

# Don't just sound great; show what you can do

Andrea Kay • Gannett • November 30, 2010

It's all well and good to be able to tell an interviewer what you are good at doing: that you are a magnificent leader, an extraordinary project manager, a skilled liaison who everyone wants on their team.

But trust me, it's not enough.

Here's the problem. You can have all the talent in the world. But I, the employer, am still taking a big risk by hiring you. I don't want to spend \$10,000 to \$30,000 to hire and train you only to find out six months later you were full of hot air.

I want proof.

I'll get my proof when you tell me how you have made past employers productive and profitable or made a difference somehow. This proof is what helps me see that you are the solution to my problems. It makes me say, "OK, I see how you did this in the past. That's what I want you to do for me." Now most employers won't sit there in an interview and say, "Give me proof." Some may not even know that's what they are rooting around for. They'll more likely say, "Can you give me an example of how you've done that?" Or "Tell me about a time when you . . ." But what you need to realize is that most of your competition hasn't taken the time to figure out their "proof" either. They've heard it's a good idea to think through such examples, but they haven't done it.

When you do, believe me, you'll be miles ahead of everyone else.

So let's figure out your proof now.

Go grab some paper. (By the way, this works whether you have loads of experience, have just graduated from school or have done mostly volunteer or unpaid work.)

Write down a specific time when you used your strengths to solve a problem to meet a company's need or to successfully complete a class or volunteer project. You may be thinking that what you did wasn't measurable. But trust me again, everything has a result. Whether you're moving tickets for a theater performance or putting software into service that will let a bank support capital markets and private banking, it's all about results.

To get you going, here are some examples of how people make things better and achieve results. They do the following:

- Correct internal problems.
- Expand or improve something.
- Make something look better.
- Increase business, membership or attendance.
- Reduce error rates.
- Obtain more information.
- Raise profiles of companies or events.
- Cut downtime.
- Make someone look good.
- Meet standards.
- Devise or streamline a system.
- Avoid problems

- Increase customer satisfaction
- Raise conformance ratings.

Now going back to what you wrote down, describe what the situation or problem was, what you did to solve it and what the result was. Here's an example.

**The problem:** I was a volunteer in Amnesty International when dozens of people were being held as political prisoners in a particular area. **What you did:** I coordinated and put into place a letter-writing campaign and fund raiser. **The result:** Our efforts led to the eventual release of these political prisoners.

I realize this accomplishment has a lot more to it, and that I have whittled it down to essentials. But you can go into greater detail if your interviewer wants more.

For now, be ready to cite four to six juicy examples of how you've applied your strengths, which proves how incredible you are. If you don't, when asked for examples of your abilities, you'll fumble around and end up saying: "I have a lot of experience leading people to get great results." With that kind of response, you're asking the employer to make a great leap of faith to hire you. Because, I assure you, you won't sound so fabulous.