

textbooks, prosthetic devices, multimedia-imaging equipment ... whatever your specialities are and whatever is relevant to the particular position.

Along the same lines, if you were being interviewed for a position that will involve work in water management, I'd expect you to talk about water management and all the associated technology, water allocation issues, the types of data you'd collect and the problems you have overcome with farmers and other interest groups in ensuring compliance with the relevant legislation. And yes, of course, mention the name of the legislation.

As a further example, consider a job description for a forensic civil engineer that I read recently. The organisation wanted someone who could "conduct field investigations and analyse failures involving all types of structures and construction problems including residential, commercial and industrial properties; and who can determine the cause, origin, and extent of structural failures, water intrusions, construction defects and building system failures including envelope, roof, wall and glazing". They want the successful applicant to be able to do this for "foundation settlement investigations, structural assessments, site evaluations, sub-surface investigations, vibration analysis, construction site accidents and building egress accident evaluations".

Can you spot the jargon? It is nearly all jargon, isn't it? Therefore when you explain your strengths, examples and experiences talk the jargon. Talk about site visits, field investigations, failures, structures, foundation settlement investigations, sub-surface investigations and water intrusions.

Talk the jargon. I know I have mentioned it before, but it is relevant to many sections in the book and people commonly fail to do this, so it's worth repeating.

Tip 3: Make it obvious that you have the right the length of experience

Positions often require a minimum number of years in their related fields. When you describe your experience and strengths make it obvious you have the years of experience, demonstrate the benefits that your years of experience have given you, talk of the patterns you have observed, and so on. In other words, converse in a way that indicates your years of experience. Don't talk as a new graduate talks, don't talk as a generalist would talk, talk as the long-term specialist you have become.

For example, if the above forensic civil engineer position requires a minimum of five years of civil - structural experience, don't sound like someone with only two years experience. In contrast, show the panel that you are someone who understands all the ins and outs of forensic civil engineering, who knows the refinements that can only be accrued over many years, who knows how hard it is to detect some of the risks ...

... Talk about the trends in structural assessments you have observed over the past decade, talk about the number and breadth of structural problems you have investigated, talk about the

subtle differences in the problems that you have evaluated on residential, commercial and industrial properties and how these have differed from one site to another, let them know you have worked on many types of sites, and so on.

Make it obvious that you have gained valuable experience and built up an impressive number of strengths that can only have come from enduring practice in the field of failure investigation over more than ten years of experience. Sound as though you have ten years experience, if you have ten years experience.

How many years of experience have you had? What are the skills and strengths you have that could only have been developed through many years of experience, which someone with fewer years of experience would not yet have gained? What are the trends you have observed from having been around for that length of time and which people with less experience are unlikely to detect? What history do you bring that would be valuable in the job?

Do not undersell the benefit of your experience by talking at too low a level.

Tip 4: Ensure your strengths are task related at the right level

We have already talked about strengths in depth, but they have to be covered here too, as strengths also must be at the right level. Time and again people give me strengths that are not at a high enough level of complexity, or are not at a high enough level of technical proficiency. They also provide strengths that are related to their personality traits and character strengths rather than the actual task requirements of the position. Unless the job description requires certain personality traits such as motivation, a positive attitude and enthusiasm, your strengths are not at the right level.

Earlier, I suggested you watch the video that I made on job interviews with the highly talented, and very experienced, peak performance specialist, Steve Wells. Did you notice that when he tried to list his strengths, they were vague and wishy-washy? He said:

1. I'm caring, considerate, and kind.
2. I focus on what people want and on helping them to achieve their outcomes.

How would you know from that, that he is one of the world's most-in-demand presenters on Simple Energy Techniques (SET), the author of a book on "Enjoy Emotional Freedom" and a brilliant psychologist? You wouldn't. He wasn't describing his strengths at the right level.

He would have been more believable and at a more appropriate level had he said something along the lines of, "One of my strengths is my awareness of clients' feelings and my ability to observe non-verbal, subtle shifts in their feeling states and to be able to reflect these back to them in a way that they can both understand and accept. This enables people to change unhelpful feelings, such as anxiety, quickly even when the anxiety has been long-standing and

associated with traumatic experiences in the past". (His skills are even more sophisticated than this but it will at least give you the idea.)

If you haven't seen the video yet you can watch it on our job interviews YouTube channel here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=apBcb0JLVKg>

Steve is not alone in finding it difficult to articulate his strengths at a high enough level. (By the way, his answers were not fabricated; Steve's response was a genuine reaction to my question when I put him on the spot.) Again and again when I ask people what their strengths are they give me a wishy-washy list of personal attributes that most people would say they had, and that have very little to do with their jobs.

Your strengths need to relate to the level of tasks, roles and responsibilities that you will have to carry out in the position you are applying for. Don't be wishy-washy and warm and fuzzy. Be task orientated and job specific at the correct level.

For example, a woman in her late 30s came up to me after I'd completed a presentation to a large group on job interviews and positive self-promotion. I had asked them to write out their ten strengths and then evaluate them as I spoke. She asked me to review the list of strengths she had written out to describe herself.

This is what she gave me:

1. Honest.
2. Patient.
3. Hard working.
4. Analytical.
5. Gets on with people.
6. Empathetic.
7. Friendly.
8. Approachable.
9. Punctual.
10. Good team player.

As I read them I tried to work out what job she was a candidate for.

What do you think she was applying for? Was it a job involving people? A job requiring people management? A role in the not-for-profit sector, or something involving administration or even events management? No! She wasn't involved in any of that.

She worked with rocks. Yes, she was applying for a position as a senior geologist in the mining industry. It isn't obvious is it? It should be. Why isn't it obvious? Because she has not included

task related strengths, she had instead focused mainly on her personality traits. I could list all the same attributes but I could never be a geologist.

On cross examination by me, it turned out that really one of her strengths was that as a highly qualified geologist with over 18 years experience in the mining industry she was able to analyse ore samples using highly sophisticated technology. The value of the equipment she used was that it provided a very high degree of accuracy in predicting the content of the samples she analysed, and that this meant her clients could be significantly more confident in her results than if they'd had their samples analysed by other methods.

Wow! Now that's what I mean by a specific strength. Isn't that far more likely to get her the position than saying she's empathetic and friendly? Yes! Absolutely.

It should be obvious from your list of strengths, and the way that you talk about your work and future work, the level you are applying for and that you can operate at this level.

You need to pick the strengths at a high enough level – at the right level for the job.

Tip 5: Have examples at a high enough level

Frequently I have coached people who, when asked for examples to prove that their strengths really do exist, have selected examples way below the requirements of the role. Think big! Think high! Think powerful!

For example, I recall one client going for a challenging and complex position as a senior executive, who told me that one of his strengths was that, he was "good at using Excel spreadsheets". He then proceeded to give me an example of where he had used Excel spreadsheets to carry out a simple and mundane task that his personal assistant could have done with her eyes closed. He was so much better than his example suggested, and he needed much more sophisticated, complex and challenging examples to reflect this.

Match your examples to the requirements and level of the position.

For instance, if one of the essential criteria mentions that you need to be able to "diplomatically handle disagreements and maintain relationships with people at all levels and with key stakeholder groups", I don't expect your example to cover a discussion you had with a single person about a minor disagreement. The example would need to be complex so that it demonstrated all levels of people and all stakeholder groups. Thus you might select an example of your chairing a community meeting when different stakeholder groups were present and where some members of the group were hostile. In the example, you'd explain the conflict management techniques you employed and how you achieved group collaboration and co-operation by the end.