

# The Fordyce Letter

Email Version

December 2006

Volume XXXVIII



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## **TOP TEN INTERVIEW BLUNDERS**

**A Holiday Season Gift for Recruiters and Their Candidates**

*By Frank G. Risalvato, CPC*

*And now for the drum roll please.*

The Top Ten interview blunders that cost people jobs and offers have been compiled from nineteen years of record keeping and observations. Here they are:

1. **Poorly Designed/Unflattering Resume**
2. **Bad Telephone Interview Etiquette**
3. **Neglecting to Research Company**
4. **Lack of Position Knowledge or "Client M.D.O."**
5. **Inadequate Interview Closing Techniques**
6. **Dropping the "Post-Interview Follow-up" ball**
7. **Failure to Follow Recruiter Instructions**
8. **Forgetting to Ask for the Job**
9. **Email Addiction**
10. **Circumventing your Executive Recruiter or Staffing Consultant**

### **#1 Poorly Designed Resume**

Sixty percent of the resumes floating around in cyberspace and landing in Email inboxes are not doing the job they're supposed to do - which is to highlight the strengths of the underlying candidate in the best possible light.

Expert staffing consultants and executive recruiters possess more sophisticated training than conventional corporate human resource staff members ... and may see past the formatting snafus to identify the candidate and help correct the resume for the candidate.

But not everyone will be fortunate to encounter an executive recruiter to bail them out. The resume must:

- Present the strengths and highlights
- Be electronically scannable

In cases where the resume is well-composed it is usually not electronically friendly. This creates the next hurdle.

Using excessive tables, cells and “styling” with MS Word actually works *against* you. MS Word also inserts excessive formatting when someone chooses the “Resume Template” option (one of the **worst choices** for building an electronically friendly resume).

Search Google under “*Scannable Resume*” and you will find thousands of articles explaining why no one is calling you back.

## #2 Telephone Interview Etiquette

Assuming your resume succeeds in accomplishing its objective, your next hurdle will most likely be responding to a telephone interview request by an “in-house” company recruiter (from the human resources department) or contracted search professional/recruiter.

If you’re invited to a telephone interview, this indicates your experience, education and job history as portrayed are seen as a match by the company to within at least the 75 to 85% range as based on their internal job specifications. In other words, the “hard skills” were found to be present.

From here on, the only remaining reason for not getting an offer is mainly due to your *interview skills*. It is a shame to lose job opportunities for something you can practice and have full control over improving - especially in this modern era where a quick glance through Amazon.com reveals nearly 3,000 books containing information on “*interview skills*.” Interviewing techniques can be mastered just like tying your shoelaces was something you once had to practice.

Many of these books have internal <sup>1</sup>“Search Inside ®” features which will let you read many pages without even buying the book. Spending two hours doing this alone would give you a 100% advantage over another candidate that was too lazy to invest in their career in this manner.

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<sup>1</sup> “Search Inside” ® is a registered service mark of Amazon.com

**A telephone interview will most likely focus on “Soft Skills.” These skills include characteristics and attributes which are best determined in a dialogue and conversation such as:**

- **Temperament**
- **Listening Skills**
- **Reasoning**
- **Interest Level**
- **Passion**
- **Energy/Enthusiasm**
- **Ambition/Initiative/Drive**
- **Level of research conducted on the hiring company.**

NEVER allow yourself to begin a telephone interview while:

- **Driving**
- **Using a cell phone/in a noisy area**
- **At a location where you can not speak freely and candidly.**

**If you must use a cell phone pull over, shut off the car engine, make sure you have a fully charged battery or adapter, have the strongest possible signal and have at least 30 minutes to devote.**

Any of the above can and will jeopardize your telephone interview results. Each week I personally see dozens of candidates being “knocked-out” for reasons such as the above even though we warn them preemptively.

## #3 Neglecting to Research Company – (*Then having no questions during interview*)

In the twenty-first century with the world’s information being one quick “Google Search” away ... it is completely inexcusable to fail to possess at least some basic knowledge of the company you are about to meet.

Working through a Professional Recruiter will provide many advantages in this area ... as your recruiter may have a decades-old relationship with the managers you are about to meet and can advise you accordingly to assist you in

having an edge. But there's still much you can do on your own.

ALWAYS research the interviewing company thoroughly. While helpful hints may have been provided to you by your recruiting consultant, eventually the hiring manager will want to see *what you did on your own to prepare yourself*. The Internet should be a good tool to help you prepare.

Besides a "quick Google Search on the company name" you can try:

- Yahoo Finance - if it is a public company with disclosures required by the SEC
- Bloomberg.com
- www.zoominfo.com (for looking up the hiring manager's past history of employment)

Understand the job and company thoroughly before interviewing. This will allow you to compile pointed, intelligent, thought-provoking questions that demonstrate your interest.

Conversely, not having *any questions* during the interview will result in management deeming your interest is shallow and perhaps you are lazy and uninterested in information. No interest = No Job Offer!

#### **#4 Lack of Position Knowledge or "Client M.D.O."**

M.D.O. represents the client's "*Most Dominant Objective*."

This refers to the *outcome*, goal or accomplishment they seek as a result of hiring someone for the position for which you are interviewing. It is the *real reason* behind the hiring you must get yourself to understand to have an advantage.

Finding out this "Hiring Objective" will provide you with tremendous advantage over any other candidate. Once you know the "M.D.O" (Most Dominant Objective) you can tailor your responses, discussions, and dialogue toward addressing this specific topic.

Some common Dominant Objectives may include:

- Adding to staff to bolster the department so company can take on new accounts and reach new revenue targets
- Adding new sales talent to enhance revenue
- Cutting costs by improving accounting department's credentials
- Shortening customer service response time to less than 24 hours
- Improving marketing deadlines
- Motivating staff which has lost focus by adding a New Manager

While many managers will know their objective, some may not. Your questioning to raise this issue alone will be seen as a keen approach few other candidates will have bothered to inquire about.

#### **#5 Inadequate Interview Closing Techniques**

At the end of the interview the interviewer may ask, "*Are there any more questions?*"

Most candidates would reply "No" which leads to the immediate conclusion of the interview and being escorted to the elevator or office exit with an interview conclusion that fizzles out. This would be what we refer to as example "A."

A better reply instead of simply, "No" and leaving without a final strong positive "*finale*" is the following technique known as "Restate, Reassure and Reaffirm."

In this formula you first *restate* the hot topics management indicated necessary for an offer to be justified; secondly, you reassure how your experience fits; and thirdly you ask for action by *reaffirming yourself* as the ideal candidate.

Example:

***"I have no further questions at this time, except that I'd like to reiterate what I understand are the key strengths sought for this position. May I review my understanding with you?"***

This almost always results in the interviewer replying with “Yes” and now puts YOU in control of the final closing process.

NEXT, *RESTATE* the key required points. Example:

*“I understand you’re looking for someone with strong (Fill in with stated skill requirements) who can (Fill in with reiteration of dominant projects and goals new candidate must accomplish). Is that correct?” (This is a “trial close,” you will elicit confirmation as to whether you’re on the right subject ‘hot points.’) “In that case I’d like to reiterate my strengths.”*

If “Yes” then REASSURE:

*Repeat the hot buttons you just received confirmation on. Example: “analysis, interpersonal skills, and relationship building, etc.) and I believe I’m ideally suited for this position.*

Close:

*“Where do we go from here?”*

OR

*“Because I’m very interested and confident of joining the team, what remains required from me in order to proceed?”*

Which person would you hire?

Person A, who was escorted out of the interview with a wrap-up reminiscent of a dud firecracker that fizzled out and then never exploded?

OR person B who **restated, reassured, and closed** the client firmly and convincingly on his/her interest and desire to move forward?

The latter would have resulted in an interview conclusion analogous to a grand Fourth of July fireworks finale with choreographed orchestra and laser light show accompaniment.

**Person B** almost always gets the job offer!

This is a critically important interview skill which is why I’ve spent two-thirds of the space of this article on this one interview technique alone.

## #6 Neglecting Post-Interview Follow-up

Call your recruiter immediately after your interview (if you are working through one). Never wait more than twenty-four hours to do so. Companies frequently ask those of us contracted as recruiting consultants to monitor *how long it took for a candidate to get back to us* as a prime indicator of interest. Some make their choices based on an hour’s difference in behavior.

If you tell the company you’re interested during the interview ... and two days later we haven’t heard from you ... your inaction will overshadow your words expressed during the meeting. Whatever you stated will no longer matter.

In sum, you will be pegged as someone whose actions are not congruent to their spoken words or statements.

## #7 Failure to Follow Recruiter Instructions

If you change your mind about the job or company at any point during the process, or received another offer, call and notify your recruiting consultant at once. Notice we say “call” over “Email” as this will enhance your rapport in your best interest.

If you are asked to *call* - then call! Don’t Email!

If you are asked to confirm an appointment by Email then do so via Email.

Since Email is not as reliable as the telephone, I recommend leaving a voice message or calling to confirm that any important Email was received by the designated recipient.

These days with many anti-spam programs often deleting business Emails ... the telephone remains the most reliable means to confirm important communications.

## #8 Forgetting to Ask For the Job

Just as it is important to close during your first and each subsequent interview, it is important to simply *ask for the job*. This is especially true if you are in the latter stages of a face-to-face interview process and are on your second or final meeting.

Many times, all a hiring manager is waiting to hear are the words “*I’m excited ... when can I start as I’m eager to come on board.*”

## #9 Kicking the Email Addiction

In this twenty-first century of multiple means of high speed electronic communications, many seem unable to step away from their Palm, Blackberry, or laptop Email application ... Even when specifically ASKED TO NOT USE EMAIL!

If you are asked to CALL don’t frustrate the interviewer by continuing to respond by Email, disregarding the telephone call request. This is annoying, rude and demonstrates inability to pay attention to what you’ve been asked.

Quite often we find people Emailing once, twice or three times after a request was made to continue the dialogue verbally by *telephone*. Sometimes recruiters will purposely ask you to *call* at a certain time as a simple test of listening skills, ability to follow simple instructions, and as a test of your interest level.

## #10 Circumventing your Executive Recruiter or Staffing Consultant

Most search firms invest a great deal of time formulating a working relationship and agreement with their client companies. Many will even visit the client hiring company should it be a new account never represented before to obtain a hands-on feel for the work environment - or may have a decades old relationship in place.

Despite the investment of time and due diligence toward developing partnering alliances with only ethical company entities, every now and then an unethical company account may succeed in duping the search firm into providing their services.

Should a hiring manager you meet, as a result of a search firm, suggest “*Let’s discuss this among ourselves,*” or “*I want to offer you the job directly ... let’s pretend we knew each other already.*” **DO NOT let yourself fall into such a trap!**

Keep in mind any company that attempts to circumvent its clearly spelled-out contractual obligations is most likely going to CONTINUE to exhibit less-than-ethical behavior toward any other contractual obligation, statutory guideline, law, or regulation imposed upon their industry.

### Leopards don’t lose their spots overnight!

Companies that try to bypass any obligation with their executive search firm or for that matter, any vendor or partners, are usually the same ones which later:

- *Conveniently forget your performance review anniversary*
- *Forget to pay the raise that was promised*
- *Switch job responsibilities to a lesser desired position you did not originally bargain for*
- *Present a host of other problems.*

When a company is honest, forthright, and behaves with integrity, it most likely treats its allies, business partners, vendors the same way it will treat its employees. Company personalities percolate from the top down

Do you really want to work with a company that is suggesting you join under a suspicious arrangement? **NO!**

If a suggestion is made alluding to:

- a) Presenting an offer directly to you OR b) Scheduling an interview without your recruiter’s knowledge, simply reply with the following in a polite tone of voice:

*“Ms. Hiring Manager I’m happy to hear you want to move forward. However I must ask you work through my agent as he’s been a great help so far and I don’t want to cause problems by leaving him out of the loop.*”

*I'm sure, as a company with integrity, you can understand my wanting to continue to work through the recruiter who has been a great help to the both of us. Go ahead and (present the offer ... schedule the interview, etc) through him. Thanks”*

It takes two to tango. A company cannot engage in circumvention unless a candidate cooperates. A company can never act unethically unless you as the candidate cooperate in allowing them to do so.

Your recruiter is an expert on the successful conclusion of job offers and acceptances.

While the recruiter's first goal is to assist the client, most are there to help you as the candidate as well in their dual capacity as a career coach with:

1. Making certain you have a valid offer in writing
2. Ascertaining that all pertinent conditions relating to the offer are within the offer letter
3. Guiding you through the resignation process
4. Providing assistance with resignation letters
5. Providing assistance with references ...  
*And much, much more.*

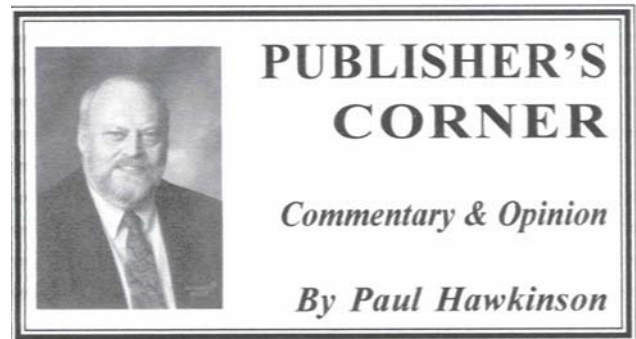
Cooperating with a company whose desire it is to “cut the recruiter out” cuts both ways by preventing you from obtaining many of the protections that recruiter was about to provide you. Fortunately this happens rarely.

NOTIFY YOUR RECRUITER AT ONCE if any motion is made by the company that is suspicious. The average search firm will be around far longer than the 12.5 year average life span of most companies. You will want the search firm on your side in the future.



Copyright 2006 © by [Frank G. Risalvato](#). Frank is a staffing and recruiting consultant and has been in the search profession since 1987.

*He has contributed hundreds of articles to the recruiting profession, has appeared on TV and Radio, and has been called upon by state and federal agencies for expert testimony. His [recruiter training services](#), books and kits are found on [www.searchwizardry.com](http://www.searchwizardry.com) where you will find a downloadable pdf file of this report for sharing with your candidates. Call (973) 300-1010 for more information, Email: [fris@iresinc.com](mailto:fris@iresinc.com)*



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