

ASK DAVID



David E. Fitzgibbons is a Certified Personnel Consultant and expert in jobs and the hiring process. David has been an Executive Recruiter since 1991 and is the owner of ToyRecruiter.com. No other recruiter in the industry will answer your questions with as much candor and insight as does David. David is here for you so if you have a question, please feel free to contact David via [email](mailto:).

ASK DAVID VOLUME 1 answers the following questions:

- **How long should I wait before I follow up after an interview?**
- **What are your thoughts on LinkedIn, Facebook and other web presences?**
- **I need advice for a phone interview...please help!**
- **Should I study Mandarin to get further in business?**
- **I want to blog about my current employer...any advice?**
- **How many windows are there in NYC and other bizarre interview questions?**
- **My job was just advertised on Monster.com...what do I do now?**
- **I work 10 hour days, will my company pay for a gym membership?**
- **Is it illegal to ask my salary in an interview?**
- **I have been laid off several times...is there something wrong with me?**
- **Why does your competition write about the Chinese Navy?**

Dear David: I recently had an in-person interview for a position I am ideally suited for and with a company I am very eager to work for. During the interview I met with representatives from Human Resources and Finance. The interview went so well that the VP of Finance brought in another member of the senior staff (and my future superior) to further interview me.

All told, I spent half the day there and after what I felt was a very successful series of interviews, the VP of HR informed me that they would be deciding within 2 weeks. I then sent thank you letters and followed up with a call a week later. With no response, I called again only to be able to leave messages. After that, I heard nothing...no turn-down letter or email. It has been 2 months and the same job is now on several job boards. Should I re-apply?

David Says: No, you should not reapply for this job. In today's buyer's market it takes very little to be disqualified for a position, and clearly you were disqualified. Their lack of response to your calls is testament to the fact that they have already moved on – albeit with an utter lack of professionalism.

Some might say, "What could it hurt to reapply? Maybe the company forgot about you?" Wrong. It could hurt your chances in the future. You will seem weak and desperate, and

perhaps even childish for reapplying for a job you already interviewed for. There is always the chance of interviewing with the company again in the future and you don't want to be tagged as someone who "*kept applying online even after the interview*".

Dear David: I haven't found a job yet and I don't know what else to do. How do you feel about LinkedIn, Facebook, a web site or a PowerPoint Presentation I can email to prospective clients showcasing my abilities?

David Says: Here are my thoughts: **LinkedIn:** I definitely recommend LinkedIn because so many companies go there to "hunt" for candidates. If you don't already have an account, set one up now and start making connections. With respect to anthropologist Robin Dunbar, you need to have between 100 and 230 connections to show you are viable in the business world; 150 connections is an absolute minimum when trying to impress a prospective employer. Also important is to try to get as many recommendations as you can but NOT from recruiters as they don't impress employers. Do however connect with recruiters as other recruiters will hunt competitor's connections to find the right person.

Facebook: At this point I am going to give Facebook a rather tepid recommendation as it is nowhere near the power of LinkedIn for getting a job; but it will be so you might as well get on board now. In the future, Facebook will be the dominant hiring website in the marketplace displacing all other sites; yup, say goodbye to Monster.com, The Ladders, Hotjobs, etc...Facebook will put them all out of business. The biggest pitfall of Facebook – and I have seen this firsthand – is an individual writing something on their wall that shows them to be NOT the type of employee a company wants to hire. This will continue to be a problem – don't fall prey to it.

Website: Sure...as long as it is good. The problem is websites need to be constantly updated and they need to look fresh and impress. Now hear this, a website needs to be lean and mean, not fat and bloated. LESS IS MORE. It is better to tempt a prospective client with a few good art examples/business ideas than to show them too much and risk turning them off with examples that are weak, DATED or off target. Chances are good that if you show an employer enough material he will find something he doesn't like. Think about this, how many great looking websites can you think of right now? I expect you didn't come up with any/many. My advice is to stay away from a website unless it is absolutely amazing.

PowerPoint: No. Never. In my entire career I have never seen a good PowerPoint presentation and no hiring authority wants to sit in front of their computer and click on slide after slide of yours. A PowerPoint is a guaranteed loser and will likely hurt your chances.

Dear David: I have a phone interview tomorrow with a company and I hate phone interviews. Any pointers of things to avoid on a phone interview? I appreciate your help.

DAVID SAYS: Recruiters call them "*phoners*" and they are a way of life so it is best to embrace them as they are here to stay.

The rules for a successful phoner are simple. First and foremost, clear your schedule and contact the interviewer at the time selected and be punctual. If you miss the interviewer,

which is common, tell them you will call back in precisely 5 minutes. If you miss them yet again tell them you will call back in 30 minutes. At the 30 minute mark leave your number and do not call back again. Trust me, your three calls are sufficient to let them know you made the call and you are interested. If you are to be called – just make sure you are sitting by the phone. Since you might be at home, make sure you are in a quiet room. Pen the dogs and tell the kids you can NOT be disturbed under any circumstances and leave a note on the door saying so.

Wear whatever clothes you feel most successful in; even if that means a business suit. If you don't feel professional in jeans, and most people don't, then dress for your phoner. No joke...don't underestimate dressing for success. Make sure you speak loud and clear into the phone. You should consider standing during your phoner as it offers better voice projection and can add confidence. Some people tell me that looking in to a mirror helps them with their body-language which in turn keeps them looking/feeling and speaking professionally.

Most important is to not fear SILENCE. If the interviewer isn't talking don't try to fill the silence. They might be writing, thinking of a new question, considering a follow-up or reading an unrelated email. Just be yourself and imagine yourself across the desk from the interviewer. You wouldn't arbitrarily fill the silence if you noticed them taking notes or reviewing some material. So don't do it on the phone.

A final word on cell phones and cordless phones. Nothing, and I mean NOTHING, makes me want to dump a call faster than a poor phone connection or a cell phone that cuts out. A poor connection is anathema to an interviewer and it will cost you the job. Be very mindful of your connection and the sound of your phone. I couldn't imagine anything worse than flunking the phoner because I had AT&T cellular service and the interviewer couldn't hear me. Use a landline when at all possible.

Lastly – and this goes for in-person and phoners – at the end of the interview tell the interviewer you *"...are very interested and want to take this to the next step"*. Remember your ABC's...Always Be Closing! Good luck.

Dear David: Everything my company makes is manufactured in China. I spend at least 6 weeks per year in China and my employer is looking for me to spend even more time there. China is quickly becoming the dominant country not only with regards to toys but everything from military power to world finance. My question is, should I learn Mandarin and more importantly should I teach my child Mandarin?

David Says: The short answer to both questions is no. Here is the long answer. The world's de facto language, and language of business, will continue to be English. A little history is in order here. We didn't force the world to speak English, the British did when they colonized the better part of the world (think English speaking in Hong Kong and you'll clearly see the effect of colonization). More important however is that English was "lucky" in so far as it came of age, and pervasive distribution, during an age of print, widespread literacy and a rapidly expanding media. English also has something over every other language spoken (or spoken/read languages such as Chinese, Japanese, etc)...it is painfully simple. English is even easier to learn than Spanish, a language that burdens the student with complicated conjugations.

I recall a story told to me years ago about doing business in China. It involved an exuberant young executive who had been studying Mandarin. When the young executive arrived in China he endeavored to communicate with his counter-part in Chinese. The Chinese counter-part raised his hand in the stop sign motion and said in perfect English, "We can think faster in English than you can speak it so don't bother with Chinese and we'll all get through this meeting a lot faster". Based on incestuous business practices and a near constant desire for secrecy you can be assured the Chinese themselves have no desire for you, or your child, to learn Mandarin. Work instead on perfecting your English – yes I am serious about that, and concentrate more on writing skills. As someone who reads a tremendous amount of other people's business writing I can assure you we are far, far behind in that language skill.

Dear David: I work for a California company that is famous for making a doll that begins with the letter "B". I want to start a blog about the crazy (and yes interesting) inner-workings of how this doll is brought to market as I think this topic, and my blog, would have mass appeal. What do I need to do to make sure this doesn't impact my current job or my career?

David Says: That's easy to answer...don't do it! Professionally there is virtually zero upside to blogging about your employer. There is however a long and storied history of employees getting fired for their blogs. The most famous example is that of Ellen Simonetti who was fired by **Delta Airlines** for posting "inappropriate" images of herself on her blog while wearing a Delta Airlines uniform. [Ms. Simonetti's bra was "visible" in one of the pictures.] Like most companies, Delta Airlines doesn't address *web-logs* (blogs) in their employee manual; most companies don't. That fact however won't prevent a company from executing their legal right to fire you for it. Of course if you stick to "words only" you still aren't safe. **Microsoft** and **Google** have fired employees for their blogs and they ENCOURAGE their employees to blog!

My advice would be to channel your energies and internet acumen into a more worthy cause. Perhaps your alma mater, local charity or your child's school could put your passions and abilities to work. The world will be a better place because of it.

Dear David: I was asked a bizarre interview question and I didn't know how to answer it. The question was off-topic, confused me and left me speechless because it had nothing to do with the job I was interviewing for. How do you handle a situation like this? Oh, the question was, "how many windows are there in New York City?"

David Says: These types of questions are traditionally used in stress interviews where interviewers ask repeated difficult, inappropriate or challenging questions. There is a company (that makes fashion dolls) that used to ask "why are manhole covers round?" [Answer: So they don't fall into the hole; which is accomplished by adding a lip of a few inches on the outer diameter of the manhole cover.] When you encounter an oddball or stress question stop and clear your mind. You have a couple of options. You can try to solve the problem logically. I assumed there were 7.5 million residents of NYC (I checked and was wrong, there are 8.2MM), then I made an assumption about the number of windows each person may come into contact with. I assumed 10 as I figured a person sees windows at

home, at work, in transit and while shopping. My answer is 75 million windows. I have no idea if I am right, but I do know I gave a credible, defensible answer which is likely what the company is looking for. If you aren't up for the on-the-spot cognitive exercise, take a breath and tell the interviewer you would like a day or two to get back to him/her so as to give the best possible answer. It's a bit of a dodge but it is better than saying "I don't know" or freezing up entirely.

Dear David: I work for a major toy manufacturer with a satellite office in Manhattan. While on Monster.com this past Sunday I noticed an advertisement from my company for what appears to be my job! I spoke to my boss and she said that we will not "...be hiring for any NEW positions in the next 6 months" citing budgetary reasons. I don't need to be hit over the head here, they are obviously looking to replace me – what should I do?

David Says: Remain calm; there are two possible situations here. The first one being that your company is NOT replacing you nor hiring anyone new as per your discussion with your supervisor. This might be difficult to accept but many Human Resource departments continue to advertise and recruit for positions even during a hiring freeze or economic downturn. Their rationale is that when the market improves and expansion is necessary their pro-active behavior will put them ahead of the curve when the hiring "lottery" occurs. This occurs all of the time, especially during times like these when companies are not hiring but when budgets are still in place and available for recruiting/advertising. Your Human Resource department has to keep busy otherwise it's their resumes they'll be putting out.

The second situation is cause for concern...you're fired as soon as they find an applicant who they like. Start cleaning out your desk and get your resume ready to go.

Dear David: When I am not traveling (to China, Dallas, Nuremberg, etc) I work 10 hour days and sometimes without lunch – or lunch at my desk – and I am worried about the effect this is having on my health. I'd like my employer to pay for a health club membership but they are pretty cheap...any ideas?

DAVID SAYS: In a perfect world your employer would pay for your gym membership because a healthy employee is a happier employee. A healthier employee handles stress better, incurs less sick time and will (presumably) require less costly medical services which reduce the strain on your company's health care premiums. Of course this is a pretty difficult sell to a company, especially a cheap one; they won't see nor appreciate that spending a little now can save them a lot in the future. Most companies, like most people, are pretty myopic when it comes to a concept like that so be prepared for their answer being "no". Alternatively, you could bring up this request at your next performance review and ask them to reimburse you for your membership. Perhaps you could even contact a health club facility near you and inquire about a discount for your company if "X" number of people join that facility. As an aside, and this is no advertisement, but I believe **Planet Fitness** offer memberships for \$10/month and they are located in your city. Talk about cheap...for the price of two **Starbucks** drinks you can join a gym. Stop being so cheap and do this yourself.

For your information, sitting at your desk for prolonged periods of time is linked to expanded waistlines, higher blood pressure, lower levels of LDL (good) cholesterol and higher levels of inflammation. For those who can't afford the time to make it to a gym, studies suggest

standing up and/or walking around periodically throughout the day can help. You should also stand up during phone calls or in meetings (besides if everyone stands in a meeting the meeting will finish much quicker). Instead of an email, you can walk over to a co-worker's desk to speak with them. A recent **Harvard** study showed that moderate exercise is just as effective at preventing cardiovascular disease as more vigorous workouts are. Keep a pair of comfortable shoes in your desk drawer and go for a walk during lunch. And on that subject matter, make sure you take a lunch break. Eating lunch makes you more productive. Not eating, or eating quickly at your desk, can lead to mental exhaustion which the **American Psychological Association** says leads to workplace stress, which leads to inflammation which in turn can lead to cardiovascular disease.

For those more intrepid souls, I suggest replacing your office chair with an exercise ball. A growing number of schools have started replacing their chairs with the inflatable rubber balls normally used in the gym. According to a recent **Los Angeles Times** article the physical challenge of sitting on the ball keeps otherwise easily distracted students mentally engaged. The same goes for adults as well, in addition to improving your core strength, this minor physical task will give your brain enough of a processing task that it will become more alert. For \$80.00 (and free shipping) **Gaiam** makes a Balance Ball Chair that would be very appropriate for a business setting. I tried an exercise ball at home in place of my Recaro Office chair (for those who know what that is) and I prefer the \$20 ball to the custom chair. Go figure.

Dear David: During a recent interview I was asked how much I made at my previous position, is that a legal question? If it is illegal couldn't I just make up a number and tell them that?

David Says: Not only is the question legal it is very valid. Frankly I am surprised this question has not been asked of you before. Asking this question helps the interview process for both parties make sure they are in the same ballpark and mitigates surprises. A VP of Sales position for example, depending on company size, can range in pay from \$100,000 – \$300,000 so obviously it is important for both parties to know what ocean they are swimming in. As for making up a number for your prior salary, I wouldn't recommend it. I have represented numerous clients that would offer for example a 20% pay increase to entice you to joining their firm. The caveat was you had to bring in your W2 to prove your prior salary. It would be very uncomfortable for you to bring in a W2 with \$85,000 on it when you claimed you were making \$125,000.

Dear David: I consider myself a conscientious, hard-working employee. However, as you know, I have been laid-off/downsized/fired three times in the past three years. I thought I was worthwhile as an employee but maybe I am worthless. You know my background, and that I held a job at a major toy company for nearly twelve years before all this...could I really be that bad now?

DAVID SAYS: Your career path at present is not unique among your peers. Many people have held jobs for 7, 10 or 15 years only to suffer multiple separations over the past 8 years (since around 9-11). If timing is critical to the hiring process it is more so to the firing

process. Tenure is king when surviving a lay-off and so when you join a new firm and the bad times come...you are more easily selected as the first to go; couple that with a recession and frequent job separations aren't that uncommon.

However, it might be time to be introspective. Are you too set in your ways to adapt to new surroundings? Are you difficult to deal with? Have certain technologies passed you by? Are you as in touch with the youth trends today as you were 20 years ago?

Your resume gets you in the door but you have trouble when you get there. You should strongly consider working with a career coach. Yes, your abilities are excellent but make sure your attitude matches and you welcome change. If possible, you should reconnect with some former co-workers and employees and ask them to be honest – BLUNT – in their assessment of your weaknesses both professionally and personally. Hopefully that coupled with a career coach can point you in the right direction.

During this process don't allow yourself to wallow in self-pity and don't throw in the proverbial *work* towel. Just be prepared to make changes and improvements in yourself both personally and professionally. Good luck!

Dear David: You must be aware that a competitor of yours also publishes a newsletter but are you aware of what the stories are? Would it surprise you to know that the following are stories in their latest newsletter: "Chinese Missile Shifts Power in the Pacific", "A Chinese Stealth Fighter Challenge", "Chinese Military Comes into Its Own" and "Beijing Builds Navy to Keep US at Bay" among others. Do you feel that stories on China's military have great impact on our industry, why or why not?

David Says: I will answer your questions in order. Yes I am aware that a "competitor" of mine publishes a "newsletter". No it doesn't surprise me to learn that this individual runs reprint stories on China's military in their "newsletter". No I don't feel that stories on China's navy, or new stealth fighter, have any impact on the toy industry. Although I am **NOT** commenting on my competitor or their "newsletter" I will say that lazy people do lazy things. I can tell when people put effort into their work or when they just *phone it in* and so can you quite obviously. This should be a lesson to all out there to put their best effort out there, especially when you share that effort with the world via the internet.



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