

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 3 answers the following questions:

- **What to do when you don't have any questions for your interviewer?**
- **I always come in second place in the interview...what am I doing wrong?**
- **What is the protocol for a dinner interview?**
- **I am 70 and better than anyone half my age...why don't I get hired?**
- **I have 24 hours to accept or reject a job offer...what do I do?**
- **Any advice on what industry is a good cross over fit for me?**
- **Can I get cash in lieu of medical benefits?**
- **Is LinkedIn a mirror of the economy?**
- **Why are recruiters such jerks?**
- **I heard about a company that fired people with Obama stickers on their car...**

Dear David: What do you do after a conversational interview when they have answered all of your questions and they ask you if you have any questions for them? That just happened to me and I was stumped and I know I came off looking weak to them. What should I have said?

DAVID SAYS: I have a list of questions that you can ask [**Editors Note:** Anyone can [email](mailto:) me and I'll send you the list] however there is always a very simple fallback for situations like this...ask the interviewer about themselves. You could ask your interviewer the following, *"I'm curious as to what brought you to this company?"* People love to talk about themselves and this is a golden opportunity to do just that. Most people will run with it and talk themselves and you deaf and dumb. But if their answer is curt, come back with *"What has been some of the greatest challenges you have faced since joining this company?"* People love to talk about their big wins for the company, help them to do that and encourage them along the way. Frankly, the more the interviewer talks about themselves in the interview, the more they like you as a candidate; hard to believe but true.

Dear David: I have been the finalist candidate several times for several positions over the past year. I was even offered a position once (contingent on a reference check) yet in all three occasions I came up short and didn't get the job. I am tired of coming in second (or third), what can I do to be the one that lands the job?

David Says: Have ***you*** checked **your** own references lately? You may think that your references are helping you but they may be hurting you. Sun Tzu wrote in the Art of War to *keep your friends close and your enemies closer* (loosely translated). Clearly you have an enemy in your camp. I have seen this time and time again; a "friend" who claims to help you sabotages your opportunities over and over out of pettiness, jealousy or perhaps a perceived insult. I recommend you utilize a reference checking service. For a fee they will contact your references and find out what they are really saying about you. A Google search for "reference checking service" will provide you with many firms to choose from. Good luck.

Dear David: I have an interview with a SMALL New Jersey toy company next week. They didn't want to do a phone interview but want our first interview to be in person (which I guess is a good thing). My concern is however that they want to do the interview over dinner. I find that bizarre and I wonder if I should cancel and tell them I prefer to meet at their offices. Am I being neurotic here or is this an acceptable part of the hiring process?

DAVID SAYS: Yes and yes. Yes you are being neurotic and yes this is an acceptable practice. This time honored practice even has a name, the *dinner-view* and if it has a name that kitschy, it has to be okay. But seriously, you are way over thinking this and that leads to stress which will lead to being nervous and poor performance at the dinner-view. Here is what I suggest. First, make sure you know how to get to the restaurant and if possible, make a dry run there in advance so there is no confusion on where it is or where to park. Second, review the menu ahead of time (most restaurants have an online menu) and keep your choice simple. Have a bite to eat before dinner as you might not get a chance to eat any of your meal. You are meeting with two executives, that means they can tag team you with questions and you'll never get to eat. Prepare for that and don't be starved when you arrive. Also, don't drink alcohol. Alcohol and interviews never go well. Now, if it seems important that you have a drink (in that the CEO is *demanding* it) orders a drink with low alcohol content and just sip it. Leave it half full as that will prevent the waiter from *refreshing* it.

As an aside, I had a gentleman who was interviewing with the CEO of a toy company for the position of VP of Sales. The CEO ordered a drink and strongly suggested he do as well...so he did. He ordered a Pumpkin Martini. The CEO told me they knew right then and there he wasn't the right person for the job saying "*What kind of man orders a Pumpkin Martini?*" Oh, for your information, the CEO was a woman. Even she had the good sense to know that no legitimate sales closer drinks a pumpkin martini; even I reluctantly agreed he didn't deserve the job. The good news for you is those pumpkin martinis are out of season right now so you won't be able to make that faux pas. Also, don't order the most expensive meal, CEO's of small New Jersey toy companies generally frown on that. Be yourself, concentrate on your answers and you'll do just fine. Good luck.

Dear David: As you are aware I am 70-years-old with more experience and energy than most of my junior counter-parts. Last year alone I traveled to China 12 times and again, out-paced many of those who are younger than me. I am tired of consulting and want a full time position but nobody will hire me. I get interviews based on my amazing resume but once the client sees me in person I am quickly dispatched with. I know this is age discrimination and I am interested to know what you think I should do.

David Says: To state the obvious, I am not a lawyer and I recommend you speak to an attorney if you feel you have been discriminated against. I am disappointed at the amount of discrimination that does exist in the hiring arena and shocked that most of it is age discrimination. Be advised before proceeding on your suit that my experience shows it is extremely difficult to prove age discrimination in the hiring process. The AEDA (Age Discrimination of Employment Act) has what is deemed a "built in defense", which provides that an employer may take an action otherwise prohibited by the ADEA if the practice in question is based on "*reasonable factors other than age.*" 29 U.S.C. § 623(f)(1). If the company has interviewed and rejected "fairly" (perhaps they even rejected someone NOT in a protected class (under 40)) the situation could be very murky and again, difficult to prosecute.

I offer this advice to every candidate and especially to someone who is in a position such as yours. Drop the attitude about your age. I think you wear it on your sleeve more than you realize and I think it hurts you in the interviewing process. I think you spend too much time comparing yourself against people younger than yourself and that only accentuates your age. Stay away from such comparisons, don't discuss how much better the business was in the 1960's and be progressive in style and speech as to how you can impact the company. Ask to solve a live problem for them and showcase your talents. Most people don't want to put that much effort into the hiring process; frankly, I say about 5% do. Do your homework and find out where the client company hurts and find a way to salve their pain.

Dear David: I received a job offer that "expires" in 24 hours but need more time to decide than that, what do I do?

David Says: You received what we call an "exploding offer" and they are more common than you think. First and most important, it is important to reply quickly to their offer. Obviously you don't "love" their offer otherwise you would have jumped on it. Chances are you are their first choice but they have someone close by in the wings should you reject their offer; hence the reason they want your answer quickly. Since you are unsure of your response you can ask for more time, say 48 hours **HOWEVER** be prepared for them to stand firm to their 24 hours and walk away from you for this request. Be prepared for that contingency.

Exploding offers place pressure on candidates and some companies feel it keeps the candidates from counter-offering. A good recruiter will intercede and handle this negotiation for you. I (not you) would tell the client that is not enough time and they run the risk of losing YOU in the process. However, since you are all alone in this process, it is you who has to carry the flag in this fight. If you are prepared to be "walked" tell them you require additional time to consider their offer and you will reply no latter than a specified time/day. A reasonable company can afford 48 hours and if they can't; well, they just might not be the type/quality of company that best suits you.

Dear David: I am not having any luck finding sales work in the toy industry; do you have any advice on what industry might be a good cross-over fit for me?

David Says: While I feel you are an appropriate fit for any CPG company that sells into WalMart/Target, etc I think you will find a transition to another industry as challenging, or more, as finding work in ours. You will be competing against numerous candidates, many of whom are out of work (and will likely accept a lower salary than you require), who have considerable industry specific experience whereas you do not. A Buyer reference or referral could go a long way with an out of industry company; work your network and get a referral.

Dear David: I received a job offer for a great job with a great company but the offer was low. I countered their offer but they rejected it and stood firm. I asked for a sign-on bonus but they declined again and stood firm on their offer. They offer a great benefits package but I don't need benefits, can I ask them for the cash equivalent instead?

David Says: You can certainly ask, however don't expect them to capitulate. If the company gives benefits to everyone, they won't be too interested in **not** giving them to you (and bumping up your pay) however it has been done. Most companies don't want to do this (open Pandora's Box) because then other employees who technically don't need the insurance will go in and ask for the cash equivalent. Benefits can be valued up to 30%+ of your base pay (depending on your salary) and not many companies are interested in adding 30% in cash to your base salary. Again, you can ask...but don't expect too much in return.

Dear David: I recently joined LinkedIn and currently have 50 connections. Strange thing is that every one of those 50 is connected to you via LinkedIn. Is this an indication of how bad it really is out there – I mean, everyone connecting with a recruiter?

David Says: There is no connection between the economy and the number of people connected to any recruiter. LinkedIn is a professional networking site and the reasons for connecting ("linking" in the parlance of LinkedIn) to someone are numerous and varied. People network out of self-interest and if you allow me to paraphrase economist Adam Smith they do so...[in a desire] to achieve...economic prosperity. Networking via LinkedIn allows for greater access to information, and people, which in turn leads to the sharing of ideas. I know numerous people who are currently employed who reach out to those they are connected to for the exchange of ideas and/or the opportunity to synergize their businesses. LinkedIn also provides a viable platform from which to recruit and since *today's hired is tomorrow's fired* it will serve you well to be connected to as many recruiters as you can.

Dear David: I'm from Philly so I can ask this – why are recruiters such complete jerks? One of your competitors never takes my calls, never returns my calls but calls me for names all the time. Just recently he called me late at night – **while I was sleeping** – and woke me up. I figured this was *my* "big opportunity" so I took the call. Guess what, he just wanted more names. Come on Dave, what gives with you guys?

David Says: Every profession has a few bad apples, even recruiting. Generally, the recruiters in this industry are respectable, caring and professional individuals. I have heard stories about certain recruiters for years, but it is up to *you* not to take their calls. If Stalin or Hitler were recruiters would you take their calls? Have some respect for yourself and don't work with them any longer. I thought guys from Philly were tough?

Dear David: Another recruiter in the industry broke a story about a company that had to fire 60 employees due to economic hardships endured under President Obama's leadership. To determine which employees to fire the company owner walked around the parking lot, found 60 cars with Obama bumper stickers and promptly fired all those employees. Questions for you – who is the company (because I don't want to work for them) and why didn't you break this story? What does it feel like to be scooped? Here is the link: [Boss Fires 60 employees.](#)

David Says: The reason I didn't *break this story* is because it is false. It is an urban legend that has been around for years and frankly, I would be pretty embarrassed to have my name associated with such a story. I went to the link and it provided a screenshot with that recruiter's name, address and logo. Writer Stephen Blackwell claims "[the recruiter] has been forwarding this email around to his friends. We are the trusted recruiter in the industry and we check our facts before we forward emails or send out information so although we could be *scooped*, we'd rather be right about a story.



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