hear back from you?**

This one tells them you're interested in the role and eager to hear their decision. "Knowing a company's timeline should be your ultimate goal during an interview process after determining your fit for the position and whether you like the company's culture,"

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Hoover says. It will help you determine how and when to follow up, and how long to wait before "moving on."

**24. Is this a new position? If not, why did the person before me leave this role?**

This might be uncomfortable to ask, but Harrison says it's not uncommon to ask and that it shows you are being smart and analytical by wanting to know why someone may have been unhappy in this role previously.

If you found out they left the role because they were promoted, that's also useful information.

**25. Where do you see the company in three years and how would the person in this role contribute to this vision?**

Asking this question will show your interviewer that you can think big picture, that you're wanting to stay with the company long-term, and that you want to make a lasting impression in whatever company you end up in, says Harrison.

**26. I read X about your CEO in Y magazine. Can you tell me more about this?**

Oliver says questions like this simply show you've done your homework and are genuinely interested in the company and its leaders.

**27. What's your staff turnover rate and what are you doing to reduce it?**

While this question may seem forward, Harrison says it's a smart question to ask because it shows that you understand the importance of landing a secure position. "It is a black and white way to get to the heart of what kind of company this is and if people like to work here," he says.

**28. Is there anything else I can provide to help you make your decision?**

This simple question is polite to ask and it can give you peace of mind to know that you've covered all your bases, Hoover says. "It shows enthusiasm and eagerness but with polish."

**29. Is there anything we haven't covered that you think is important to know about working here?**

Hoover says this is a good wrap-up question that gives you a break from doing all the talking. In addition, she says you may get "answers to questions you didn't even know to ask but are important."

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