

INTERVIEWS:

A 3-STEP INTERVIEW STRATEGY FOR CAREER CHANGERS

Takeaway Points

- Address the strengths you want to highlight and how they relate specifically to the job.
- In framing your response for interviewers, you'll see new ways in which your previous experience is relevant and transferable to the new job, and that will demonstrate how well qualified you really are.
- Always ask the interviewer for tips on what you can do to shorten any learning curve to help you excel in the position.

By: Team Pongo

Most people change careers or industries (not just jobs) several times during their working years. Sometimes the change is planned, other times it just happens. In times of high unemployment, many workers switch careers out of desperation, because their own industries are not hiring.

If you're thinking about making such a change, you must be able to adequately address an interviewer's concerns about your lack of experience in the field or industry you want to work in.

Here's a powerful, three-step interview response strategy to help you handle this difficult situation comfortably and effectively. Use this example as a framework for crafting your own response.

The Strategy

There are very few job candidates who fit *every* requirement for a job. Almost everyone has weaknesses or missing skills they have to work around in the interview, and it's really no different when you're changing careers or industries. The strategy is to focus on the skills you *do* have rather than the ones you *don't* have.

So how do you respond when the interviewer says, "I'm concerned with your lack of direct experience (or education) in this area"?

Step 1. Acknowledge the concern.

"That's a very reasonable concern, and I'd like to share some additional information about that."

Step 2. Show your strengths.

"From my own experience, along with extensive industry research and informational interviews, I've got a good idea of what it takes to be successful in this [career, field, or industry], and I already possess many of those skills and qualities. For example..."

List the strengths you want to highlight and how they relate specifically to the job. Some of these might include:

- A high level of attention to detail
- Persistence and unwavering focus on results
- Staying current on industry dynamics and professional certifications
- Diplomacy and team-building
- Thorough knowledge of a process that befits the job
- Project management and follow-through
- The flexibility and intellectual agility to respond to changing priorities

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Did you know?

Pongo's Interview Tips an interactive online training program, can help you build the skills you need to ace your interviews and land a great job.

Step 3. Ask a Question.

"I can give you specific examples where I've demonstrated these talents – which would you like me to elaborate on?"

Come up with a brief real-world story to back up the strengths you mention. For instance, you might talk about a sales conference you arranged for 300 people in another city that went off without a hitch, despite a change of hotels and an impending airline strike. This scenario demonstrates attention to detail, diplomacy, project management, follow-through, and flexibility.

Another good question to ask is: "What can I do now that would shorten the learning curve and help me excel quickly in this position?" This kind of question communicates enthusiasm and confidence, and shows a willingness to be proactive in addressing any knowledge gaps.

The bonus of this three-step strategy is that, in framing your response for interviewers, you'll see new ways in which your previous experience is relevant and transferable which, in turn, will help you demonstrate how well you're qualified.

A candidate with the right basic skills, along with the desire and confidence to learn and contribute in the new arena, will make a strong impression on any interviewer.

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