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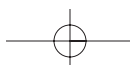
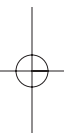
Chapter

**1**

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# Personal and Family Data

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## CHAPTER 1

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### DELIVERY

Of all the questions you'll be asked, personal and family ones appear to be the most statistical. For this reason, most job-seekers answer them in a static way, with name, rank, and serial number.

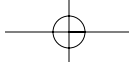
They're also often emotionally charged because interviewers ask about personal perils, family feuds, and status symbols. Therefore, rehearsing your lines is particularly important because what you *say* is as important as what you *convey*.

While most of the questions in this area have only marginal value in determining your qualifications to perform a specific job, you must get *past* them so you can get down to business with the interviewer. That's why they're called "KO" factors. Wrong answers mean *knock out* in Round 1; right answers will keep you in the ring for a while.

Personal and family items are invariably at the top of resumes, on the front of application forms, and at the beginning of interview checklists. Because these documents are the cue cards used in the actual interview, expect the questions in Act 1, Round 1.

If first impressions really count (and they *really* do to overworked people who are interviewing), then now is your chance to shine. Most film critics will tell you they lock into a review within five minutes. If they watch longer, it's either to enjoy the show or to justify their negative rating. That's why lawyers often see judges writing their decisions from the bench soon after the opening statements. Yours will, too. Your judge is overworked.

Greet the interviewer with the Magic Four Hello:



## PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA

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1. *A smile.* If you can't fake it, just think about how lucky the interviewer is to be meeting you.
2. *Direct eye contact.* If it's too much for you, look at the bridge of the interviewer's nose.
3. *Introduce yourself.* Say, "Hi, I'm (first name) (last name). It's a pleasure meeting you."
4. *A firm but gentle handshake.* Rehearse. No live shark; no dead flounder.

Then, once you're on the set (the interviewer's office):

1. Head for the chair on your favored side (right if you are right-handed, left if you are left-handed). If you're ambidextrous, you can take center stage. Just be sure there's a chair behind you.
2. Stand there until you're asked to be seated. (If you're not asked, it's probably because you've *already* drawn an SRO audience!)

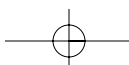
Now, sit up straight, feet on the floor (women may cross their legs), and look the interviewer in the eye.

Lights . . . Camera . . .

## SCRIPT

### Just the Facts

The first seven questions that follow might have appeared on the employment application you completed prior to the interview. Even if you answered them already, be prepared



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**CHAPTER 1**

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again with short, direct, upbeat answers. Most applicants answer either with statistics (bad) or excuses (worse). With a little practice, you'll really shine when it counts most—at the beginning.

**1. What are your parents' occupations?**

(Think your answer through. Avoid saying anything negative, like "My father was just a janitor" or "My mother didn't work." Show pride in your background and heritage, even if you have come to regard it as very humble: "My father was a custodial supervisor, and my mother ran a busy home.")

Be careful about overstating, too. Avoid an answer like "My father is the leading brain surgeon in the state and my mother is a retired Superior Court judge." In such cases, "My father is a surgeon and my mother is an attorney and former judge" positions you properly.)

My father is a \_\_\_\_\_, and my mother is a \_\_\_\_\_.

**2. Do you live with your parents?**

(It's okay if you do. Even mature adults are finding it financially beneficial to share expenses with their parents. Give the impression that you made a responsible financial decision.)

Yes, I moved back in with my parents after I discovered that more than half my net income was being used to

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**PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA**

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pay for rent and utilities. We have an economic arrangement that allows me to save for my future, while I'm around to help them maintain our home. We all benefit, and we have been able to develop a strong friendship as three adults.

**3. Were you in the military service? Where and when?**

(If yes, give dates and where stationed. Mention briefly any training or experience that relates directly to your target job.)

I served as a \_\_\_\_\_ in the \_\_\_\_\_  
from \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_.

OR (if no)

I was never in the military.

**4. What is the year and model of your car?**

(If the job for which you are applying requires you to use your own car for company business and if you really are riding a set of wheels, mention the make and model of the reliable car you intend to buy soon. After all, you *do, don't* you?)

I own a \_\_\_\_\_.

OR

I will be buying a \_\_\_\_\_.

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**CHAPTER 1**

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**5. Do you own or rent your home?**

(This is one of those questions that attempts to establish your stability. The translation is “Are you a responsible member of the community?” Answer briefly and honestly. If you are renting while you save to buy your own home, mention where you’ve been looking. If you haven’t, start now with a call to a local real estate agent.)

(I/We) purchased our home in \_\_\_\_\_ (name of town) in \_\_\_\_\_ (year).

OR

(I am/We are) currently renting a (house/unit) in \_\_\_\_\_ (name of town), but (I’m/we’re) looking for (my/our) own home in the area.

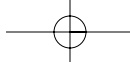
**6. How far do you live from this company?**

(If you currently live farther away than what would be considered a reasonable commuting distance, you might mention that you would be willing to locate nearer the company’s offices if hired.)

I clocked it on my way here today. I’m exactly 10 miles door-to-door, and it took me 17 minutes to get here. A breeze.

OR

The ride here today was 40 miles. With moderate traffic, it took almost an hour. I don’t mind commuting that far twice a day—I like to get an early start on my day,



## PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA

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anyway. If I were hired, however, I would probably investigate the real estate market in the immediate area.

### 7. Do you speak a foreign language?

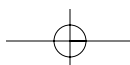
(If you speak another language fluently, by all means say so. This is an asset. However, if you took Spanish or French in school but cannot remember more than two or three phrases, simply mention that you understand the language better than you speak it. Try this answer:)

I studied \_\_\_\_\_ (Spanish/French/German) in \_\_\_\_\_ (high school/college) and enjoyed it. I'd like to get some language tapes and increase my fluency.

## RELATIONSHIPS AND HOME LIFE

You're probably aware that certain questions cannot be asked by an employer prior to hiring an applicant. These include questions that directly or indirectly probe race, color, religion, national origin, age, gender, marital status, physical handicap, medical condition, arrest information, or other unlawful criteria.

In spite of the law, illegal questions get asked every day, and company attitudes and interviewer prejudices creep into every personnel situation. You can choose not to respond, you can tell the interviewer you intend to file a charge of discrimination, or you can lecture to the interviewer about civil



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**CHAPTER 1**

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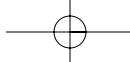
rights. These things might make you feel better momentarily, but they will likely result in an *apology*, not an *offer*. Wouldn't you rather answer the question, get the job, and change the employer's attitude? Everybody will win if you get hired.

**8. How much time do you spend with your family?**

(Be careful to project a balanced attitude here. This can be a touchy subject. You might be dealing with an interviewer who is work oriented and lives by the credo "Work is not only the way to make a living; it's the way to make a life." Or you might be talking to one who recognizes the importance of family. Before you answer, scope out the situation: Look around the office for family photos, desk accessories made by children, and the like. The following is your basic generic answer. Customize it as necessary.)

I suppose I spend an average amount. My family is important to me. My great relationship with them gives me the best reason in the world to succeed in my career. In that way, they are an inspiration.

I have a responsibility to my job as well as to my family, since I've made a strong commitment to both. I like to be there for them when they need me, but they also understand and accept the commitment I have made to my work. So I spend my time accordingly.



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## PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA

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### 9. In your opinion, what makes a happy marriage?

(Another loaded question. Even if unmarried, you have probably developed some ideas on this subject. Again, keep it balanced.)

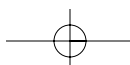
I think a good marriage is based on mutual respect and trust, with a lot of sharing, communicating, and giving. If you can't express your feelings in a sensitive but candid way, your marriage will undoubtedly suffer.

Learning to communicate effectively with and to understand the needs of another in your personal relationships teaches you how to get along better on the job. And a good marriage frees you to be more successful in your work. All the successful people I've known have had their personal lives in order. So a happy marriage is worth the effort.

### 10. Who is the boss in your family?

(Unfortunately, there are still interviewers out there asking this type of question. Remember, avoid an angry reaction. Allow for the possibility that the interviewer is just trying to lure you into saying something without thinking. Just smile confidently, and say:)

We operate our family on democratic principles, with the adults making ultimate decisions on what is best for the children. My (husband/wife) and I are equal partners.



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**CHAPTER 1**

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**11. Is your spouse employed? Will there be a conflict?**

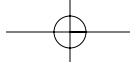
(This is one of those logical but unnecessary questions that is often asked. If you answer it in a neutral way, the interviewer will go on to something else. Yet, if you indicate there is a conflict, it could reduce your chances of being hired. The following answer usually works well:)

Yes, my \_\_\_\_\_ (husband/wife) is a \_\_\_\_\_ (computer programmer/astronaut) for \_\_\_\_\_. We have always been a two-career couple, and we have made the arrangements necessary to accommodate our careers.

**12. What contributed to your divorce? What have you learned from this experience?**

(This is getting personal. It might not be within the bounds of good taste, but worded this way, the question is probably legal.)

We married very young and made some mistakes we didn't know how to correct. We lost touch with each other, and eventually it was too late to salvage anything. I've learned that, to earn respect and honesty, you have to communicate openly and be prepared to *give* honesty and respect. It was a painful lesson, and I have no intention of repeating it.



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**PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA**

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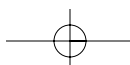
**13. Describe your relationship with your children.**

I was surprised by my reaction to \_\_\_\_\_ (motherhood/fatherhood). My \_\_\_\_\_ (husband/wife) and I waited a long time to have kids and weren't sure what kind of parents we would be. We have come to appreciate our children's day-to-day activities, and sometimes we wonder what we ever did for fun before they were born.

**14. What child care arrangements have been made for your children?**

(While this question was rarely, if ever, asked of a male applicant in the past, it is and should be an employer's concern no matter who is applying for the job. Today, more than half the children in the United States are being raised by single heads of household or have two working parents, and the lack of quality child care is a problem that can intrude on any parent's work life. Letting the interviewer know you have worked out a solid solution will show your sense of responsibility to those important people in your life, as well as to your work.)

Our children attend an excellent nursery school and day care center near our home. The youngest is there all day, and the oldest is dropped off after school. Usually, my \_\_\_\_\_ (husband/wife) picks them up at night, while I have responsibility for morning drop-off. If work commitments prevent both of us from



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**CHAPTER 1**

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getting there by 6 o'clock, when they close, there is a responsible neighbor who picks them up, brings them home, and prepares dinner for them.

## **Personal Management**

These questions relate to the ways in which you arrange your personal life. The philosophy behind them is that personal decisions provide clues to your attitude and behavior on the job. Be prepared with answers that will show responsible, mature attitudes and actions now, even if there are some hazy spots in your past.

### **15. Do you keep and follow a personal budget?**

(Any of the three alternatives given, all of which reflect responsibility and good judgment, are acceptable.)

Yes.

OR

Not item by item, but I don't live beyond my means.

OR

Generally, yes. I've intentionally allowed for flexibility to take advantage of good investment opportunities or exceptional savings on household purchases.

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PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA

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**16. Do you own a life insurance policy?**

Yes.

OR

No, I don't believe life insurance would be an efficient use of my money now. When I have dependents for whom I am responsible, I will buy life insurance. Right now, I prefer to invest my money.

**17. Do you have a savings plan?**

(Almost everyone has a savings *plan*, even if they have only one account with a minimum balance. He or she didn't ask you if you *follow* your plan. So the answer will invariably be "Yes." If applicable, you can add the following:)

Yes, I contribute \_\_\_\_\_ (5 percent/10 percent) of my net pay to a regular savings account.

**18. Are you in debt?**

(Ouch! This is another one of those I wish I didn't have to prepare you to answer.)

Well, I have a \_\_\_\_\_ (mortgage/auto loan/charge card balance), but my personal balance sheet is definitely in the black. I don't extend my credit beyond what I can afford to pay.

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**CHAPTER 1**

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**19. Have you ever been refused a bond?**

(If not, then "No." Period. If "Yes," consider carefully the reason, and what has changed in your personal life since that time. Explain the situation briefly and sincerely.)

Yes, that happened in \_\_\_\_ (year) due to \_\_\_\_\_

However, I \_\_\_\_\_.

**20. Do you have a valid driver's license?**

Yes.

OR

No, but if this job requires someone who drives, I would apply for a license as soon as possible.

**21. Have you ever had a driver's license revoked? Why?**

(If no, then the answer is simple. If yes, hopefully the circumstances that led to such an occurrence are long in your past. Your best bet is to think carefully about your own personal situation, and find a way of presenting it in the most positive light. For example:)

When I was a teenager, I ran up some points, and my license was suspended briefly. I have held my driver's

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PERSONAL AND FAMILY DATA

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license now for \_\_\_\_\_ years without a single moving violation in that time.

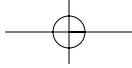
**22. When was your last physical examination?**

It was \_\_\_\_\_ (date), and my health is excellent.

**23. Do you have any chronic health conditions we should consider?**

(If not, then simply answer "No." The question is illegal, and the interviewer is asking for your opinion. The only time you should answer this question positively is if you do have a condition that will become evident in a preemployment physical, like diabetes. In that case, you might answer:)

Nothing that would interfere with my work performance. I have had diabetes for \_\_\_\_ years, but I control it very successfully and unobtrusively. It has never become an issue in my work; and, aside from my family, only my doctor knows. It isn't a secret—it just has nothing to do with performing on the job.



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