**THE UNIVERSAL RULE:** Any employer will hire any applicant as long as they are convinced that the hiring will bring more value than it costs.

Although it will never be asked in this way, all employers are looking for the answer to one simple question in an interview: “Why should I hire you?” Most candidates send an opposite communication, such as “I need a job…Can you help me?”

**Plan the Interview**—Do research about what the company specializes in. What are its strengths? What challenges has it faced? Who are its main competitors? What are some trends you have read about in the industry or in similar industries? What are all the tasks you can think of which might be involved with the position you are applying for (as you answer this one, match each one with a skill you have.) Get published information about the company—brochures? News reports? Websites? Opinions/perspectives of professionals in the business?

**Dress for Success**—Most hiring decisions are made in the first 1-5 minutes of an encounter. Your appearance and demeanor are the single most important nonverbal communication you make about yourself. Making an effort in preparing how you look sends the message that this is important to you and that you are concerned about details and professionalism.

**Manage the Interview**—Keep your eyes and attention on the interviewer. If the interviewer is wandering off the subject, use direct questions to bring it back (“Yes, that’s very interesting. By the way, could you tell me how many productions you do a month?”) Ask for opportunities to communicate information about yourself (“Would you be interested in hearing about my responsibilities when I was Assistant Stage Manager?”) Ask for feedback with questions, (“Do you think that what I have told you about my experience fits what you are looking for?”)

**Communicate Clearly**—You are 100% responsible for making sure a message is received, whether by you or the other person. Don’t answer a question you don’t understand—politely ask for a clarification or restatement. Keep observing the interviewer—restate or rephrase if he/she is not following you. Avoid superficial information—answer the question; offer what you need to in terms of promoting your own abilities, and then be quiet or ask a question. Answer questions, not statements—if the interviewer makes a speech or comments about your background, merely acknowledge it and then wait for a question or ask one yourself. Keep coming back to the main topic. Get feedback from the person as you go— (“How does that sound? Does that seem to meet your needs? Etc.”) Lighten up! Use humor—people want to hire people they can stand to work with! Make corrections mid-stream—if you feel the interview is not going well in the middle of it, change something—your energy, the topic, more questions, etc.—don’t write the whole thing off.

**Handle the Negatives**—Things are only negative in context—anything can be given a positive spin if you present it as such (lack of work experience/high grades in school, time off from work/chance to learn about life or assess life, laid off/a good educational experience.) Don’t dwell on the negatives—acknowledge them and move on (everyone has made errors.) Balance negatives with positives—never say anything self-damaging.

Don’t **Apologize for Anything about Yourself**—Your experience, your presence, your resume, your portfolio. Get your best work ready before hand, and be proud of your achievements and knowledge. **Remember: The interviewer wants you to succeed, to be the answer to his/her prayers. He/she is not the enemy.**

**Some Tactic Exercises**

#1—If you have previously looked for work, think back over any of the interviews you had and list the ways you could have been more effective.

#2—Think of a present job, or a job you would like to have. List three activities you perform that make a direct measurable contribution to the organization. Write them down in terms of accomplishments, not duties. After you have written some down, practice articulating them verbally to someone in your support circle.
#3—List a number of questions you feel would be hardest to answer (including the things you hope you won’t be asked.) Record them on a tape recorder. Then play them back and practice answering them (on tape). Then listen to your answers and critique yourself. When you are ready, get outside coaching.

#4—Before each interview, write down, on a notecard, 5 things you want to communicate to a prospective employer. On the other side, write down 5 questions you want to make sure you get answered about the position/organization.

#5—List three or more things about yourself which you feel will appear as negatives. Underneath each one, list and offsetting positive characteristic.

#6—Select 2 or 3 people who would be willing to role-play with you for mock interviews. Allow at least an hour for each session, and some feedback time.