

What stories should I develop before I go for an interview?

You need at least three stories walking in. Have a “who I am” story that says a lot about who you are and who you are not.

You also want ready answers to the highly predictable “Tell me a strength and a weakness” request. Make your answers value in actions stories. Both are a time you shined but one is a unquestioned value, and the second is a value that can be a weakness in certain situations.

How do I come up with a story like that?

What qualities do you bring above and beyond your resume? Why will they be glad they hired you two years down the track? Once you have discerned your best qualities you can look for a story that showcases those qualities. This website has “how-to” guides for all six kinds of story.

What if they don’t ask that question?

Listen to a politician on TV or radio – no matter what question is asked they turn it around to what they want to say. You can do that too. Most questions are just probes anyway – if you tell a story of substance they will be engaged.

If someone asks me a direct question –won’t they get irritated if I launch into a story?

People get irritated when you waste their time. If the story feels like a waste of time they should be irritated. The truth is an interviewer is more irritated with monosyllabic answers. If asked a direct question: “Have you worked overseas?” And your answer is “no” – for heaven’s sake add a story that tells a more complete and informative picture: “When I was growing up we lived in Germany and Japan. I remember the move to Japan. On the first day of school...”

What about people who want me to cut to the chase?

Impatient people want fast results – make sure your story delivers. If a picture is worth a thousand words a story can be worth ten minutes of interviewing. Impatient people will appreciate a brief example. Anyone who says, “Give me an example is really asking for a story.” Still matching the person’s pace makes them comfortable. In this case you can use a teaser so they ask for your story. For example: “I prefer to lead in a collaborative manner. But if a group needs it I can be directive enough to go fast. Like the time my group’s budget was cut 30% and we had one day to decide how to deal with it.”

What if I’m only given five minutes to make a presentation? How could I fit in a story?

You can’t fit in more than one maybe two very short stories. Find the right story and *then* edit it down. I have a one hour performance length version of Joan of Arc that I can tell in three sentences. “Joan of Arc’s biggest mistake was embarrassing her boss. He looked like a wimp

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when she's beating the hell out of the English and he's too scared to travel for his coronation. When it was time for him to ransom her – he left her hanging.” And then I might talk about customer service figures and how our technical support might be making customers feel dumb. Or leadership training – and the flexibility to train an introvert and an extrovert. Or telling the truth and the three ways to help others save face.

Do I need to test a story before I use it?

It is very important to test your stories. Not so you hear someone's critique (which will kill a baby story) but so you can hear yourself. You need a “sounding board” because you can't really hear your own story without looking the eyes of a delighted listener. Looking into the eyes of a critical listener causes you to hear only the bad parts of your story.

When should I be asking my interviewer to tell me a story?

It's a good idea to work the interviewer around to telling you a story when you:

- aren't connecting
- want guidance
- want to know what is expected
- what might get you into trouble
- need time to think

How do I get them to tell me story?

Ask an open ended question and if they give a one word answer, encourage them “Can you tell me more about that?” Ask about a detail. “What happened when...X did X?” Who, what when where...ask for specific details to help them remember an the experience so they can narrate it for you. If they push back, stop. Some interviewers feel dumb if they can't answer your questions. Never make an interviewer feel dumb. Instead tell a story/example and ask “is that the kind of thing you mean? Your story will help their brain shift to story-thinking and they will be more likely to remember a story in response.

Where does story fit into career planning?

Your career is a result of the story you tell yourself about who you are, why you are here, what you have to offer, etc. If your career is planned simply on goals (a salary of \$100,000) it doesn't tell you what to do in ambiguous situations. Your “who I am” story helps you make decisions that consistently keep to your values as well as your goals. When you are clear you are a person of integrity for instance you may not take a particular job for \$100,000 because the industry violates your ethics. My career story: I learn as much as I can and give it all away so I earn the right to learn more, means I don't withhold info from people who can't pay. I decided “generosity” would be my competitive advantage. When an acquaintance phoned and asked I ended up faxing my intellectual property to him before I'd published or presented it myself. He

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presented it at his toastmasters club. Someone there heard it, asked to speak to me, hired me to speak at a regional conference that lead to my speaking at a national conference. That story helps me remember who I am and how I act – because it can feel stupid to share intellectual property when everyone else licenses and trademarks everything they do.

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