



The Career Center

East Carolina University
701 East Fifth Street
Greenville, NC 27858-4353
Office: 252-328-6050
Toll Free: 800-391-0506

Selling Value in Job Interviewing

If you break the interaction between a job seeker and an interviewer down into its basics, it is easy to recognize that selling yourself in an interview is much like selling a product. The job seeker is the product that must be sold and the interviewer is the buyer to whom the product must be sold. There are two ways of approaching this sale. You can be job focused or company focused.

You can tell when job seekers are **job focused** because all of their efforts are focused on two things:

1. Finding a job opening
2. Presenting their qualifications--background, skills, and abilities--in a way that fits the job description and demonstrates that they are qualified for the job.

To put it in a sales perspective, job focused job seekers assume that if they describe the product they are selling in terms that are attractive to buyers who are looking for this product, the buyers will buy.

Company focused job seekers have different objectives:

1. Determining the needs, problems, and challenges of potential buyers who might need this product, even if they don't know they need it and are not looking to buy at this time.
2. Presenting stories describing ways in which this product can help provide solutions to company problems.

In other words, the seller does not focus on why this product is the best product that the buyer could possibly buy. They recognize that there will always be other job seekers with more or better qualifications. They focus on their own uniqueness and how the buyer will actually get more value for their money, because this product will actually help provide solutions to the company's immediate problems. In order to be an effective job seeker, you have to differentiate in the mind of the prospective employer the differences between you and other job seekers. Once they perceive this difference they will hire you.

If you run into companies that interest you who say they would love to hire you but there are no openings, the issue is not really an issue of openings. What they are actually saying is that they do not see how you can give them anything they either (a) don't already have, or (b) can't do without. When most job seekers run into this situation, they lower their salary expectations, try to make the sale based on price and usually, they go away frustrated and unemployed. Company-based job seekers recognize that the real way to generate offers is to help the company identify ways they could be making more money, through things like increasing sales, reducing costs, or reducing the time it takes to get products or services out.

When the company begins to recognize that (a) they do have problems that can be fixed, and (b) that you can provide solutions to help solve those problems, then they become willing to spend money to hire you because there is a clear return on their investment. Your role as the job seeker in the job interview, is to help the company identify the problems they have in your area of expertise and then to raise the importance and value of solving that problem.

In order to help the company identify problems you have to:

1. Ask open-ended questions that probe into a company's needs, problems, and challenges in your area of expertise.
2. Talk about what you can and will do for that company rather than focusing on trying to explain why you don't have more experience and better qualifications.

Getting the company to value you has to happen in the interviewer's mind. It doesn't matter how many degrees you have. It doesn't matter how many years of experience you have. It doesn't matter how young or old you are. If the interviewer doesn't value the qualifications you're offering then those qualifications are not important. The only thing that matters is what the interviewer believes is important and you have to ask them to find out what that is. You have to focus your efforts on identifying the employer's perception of their needs, problems, and challenges.

If you sell yourself based on salary expectations, someone will always make them a better offer. If you sell yourself based on your experience in this field, someone else will always offer them more experience. If you sell the product based on price (your qualifications or salary expectations) someone else will always offer them a better price. But if you differentiate yourself from other job seekers and sell the product based on the value you will bring to them, no one else can offer them that and you will get the job. Ask yourself, what problems do prospective employers have that I could solve with what I have learned and with my experience?

Review the questions you have prepared to ask potential employers. If your questions seek to find out the qualifications for specific positions, you are job focused. If you are approaching your job search as if it is a numbers game and you need to maintain a certain flow of letters and need to make so many calls a week to win a job, you are job focused. Instead you need to be asking employers questions.

"What are the top three problems facing this company?"

"What kind of problems are you having with your suppliers?"

"What areas of your business are the most costly?"

Business problems typically revolve around profitability. You should focus on identifying and solving problems that relate to the profitability of the company. In order to present yourself most effectively, sit down with your qualifications, your accomplishments and analyze each feature. Identify the corresponding benefit and tie each benefit to a solution. "What solutions can I offer?" Now instead of spending valuable time telling the interviewer about your qualifications, spend the time asking questions about their problems and presenting examples of ways you have come up with solutions in similar situations.

To summarize, in a job focused job search the candidate tells the interviewer all about their qualifications. But with a company-based focus, the candidate asks decision-makers about their problems. Be a company focused job seeker. Ask questions like, "What are you trying to accomplish?" "What is preventing you from accomplishing that?" Then show them how you can help meet their goals; how you can help overcome their problems, and quantify your examples in company terms. As long as you are focusing on what the interviewer and the company wants to accomplish, then your ability to receive job offers will increase.

Ask yourself, so far in your job search, have you been job focused or company focused? Have you been looking at what you can do for the company or at what the company can do for you? Taking this approach means making your experiences and your skills and abilities more valuable in the mind of the decision-maker. It doesn't matter who your competition is. It doesn't matter if they graduated from Harvard or even if they have 10 years in this exact position with a competing company. The person who is best at identifying the needs of the company and presenting their ability to address those needs *wins*. Not the person with the best qualifications. Not the best schmoozer, but the best **problem-solver** wins. What kinds of solutions will you be offering in your job interview?