

# Interview Competition

Hosted by Mutual of Omaha

PSE National Convention – April 2021

## Mutual of Omaha Interview Competition

### Pi Sigma Epsilon National Convention

April 2021

Mutual of Omaha is excited to host a [NEW Interview Competition](#) at the PSE National Convention. Our goal is for you to develop your interview skills and strategy in order to land your ideal job or internship. Interviews are stressful and there is more to them than most people think. This competition will not only give you the skills you need to win the job, you also get to compete and win prizes.

#### About Us:

Mutual of Omaha is a Fortune 500 company based out of Omaha, Nebraska with sales offices across the country. In our Workplace Solutions division, we focus on delivering products that address employers' (and their employees') insurance needs. Our distribution model is B2B, and our sales reps wholesale our products to insurance brokers. Click [here](#) to learn more about our division and distribution model.

Jeff Eilers, RVP West Region and Sara Cho, Manager Sales Training from Mutual of Omaha will be the facilitators and trainers for this competition. The interview guide for this competition was written by Jeff. He has been a sales professional and now a Regional Vice President, competing in group insurance sales arena, at the highest level for over thirty years.

On top of his duties as a salesperson, he has been building and training winning sales teams for twenty plus years. Sara started her career in Human Resources as a recruiter and manager in Talent Acquisition. She moved to the sales division in 2016 and has played a significant role to build the salesforce through recruiting, hiring and training top sales talent. Together they have interviewed thousands of "wanna be" salespeople and after witnessing more bad interviews than they care to imagine, they came up with this guide to help you get an internship and/or job.

#### The Competition:

The competition will include three parts to ensure you receive efficient pre-training to help prepare you for the interview.

1. Pre-training on [Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 6 PM CST](#). One-hour training course facilitated by Sara Cho and Jeff Eilers on our Sales Based Interview Guide.
2. Twenty-five -minute virtual interview to take place on [Tuesday, April 6<sup>th</sup>](#). You will receive a calendar invite for a Microsoft Teams interview with a designated Mutual of Omaha rep.
3. Post-Competition/Winner Announcement on [Friday, April 9<sup>th</sup> at 8 AM CST](#). One-hour

post competition follow-up to discuss competition results and announce winners facilitated by Sara Cho and Jeff Eilers.

#### Background Info:

You are a senior in college interviewing for the Sales Trainee Program at Mutual of Omaha (see attached job description). You will interview with a Sales Rep or Sales Manager from Mutual of Omaha and they will judge you on interview criteria based on what you learned from the interview guide and pre-training session (see rubric for judging criteria) on Thursday, April 1<sup>st</sup> at 6 PM CST.

#### Competitor Requirements:

- ❖ Complete prep work by reading Sale-Based Interview Guide, review job description and Sales Trainee website, click [here](#) to access the site.
- ❖ Attend all three parts of the competition 1. Pre-training 2. Competition/interview 3. Post-training/prize announcement
- ❖ Email your resume to Lisa Noah at [lisa.noah@mutualofomaha.com](mailto:lisa.noah@mutualofomaha.com) by Friday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>

#### Prizes:

- ❖ 1<sup>st</sup> place - \$500
- ❖ 2<sup>nd</sup> place - \$350
- ❖ 3<sup>rd</sup> place - \$150
- ❖ 10 Runners Up - \$50 Amazon gift card

#### Special Instructions:

The intention of this guide, training and competition is to help you interview with the hiring manager (decision maker) during the interview process. Most companies will have you interview with Human Resources first. Know your audience and where you are in the interview process.

# **Sales-Based Interview Guide**

## **Author, Jeff Eilers**

I believe that all things in this world (especially the business world) are based on survival of the fittest and competition. From where I sit, I see the world with a sales mindset. I believe that competition drives us and as a result we are constantly selling ourselves to get what we want. Everything is sales and the sales process. Whether it is a baby crying for its mother's milk, a three-year-old negotiating for a new toy or a lion stalking its prey, there will be a winner and a loser. In each example there is a primal strategy that is ingrained in us to be victorious. It is buried in our DNA to compete for what we want and desire. The baby milk, the toddler a toy and the lion food. Unfortunately, as we become more advanced in our thinking so does our need for preparation and strategy. Meaning we cannot simply cry, throw a tantrum in the toy aisle at the local Target or attack our helpless prey to get what we want.

The key to winning a job is no different than selling a product. People buy from people they like and trust. If you are selling yourself, you need to have a plan and understand the sales process. Follow these steps and you will be on your way to your dream job.

## **5 Steps to a Sale**

One of the concepts that I use to describe the sales process when I am teaching is 5 Steps to a Sale. It is an oversimplification of the sales process. I use it to help my salespeople understand how to open and close business. We are going to use these steps to help you secure a job.

The 5 steps are:

1. Prep work
2. Open
3. Interview/Discovery
4. Overcome objections
5. Close

The steps cannot be skipped or your interview will end in disaster. In this guide you will learn how to capitalize on the steps and turn your sales job interview into a successful sales call.

### **Step 1: Prep Work**

#### **Get to Know Yourself**

Before you start the interview process, get to know yourself. Spend some time thinking about

why you want a job in sales. What motivates you? What characteristics do you have that you think will help you be successful? (Complete the “What’s your motivation” questionnaire.)

You should not be answering the What’s Your Motivation? questions with reasons such as “Because I am a people person”, “I like people” or “I need a job”. Those are shallow and weak answers. When I am interviewing, I typically get those types of answers from people who have never really thought about what a sales job is or what they are trying to accomplish in life. Try thinking about what you have done in your life and how you could apply that to a competitive sales environment. For example, how being the soccer team captain prepared you for a sales job because you learned how to delegate, set goals and learn from your mistakes.

Think about your values and beliefs. What drives you? How do you operate day-to-day? How would they apply to your personal life and or work? For example, my values and beliefs are honesty, hard work, persistence, caring, being positive, and loyalty. These values drive all my actions.

Review your personality traits. Things such as competitiveness, being a good communicator, thick headedness, desire to be number one, “hate to lose” and so forth. Know your strengths, your weaknesses and how this can help or hurt you when you are interviewing for a job.

Reflect on what your short and long-term goals are. A short-term goal may be to secure a job with a sales training program and a long-term goal may be to secure a job that has unlimited earning potential. Think about what you want out of life and the kind of lifestyle you want. Be specific, six figures by age thirty, or to buy a home, boat, car or pay off student loans by a certain age. Maybe you want respect or to hold a position of authority. Be honest with yourself and be authentic, if you are not it will come across in the interview.

If you don’t understand what makes you tick, what you are trying to accomplish and what motivates you, you are already behind the eight ball. Once you recognize the aforementioned, you will be better at convincing someone else you are the right person for the job.

## **Research, Research, Research**

Seek out companies that have what you want in a job. Talk with people you know and respect: friends, family, recent graduates, teachers and so forth. Find out what they do, where they work, what they like and dislike about their jobs. Don’t be afraid to ask them for advice. Read magazines, articles, and search social media. Not sure what you are looking for? Try this: make a list of things you might want in a sales job. For example, my list from thirty-five years ago looked like this:

- ❖ Low base salary/high commissions
- ❖ Wholesale
- ❖ No company car/need gas or car allowance

- ❖ Real sales negotiations
- ❖ Normal work week/no weekends
- ❖ Professional Attire
- ❖ Entrepreneurial/freedom to be me
- ❖ Great culture
- ❖ Expense account
- ❖ Growth opportunities

Back in my day pharmaceutical jobs were the six-figure sales job to get. The only problem was that, based on my list, they would not work for me. They had a high base/low commission, company minivan, and no real sales negotiations. I would have been miserable.... So, create your list, be honest with yourself and then seek out different companies that meet your criteria. You deserve to work for a company that fits your criteria and desired lifestyle. It's important to know that not every company is going to be a fit. Don't be afraid to ask good questions when you are interviewing. If your goals and their goals don't align it is okay to move on. Simply let them know where you stand.

Don't be afraid to use your resources and meet people at career fairs and sales competitions. I know it can be overwhelming, intimidating and nerve-racking but the people who volunteer their time at these events are there to help and want to talk to you.

Once you have picked some companies you might want to work for, do your research on them. Search the internet to find some information. Try LinkedIn to seek out specific people. Don't be afraid to make a phone call or two. Most recent hires or even seasoned vets will be happy to tell you about their experiences in the workforce. Be prepared, be thorough and don't waste people's time.

## Create a Resume

### Dos

- ❖ Include your name and current contact information
- ❖ Include your academic accomplishments
- ❖ Include your work experience and put a sales twist on it. Describe jobs as they relate to specific and quantifiable results.
- ❖ Use action words: applied, competed, developed, distributed, implemented,

maintained, motivated, performed, participated, represented, worked, won.

- ❖ Create a summary of yourself that makes you stand out! Think elevator pitch. Give some interesting facts on the resume. Everyone has good grades and a part-time job. I personally like hobbies, clubs and so forth because I am looking for outgoing salespeople.
- ❖ Pick a format that fits your experience, education and skills.
- ❖ Read the job description and then reread it.
- ❖ Make the resume about the employer, how hiring you will benefit the company.
- ❖ As a college student put your education at the top of the resume since you may not have much work experience related to the job you are applying for.

## **Don'ts**

- ❖ Don't make it too long, one page preferred.
- ❖ Don't use first person pronouns—I and me.
- ❖ Don't generalize, be specific.
- ❖ Don't list too many competencies.
- ❖ Don't misrepresent information.
- ❖ Don't list all the things that you are looking to receive if you get hired. e.g. "Looking forward to gaining experience to advance my career."
- ❖ Don't send your resume to every employer you meet, be selective and do your research.

## **Optional**

Cover letters, references or letters of recommendation are optional. Nine times out of ten this is just fluff. However, some employers may require them. If you do decide to include one these items make it specific, short and to the point. No one wants to read a one-page cover letter.

## **Yes, there is MORE prep work . . . Prepare for Your Interview**

Remember you are selling yourself so approach your interview just like a sales call. If you are new to sales and you have not interviewed much, here are some basic tips that will put you ahead of your competition.

Remember these words “selling ain’t telling”. Good salespeople ask good questions and listen intently to the response. They then analyze and diagnose the responses to their questions and find a solution. Recognize that in an interview situation, the employer has a problem, he needs a great salesperson. **You** can be the solution; he just doesn’t know it yet.

## What’s Written is Real

What you write becomes reality! All the successful people I know write it down no matter what it is. I always take the time to write down my ideas, my goals, and I even write scripts to master what I say.

Think about a great movie you have watched. The actors deliver witty dialog and you think “man that was good” as if they were just making it up as they went along. A good script is written and rewritten. The actors study it, learn it, and perfect it after multiple takes. Your interview should not be different. So, write down what you want to say and accomplish. Write down good open-ended questions.

## Questions from the Interviewer

Think about the questions you might be asked and be prepared with good answers (write them down).

You may get questions such as:

- 1· Why do you want to be in sales?
- 2· Why do you want to work for us?
- 3· Tell me about a time you failed.
- 4· How do you set goals?
- 5· How did you hear about this opportunity?

Now think about the answers.

For example: The answer to the first question: "Why do you want to be in sales?"

"I am very competitive and goal-oriented. In school I took a lot of classes and I enjoyed my sales classes the best. Our class projects and activities challenged me. I enjoyed preparing, problem solving, presenting, and winning sales competitions."

The answer to question two "Why do you want to work for us?" is almost a trick question. Most people will answer it with a product puke and will **tell, tell, tell** the interviewer about themselves.

"I am hardworking and eager to learn. You are number one and I want to be the best so it's a good match." (Expected answer and boring.)

Try something such as this instead: "I've done research on your company and even reached out to a couple of your employees. From what I have heard your company has a great culture and a get-it-done attitude. Everyone seems to work hard and get along. That's what I am looking for." (Pre-frame that you did research and have an opinion about why it might be a good fit.)

The people interviewing you will appreciate the depth of your answer and it shows them you have prepared for the interview.

Don't shoot from the hip with your answers, think about them!

## Questions From You

Do not be afraid to ask the interviewer meaningful questions. You both are trying to figure out if you are a good match. Anticipate the answers you will get. Questions you could ask:

- ❖ How long have you been at \_\_\_\_\_ and how did you find out about the job?
- ❖ Tell me two things you like about your company.
- ❖ How many new salespeople are you hiring this year?
- ❖ Tell me about your training program.
- ❖ Tell me about career paths at\_\_\_\_\_.
- ❖ What advice do you have for someone like me?
- ❖ What do you look for when you are interviewing?
- ❖ Tell me about a typical day at as a salesperson.
- ❖ If I am hired who would I report to?
- ❖ Tell me about your company culture.

## Step 2: Open

### Intro/Build Rapport/Purpose

It's simple. People like to buy from people they like and trust. The best way to get people to like you is to open well. Your success is predicated on the first few seconds of an initial

meeting. People will form an opinion of you based on your appearance and the first few things that come out of your mouth. Your goal during the open is to make people feel comfortable with you. You do this by introducing yourself, building rapport and stating your purpose/asking for help. (I should note that a professional appearance is expected. That means haircut, shave, professional attire, removal of unnecessary earrings, nose rings and bracelets.)

## **Intro**

Always introduce yourself. That means a strong hello followed by your name. Sounds simple but you would be surprised by how many people walk into the interview room and forget to introduce themselves. Nerves and pressure will do funny things to your brain. When I get nervous my brain turns to mush. I overcome this phenomenon by writing down what I am going to say. As stupid as it sounds, I always write, "Hello my name is Jeff" at the top of my note pad to keep me on track.

If you go by a nickname, make sure you put that on your resume and the application. The person interviewing you will be meeting a lot of people and you stand a strong chance of being eliminated if he cannot remember your name. Years ago, a friend of mine sent me a candidate he called Scott. During the interviews, my friend called and asked how Scott was doing. I told him that Scott was a no show. Confused, he hung up. He later called and asked if I was interviewing someone named James. I said yes and he said Scott and James were the same guy. Really . . . don't make it harder for yourself.

## **Rapport**

Build meaningful rapport immediately. Stay away from expected clichés such as did you see the big game or how was your weekend. I always look for something/someone in common or something I respect about the person I am meeting with. My go-to is what I call the name game. I like to find people we have in common but that might be hard for someone just entering the business world. Maybe respect would be easier.

## **State your purpose/Ask for help**

Make sure you state your purpose. Let your interviewer know what you are trying to accomplish in your interview. A simple statement will help set the tone and get your interview off and running. Oftentimes when I do not hear a purpose statement, I will ask the candidate what he wants to accomplish during our time together and he just sits there or says, "I am just really excited to be here for the interview."

An example of what my open might look like would be:

Intro:

Hi. My name is Jeff Eilers. I am so excited to be here. Thank you very much for this opportunity to interview with you.

Respect Statement:

After doing a bit of research I saw that your company was voted number-one place to work by HR weekly. That's awesome.

OR

Someone in Common:

I met Sydney from your Atlanta office at the PSE career fair. I am assuming you know Sydney, right? She really loves her job and she told me that the training program, while hard was really great. When I find a job, I want to be as happy as her.

Purpose:

Today I would like to find out more about your company, its culture, where you think you are heading, and what you are looking for in a salesperson to see if I am a good fit!

## Step 3: Interview/Discovery

At this point, it is time to have dialog and Q & A. **Both** parties should be asking questions to obtain information and answering questions to clarify (this means you as the candidate need to be asking questions as well). The goal should be to understand how somebody thinks, what he believes in, what he thinks is important and if both parties are a good fit. This is the reason I spend so much time writing down questions and answers in the prep work portion of my interview.

Try to stick to facts. Facts will help you stay away from arguments and traps.

If somebody asks you what your best quality is, stay away from opinions and answer with facts. Do not say "I am a hard worker". That statement is subjective and your opinion. Chances are you will get a rebuttal or an argument from your future employer. Try saying, "My best quality is that I am true to my beliefs; honesty, integrity and hard work." Nobody can argue with that.

If you are asked for some examples describing hard work or a time that you had to overcome an obstacle be prepared with an answer. You may say, "I paid for most of my college. As a result, I wanted to graduate a semester early so I could save money and start my job search early. I had to buckle down and figure out how to take sixteen hours and continue my part-time job the last few semesters. I put my work ethic to the test." Or "I had a point where my grades started to drop midsemester. I realized pretty quickly that I would have to make some changes. I decided to hit the library and cut out some of my extracurricular activities. It paid off, and I graduated with a 3.4 GPA."

During your interview you will encounter objections, roadblocks and things that you did not see coming. Don't panic. Try reframing the question with a question and give yourself some time to use your sales skills from step 4 to answer and overcome.

## Step 4: Overcoming Objections

When somebody objects to one of your answers or questions your ability, don't get mad or panic. Usually, the interviewer is simply testing you, so be smart, relax and use the tool I call LAER. LAER is an acronym for Listen, Acknowledge, Explore and Respond. Years ago, Jack Carew taught me to use LAER. Believe me when I tell you it works. Listen to the objection. Acknowledge that you heard them and that you might know where they are coming from. Now explore or seek to understand what they really meant. Don't apply your meaning. Try to see it from their point of view. Finally, once you have a grasp, Respond.

The interviewer might say, "Well I don't know if you are a good fit. You simply do not have enough sales experience." You can panic and react by puking about how hard you will work and what you lack in experience you will make up for in enthusiasm. Or you can handle the objection correctly.

**Listen:** What is the interviewer really saying? Is he saying that he only wants experience or is it an excuse to move you out the door? (Remember he took the interview knowing you had no experience.)

**Acknowledge:** "I hear your concern and if I were in your shoes, I may feel the same way."

**Explore:** "I am curious, explain to me what type of experience you are looking for?"

He may say, "Well, we typically want someone who has had at least one year of cold calling."

**Respond:** "Okay I understand . . . you know I was in charge of our fraternity rush program for the last two years. I successfully met and pledged more quality people into our program than the last four chairmen combined. Networking and approaching new people on the phone or in person are things that I excel at. Selling the idea of Greek life is tough enough let alone competing with all of the other great frats on campus. Is this enough to make you feel better about my lack of experience?"

Keep moving through the questions and objections until you get to a place that you feel you and the interviewer are on the same page. Now it's time to enter Step 5.

## Step 5: Close

All right, you want it; ask for it. Go ahead and close! At or near the end of the interview you need to be thinking of closing or walking away.

If you are not interested, thank the interviewer for his time and let him know you're not interested. As a salesperson I always want to know where I stand in a sale, why I win and why I lose. An interview is no different.

You may say, "I really appreciate your time. I thought this interview was great. Based on what I've learned today though I do not think this job is for me."

Be prepared to answer why. They may clear up something you did not understand and you will be back in the hunt or it may confirm your thoughts.

If you are interested, close the deal. If he asks if you have any questions, say yes! If you have done a thorough job in the discovery process all your questions should be answered. If you are satisfied with what you have heard, then ask **one** question. **When do I start?** This is a very bold statement and may help you secure the job right then and there. If the interviewer is not ready to hire you, ask him what his process is, what objections he has about you or why he has reservations. Do not step lightly here. You are a salesperson interviewing for a sales job, so close! There are many techniques here; soft close, hard close, hypothetical close, the takeaway and so forth. Bottom line, it shows them that you are interested and will help you continue the interview process. Side note, if it is not a sales job the rules still apply. Ask for the job. Do not hint around employment. Let the employer know that you love the opportunity and that you want to work for him. Asking what the next steps are or saying "Thanks for having me. I look forward to hearing from you" are not closing statements. They are weak and mitigated. Be bold and know what you want. You might actually get it!

## Recap and Script

This guide is designed to give you a head start in the interview process and to get you thinking about the person sitting across the table from you. What his goals are, not just what your goals are. It is designed to help you prepare and think about what you want and how to get it. It is not to teach you all the sales techniques known to man. My advice to you is do your best and go make it happen!

## Use the 5 Steps

- ❖ Research and prepare
- ❖ Who are you and why are you interviewing?
- ❖ Intro/Open

- ❖ Build rapport/Look for something in common or respect/State purpose
- ❖ Interview/Ask and answer questions
- ❖ Listen and take notes
- ❖ Analyze
- ❖ Overcome objections (LAER)
- ❖ Summarize/Restate what you heard and answered
- ❖ Close/Ask for the job

Script all aspects of your interview from the open to the close. I do this for every sales call I make, and an interview is no different.

## Your script may look like this:

Introduction (shake hands)

You: Hello my name is Taylor Jones.

Interviewer, Jane: Hello Taylor, Jane Anderson, please, have a seat.

(State purpose)

You: Jane before we start, I wanted to thank you for having me out today. I am looking forward to getting to know you and your company. I am also looking to answer all your questions to see if I am a good fit so that I can join your sales team.

**Build rapport. You are looking for something you respect or something you have in common to break the ice. It will help you break down barriers and posturing. If the people interviewing you, feel a connection to you, where you are from or who you know, they will be more honest and forthcoming with you.**

You: Jane, I was reviewing your LinkedIn page and noticed you have been here for nine years. I am curious what do you love about your company?

Jane: I really like the way we operate. We are progressive and entrepreneurial, not afraid to try new things or listen to new ideas.

You: Wow that's great, sounds like the kind of place I want to be.

You hand Jane your resume and say something to the effect of: Jane where do we begin?

Jane: (Jane will go on about what they are looking for or who they are or may even get right

into the questions.) Here at XYZ, we pride ourselves on hiring only the best. We usually take on thirty to forty trainees a year and put them through a twelve-week training course. Tell me how did you hear about the job?

*At this point you should be taking notes. You should be looking for things you like that mesh with your strengths or things you don't like. During the interview or discovery process listen for answers to your questions and ask questions to get answers to the items on your list. As you listen you should be looking for commonalities and things you respect. You can continue to build rapport throughout the interview process. You should also be thinking about questions you have around what he is saying. In other words, be curious about what he is saying. Remember that you have to meet your needs as well in order to have a good deal.*

*Example of interview notes and questions you might be thinking of:*

- ❖ *Only the best*
- ❖ *Thirty to forty trainees/good culture?/how many have you hired already?/how many are you hiring now?*
- ❖ *Twelve-week training/high on list/what does that entail/how many people make it through three months, six months, one year/how soon after the training do your students start making sales?*

You: Wow Jane, that sounds great, training is important to me and is high on my list of things I am looking for in a future employer. I actually heard about the job at the PSE career fair last month. I met Linda and John, and they told me how much they have enjoyed their first year. Do you know Linda and John?

Jane: Yes, I hired them. They are great.

**Rather than sit there and wait for Jane to pepper you with questions you should ask a few questions of your own.**

You: Hey Jane, I know you have a lot of questions for me, but I have a question about your training program. I really believe that learning the fundamentals is super important and I'm curious what does your twelve-week training entail?

*Listen and take notes. Continue this exchange of taking notes and asking questions.*

Jane: We assign everyone a mentor. We then take the trainees through a series of training modules including product and sales skills. We combine that with on-the-job training and allow your mentor to take you on calls and show you the ropes. The mentor will help you even after you complete your twelve weeks. Did that answer your question?

You: Yes. Thank you.

*During this portion of the interview, Jane is going to ask you questions as well. Be prepared to answer based on your well thought out answers and what you have heard in the interview.*

Jane: So, tell me, Taylor, why do you want to be in sales?

You: I've thought about this a lot. First off, I am very competitive and goal oriented and during my sales courses in college I discovered that a sales environment allows me to excel in these areas. I also enjoy getting in front of people and trying to figure out how or why they are going to buy. Did that fully answer your question? (Do not say I am a people person; I like people, or I don't want to sit behind a desk.)

Jane: Yes. Tell me about your biggest failure.

You: Well Jane, I would say even if I lose, I do not view that as a failure. I always prepare and do my best. If I don't meet the outcome I wanted, I simply look at what I did right and what I did wrong and make adjustments for the next time.

Jane: Well Taylor you have answered all of my questions. Have I answered all of yours?

You: Yes, all but one. Jane, I want to thank you for your time with me today. I think this meeting has been very informative and worthwhile. I have learned so much about you, your company and its culture. I think it is a place that I would thrive in. **When do I start?**

## Follow-up

For this exercise you will not be conducting follow up. In the real interview process, however, you should follow up accordingly. Meaning that you should do what feels right. Do not wait. If you had a great interview, follow up immediately. **Do Not Wait.** I will say that following up with email is subpar. Be creative and different. Think about how you follow up and what your competition will be doing. Do not be the norm . . . be better than that.