



## WHY YOUR ANSWERS MIGHT BE CONFUSING AND WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT IT

This topic has been at the root of numerous coaching sessions and discussions over the past several years. At a result, I thought it would be a topic of interest since being clear, logical, and sequential is critical when answering interview question. Failure to do this can mean failure to progress in the hiring process.

The concept is simple – if a hiring manager doesn't understand what you're saying, they can't see how you'll add value to their organization. The inability to communicate your potential value means they'll move to the next candidate. Not being clear, logical, and sequential means you won't get the offer. Why you ask?

Have you ever tried to read a book or an article by starting in the middle, then moving to the beginning, and finally the end? If so, what happened? Odds are that you got confused and didn't fully understand the material, or you probably just stopped and gave up. In short, all stories have a beginning, middle, and end.

Let me ask this a different way – have you ever started watching a movie at the half-way point? (A movie that you've not seen before, of course.) When this happens, you've missed the background, character development, and key parts of the plot. The storyline continues to unfold, however you don't have the context to fully understand what's happening in the movie. You might eventually be able to understand more of the context or plot, however need to pay close attention or ask someone to fill you in on what you've missed. The same dynamic holds true when someone tells you a story or a joke – if they skip the



background and jump to the end or punchline, it won't have the same effect and you might not understand the importance or the intended humor.

As indicated in previous articles, what you say during an interview is just as important as how you say it. Your audience must be able to comprehend your response to their question, which means they must be able to follow along as it's communicated. The problem is that our brains are designed to fill in gaps using the available context. When you have the context, you can fill in the gaps. When you don't have the context, your mind doesn't know how to process the story and either makes assumptions or stops paying attention and becomes disengaged.



### **An example of how this works:**

Have you ever seen a movie and a few days later viewed a trailer for the same movie? This happened to me recently and I was surprised at how much of the storyline was revealed in the trailer. I mentioned this to an individual who was with me at the time, since they hadn't seen the full movie, and their opinion was much different. Based upon viewing the 2 minute trailer alone, they thought the movie would be interesting, but only had a limited idea of the storyline. The difference between our opinions was because I already knew the storyline and movie context (characters and plot). This understanding of the storyline and context enabled me to fill-in the gaps between scenes and transpose the order of the movie highlights back into the correct sequence. As a result, I was able 'replay' the movie in my mind based upon the handful of highlights and disjointed scenes which were shown in the trailer.

### **What does this have to do a job interview?**

During the interview, you'll discuss your professional life and provide short examples of activities and accomplishments. In this environment, candidates often jump around and deliver individual highlights (scenes) from their life followed by other short examples which might be incomplete or out of sequence. Just like a movie trailer in which they have the full context, everything is connected and makes sense. Unfortunately, the same isn't true for the listener. What we hear is a disjointed example that makes little if any sense or isn't relevant to our question. The worst is when a candidate provides no context when answering and just talks and talks and talks (rambling). Answer the question first, then provide additional context, if necessary, to support or

enhance your answer. If you rent a DVD and it confuses you as soon as it begins, you typically do one of three things: 1) go back and re-watch so you understand, 2) continue and hope to figure it out later in the movie, or 3) become disinterested and turn the movie off. The only difference between these examples and interviewing is that hiring managers can't turn the movie off. They often ask candidates to re-answer questions, hope that a confusing answer makes sense later, or become disinterested and simply go through the motions. In short, confusing the hiring manager rarely gets you the job offer.

### **What should you do about this?**

In short, you should prepare and practice to ensure communications are clear, sequential, and logical (aligned to the question or topic of discussion). Anything else risks confusing the hiring manager which results in failure. Remember that stories have a beginning, middle, and end. When answering questions, specifically behavioral questions (example: tell me about a time that you did something?), begin with the **S**ituation encountered or the **T**ask you needed to complete. Next, you should discuss the **A**ction(s) taken to address this situation or task (storyline you just developed). If you're discussing something done as part of a team effort, make sure you talk about your individual actions, not just about what the team did. Lastly, you must highlight the positive **R**esults that were achieved in response to your actions. When providing multiple examples within a single response, tell them you have multiple examples and identify when starting each of these. Lastly, understand that candidates often get overly excited during the interview and begin to talk fast – relax and ensure your pace and tone are professional.