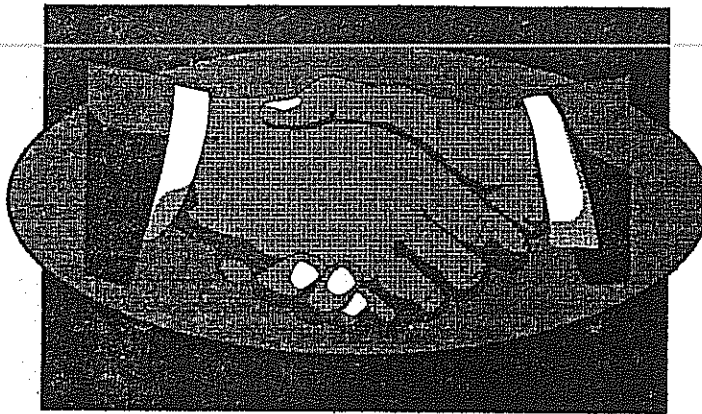




# Interview Handbook



IDEAS AND TIPS FOR  
TURNING INTERVIEWS INTO OFFERS

## Interview Confirmation

Candidate: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Your interview is confirmed for \_\_\_\_\_ at \_\_\_\_\_.

This booklet will provide you with valuable interviewing tips that can give you a *winning edge* over other, less prepared, candidates. Review it thoroughly and prepare your responses and questions from the suggestions contained in the packet. As always, feel free to call us if you have any questions or concerns.

Good Luck!

Prepared especially for you by

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***This MRI booklet credits contributions from the following sources:***

***The Interview; A Guide To Obtaining a Job Offer***

by Chuck Russell & Associates, Management Consultants, Houston Texas

***Courier Journal & Times* article: "Careers"**

by Joyce Lain Kennedy

***Win The Interview - Win The Job***

by Theodore Pettus

Thank You Letter from:

***How to Turn an Interview into a Job***

by Jeffrey G. Allen

## Appearance: Women

### Female Candidates

- Fingernails should be clean; manicured if possible. Choose subtle low-key colors over bright fashion colors for nail polishes.
- Wear a suit or tailored dress in basic navy or gray. Blouses should also be tailored and color coordinated. Don't wear big bows or ties.
- Avoid exotic hairstyles and excessive makeup. Hair should be neat, clean and brushed with your jacket off. Makeup should be light and natural looking.
- Use deodorant and avoid colognes or fragrances.
- Jewelry should be limited and subtle. Don't wear jewelry or pins that indicate membership in religious or service organizations.
- A closed toe pump that is color coordinated with your outfit is appropriate for an interview. Avoid open-toed shoes or sling-backs.
- For good posture cross legs at the ankles, not at the knees.
- Maintain good eye contact
- *Do not take portable phones or beepers into an interview.*

## The Interview Itself

A typical sequence of events are:

- Interview with personnel (general questions, review of the company and their benefits.)
- Interview with the immediate supervisor and peers.
- Interview with the hiring authority (manager, etc.).
- Shake hands firmly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Maintain a high energy level. Sit up with back straight. No coffee (to spill) and no smoking.
- It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises, but do not fake knowledge. Be yourself. Poise, confidence, and self-respect are of great importance.

If there is interest on both parties:

- Testing (physical drug test, written test, and proof of employment eligibility).
- Offer.

Personnel will usually provide company information and available benefits. Thorough review and questions concerning benefits should be addressed after the interview. Remember, the interviewers are trying to see how you can contribute to the company.

Conduct yourself with confidence and determination to get the job. You have other options, of course, and your interviewer knows this, but wants to think that you want a job with this company. Don't play coy. Sell yourself. This is your first meeting and the position, as well as future promotions, may depend on your presentation. Are you going to sell them on the idea of hiring you, or will they sell you on the idea that this job is not for you? You must present a positive attitude to the prospective employer. You must NOT seem disinterested or appear to be job shopping.

It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises, but do not fake knowledge.

The interview should be a two-way conversation. Ask questions of the interviewers. This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision afterwards. The questions you have prepared can be asked to the different people you see.

Remember, the objective of the interview is to obtain an offer. During the interview, you must gather enough information concerning the position to make a decision.

## Typical Interview Questions & Responses

You should give complete but **brief** and relaxed answers to questions. When possible use questions as a basis for developing information that you want to make sure is presented. Continue to sell yourself in a positive way.

- Describe jobs in terms of duties and give indicators of good performance such as raises, sales volume, and promotions.
- Include short stories involving problems or challenges and how you were able to solve or overcome them. Describe the results you achieved (see PAS worksheet on page 13).

### *A. Exploring your Background Questions*

#### ***Tell me about yourself.***

- Answer these questions in terms of the qualifications required of the position.
- Keep responses concise and brief and avoid being derogatory or negative about previous jobs and bosses.
- "Tell-me-about-yourself" means, "Tell me about your qualifications." Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications. Start with education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.)

#### ***What are your greatest strengths?***

- Interviewers like to hear abstract qualities. Loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, fast-learner, technical skills, politeness, and promptness, expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid the simple generalization "I like people". It's not a good answer.

#### ***What are your greatest weaknesses?***

- Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state "not being able to go to work on Mondays", or "coming in late", etc.). Present your weaknesses as professional strengths, (i.e., "Sometimes work too hard to make sure things are done accurately").

### *B. Personality Questions*

#### ***What do you do in your spare time?***

- Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Your answer gives you dimension. Name some hobbies.

### *C. Motive Questions*

Answer motive questions enthusiastically. Show the interviewer that you are interested in the position and that you really want the job. Remember to maintain eye contact and be sincere.

### ***How can you contribute to this company?***

- Be positive and sell! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

### ***Why should I hire you for this position?***

- Explain your qualifications and how they "fit" the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it's work that you enjoy. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

### ***Why do you want to work for our firm?***

- Make a compliment about what the company does, it's location, or it's people. Other positive remarks might be about the company's product or service, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement. Research about the company is important here.

### ***Where do you hope to be in five years?***

- Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years, and that their investment in you will pay. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you'll be more successful than they are. But do show a strong desire for promotions.

### ***What interests you most about this position?***

- Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one or two-word answer such as, "the challenge" or "the opportunity", will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

### ***How long do you plan to be with this company?***

- As with marriage, most employers expect a till-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field", is a reasonable response.

### ***What are your career goals?***

Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:

- Short term - "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
- Long term - "After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

### ***What are you doing to achieve your goals?***

- "I look at continued learning as the key to success. I continue my education, as you see from my resume, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organizations in my field."

## ***D. Job Satisfaction Questions***

### ***Why did you leave your previous employer?***

- NEVER speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

**What did you like most about your previous job?**

**What did you like least about your previous job?**

- An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

**Why are you looking for another job?**

- Again, be positive. I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at \_\_\_\_\_ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth, and recognition. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions and advance my career.'

**What do you think your employers obligations are to you?**

- Interviewers listen for employees who want a positive, enthusiastic, company atmosphere, with the opportunity to advance. Such a person, they surmise, has motivation and staying power.

**Are you applying for any other jobs?**

- In your answer, show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective. Make it known that your talents are applicable to other businesses and that you have explored ways to maximize your potential and are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don't give an indication that you are just shopping.

**E. Past Performance Questions**

*(To determine behavior based on past examples)*

**What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?**

- Again, be truthful and admit not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit so as not to instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

**What causes you to lose your temper?**

- Everybody has a low boiling point on some particular issue. Pick one of yours; something safe and reasonable. People who are late to meetings, blame shifting, broken appointments and office "back-stabbing" are suitable responses. Don't say that you never fly off the handle. You won't be believed.

**What are your greatest accomplishments?**

- Be ready to recant one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

**How do you feel about a younger male/female boss?**

- A question like this usually means that your boss will either be younger or of the opposite sex or both. Be certain that if you register any concern, you will probably not be hired. Explain that their age or sex is of no importance to you. You are only interested in their capability and what you can learn from them.

**What kind of worker are you?**

- Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

## F. Salary Questions

Salary discussions should be avoided, if possible.

### **What type of salary do you have in mind?**

- Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer."

### **What is your current salary?**

- Answer truthfully. Remember that "salary" includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits, and vacations as well as sick days and personal days. Also, if you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

## G. Other questions you should be prepared to answer truthfully:

- **Are you willing to relocate?**
- **May we check your references?**
- **May we verify your income?**

Answer a question to the best of your ability and then relax. If there is a period of silence before the interviewer asks the next question, stay calm. Interviewers often use silence to see if you can handle stress and maintain poise.

## Questions for You to Ask

Your interviews, however, should be a two-way conversation. You must ask questions and take an active role in the interview. This demonstrates the importance you place on your work and career. Asking questions gives you a chance to demonstrate your depth of knowledge in the field as well as to establish an easy flow of conversation and relaxed atmosphere between you and the interviewer. Building this kind of rapport is always a plus in a interview.

Your questions can help establish a smooth flow of conversation between you and the interviewer.

Remember, you are not just there for the interviewer to determine if you are right for the position but your questions can help you determine if this job is right for you. Some of your questions should evolve from research you've done on the company in preparing for the interview. Following are some guidelines for your questions as well as some examples.

- Don't cross examine the employer.
- Ask questions requiring an explanation. Questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.
- Don't interrupt when the employer is answering YOUR question.
- Ask job-relevant questions. Focus on the job—the company, products, services, people.
- Prior to the interview, write your list of Interest Questions and take them with you.
- Ask about your potential peers, subordinates, and superiors. Take notes.
- Ask the employer how he/she got where they are today.



### ***A. Interest Questions***

#### ***Why do you want someone for this job?***

- Force the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by one of his current employees. The answer may give you a valuable job description.

### ***B. Job Satisfaction Questions***

Ask questions that relate to the responsibilities, importance and authority of the position as well as those investigating the rewards for a job well done and the long range career opportunities.

### ***C. Past Performance Questions***

#### ***Why isn't this position being filled from within the company?***

- You may discover that nobody in this organization would accept it or that your future fellow employees are a weak lot.

#### ***How many people have held this job in the last five years?***

#### ***Were they promoted or did they leave the company?***

- If the turnover has been high, you have a right to suspect that the job may leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you can expect to be promoted quickly.

#### ***How did you get started in the company?***

- A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

#### ***What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?***

- Here you may discover you are overqualified or in a position to ask for considerably more money.

### ***D. Additional Questions***

- What would my responsibilities and duties be?
- What are the most difficult aspects of the position?
- Describe a typical day on the job?
- Describe the department's/company's growth in the next 2 years?
- What is the philosophy on training and development here?
- Has there been downsizing within the company? How is it handled?
- How do you think I'd fit into the job and into your organization?
- What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?
- Who would I be working for and with?
- What is the person doing who used to hold this position?
- When would you need me to start?
- May I see my work area?
- May I meet some of my future co-workers?

## Interview Conclusion

If you are sincerely interested in the position and are satisfied with the answers given, you should ask the interviewer if he/she feels that you are qualified for the position. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully.

**Ask for the job.** Make a positive statement about the position. Emphasize that this is exactly the type of opportunity you've been looking for and would like to be offered the position. Ask when you should expect an answer. A typical conclusion might be:

"Thank you for this meeting, \_\_\_\_\_. I like what I've heard today and I'd like to join your team. I know I'd be an asset to you/your department because you need someone who can \_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. As you know, I have (match your qualifications with the employer's "hot buttons"). Before I leave, do you have any more questions about my background or qualifications or can I supply you with any more information? On a scale of 1 to 5, how do I compare to the other candidates you've interviewed? I can start as soon as you need me." The farewell should also include a smile, direct eye contact, a firm but gentle handshake.

## Thank You Letter

Immediately following the interview, call your employment recruiter. It is very important to convey your impressions of the position and the company. Let the recruiter know whether you are interested in the position or not and if there were questions you forgot to ask at the interview, express them at this time. Only after we get your feedback about the interview and the company do we contact the employer for theirs. And finally, we follow-up with you regarding the employer's thoughts.

It is always a good idea to send a short note of appreciation to thank the employer or interviewer for their time. Reiterate your interest in the position and the company as well as your ability to do the job. Be sure to mail your correspondence the following day. This is a good way to keep your name current in the interviewer's mind. Following is a sample thank-you letter that you can adapt to fit your specifics:

### 1. ADDRESS LINE

The full company name and address (no abbreviations) as well as the full name of the interviewer and his/her complete title.

### 2. SUBJECT LINE

"Re: Interview for the Position of *(title)* on *(date)*." This illustrates the content of the letter.

### 3. GREETING

"Dear Mr./Ms. *(last name)*:"

"Miss" or "Mrs." should not be used unless you are sure that person does so. Do not use a first name in the greeting unless you have established a strong rapport.

### 4. OPENING

- a.) "It was a pleasure meeting with you *(day)* to discuss the opening in *(department)* with *(company)*."
- b.) "I appreciated meeting with *(name)* and yourself in your office on *(day)* to discuss the *(title)* position with *(company)*."
- c.) "Thanks for taking the time to see me regarding the opening in *(department)*."

Again, comment or add something discussed during the interview that will allow you to restate your qualifications and confidence in performing the job.

**5. BODY**

- a.) "From our discussion, and the fine reputation of your organization, it appears that the *(title)* position would enable me to fully use my background in \_\_\_\_\_."
- b.) "I was particularly impressed with the professionalism evident throughout my visit. *(Company)* appears to have the kind of environment I have been seeking."
- c.) "The atmosphere at *(company)* seems to strongly favor individual involvement, and I would undoubtedly be able to contribute significantly to its goals."

**6. CLOSING**

- a.) "While I have been considering other opportunities, I have deferred a decision until I hear from you. Therefore, your prompt reply would be greatly appreciated."
- b.) "It's an exciting opportunity, and I look forward to hearing your decision very soon."
- c.) "The *(title)* position and *(company)* are exactly what I have been seeking, and I hope to hear from you within the next week."

**7. SALUTATION**

- a.) "Sincerely,"
- b.) "Very truly yours,"
- c.) "Best regards,"

## Resignation Letter

Informing your current employer of your resignation takes tact and discretion. If they inquire as to whom your new job is with, it is best to tell them that you cannot disclose that information until your new employer announces it within his/her own organization. The following sample letter is suitable correspondence to announce your resignation.

Date

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation as *(Title)* for *(Company)* to become effective as of *(Date)*. I have accepted a position in *(Location)*.

I believe this position will offer me more challenge and opportunity for advancement as well as allow me to broaden my own experience and knowledge.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and efforts in my training and advancement during the past *(Time)*. The support and concern shown by you and the rest of the management team has been deeply appreciated.

I leave *(Company)* with no animosity or ill will and wish you and your company continued success.

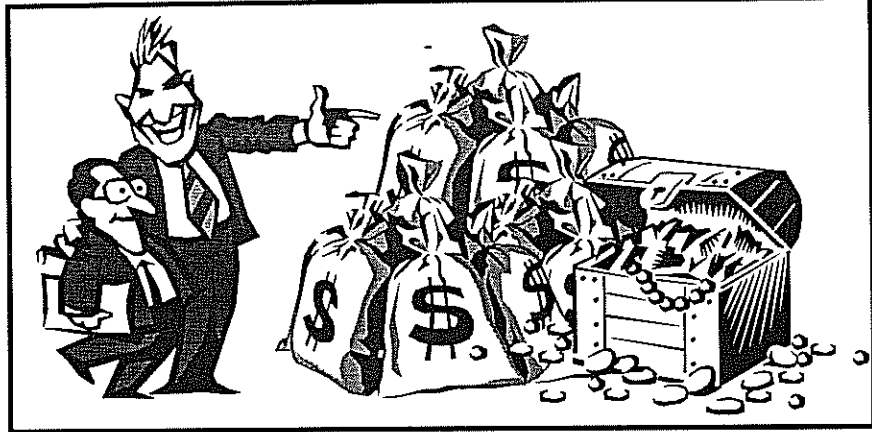
My decision is irrevocable and any counter offers extended by you and/or *(Company)* will be rejected.

Sincerely,

*(Your Name)*

# Dealing with Counteroffers

**What are you really getting when they beg you to stay?**



Quitting a job is never easy. Career changes are tough enough and the anxieties of leaving a comfortable job, friends and environment for an unknown opportunity can easily cloud anyone's judgment. But what should you do when your current employer "muddies the waters" even more by asking you to stay.

A counteroffer is an inducement from your current employer to get you to stay after you've announced your intentions to accept another job elsewhere. And, in recent years, counteroffers have practically become the norm.

If you are considering a counteroffer, remain focused on your primary objectives. Why were you looking for another job to begin with? If an employee is happy with their current job, employer and/or salary, they're usually not paving the road with resumes. So, often times a counteroffer that promises more money never really remedies the real reasons for wanting to move on in the first place.

Apart from a short-term bandage on the problem, nothing will change within the company and when the dust settles you can find yourself back in the same old rut. Recruiters report that more than 80% of those who accept counteroffers leave, begin looking for another job, or are "let go" within six to

twelve months after announcing their intentions.

Counteroffers are certainly flattering and make an employee question their initial decision to leave. But often times they are merely stall tactics used by bosses and companies to alleviate an upheaval a departing employee can cause. High turnover also brings a boss's management skills into question. His reaction is to do what's necessary until he's better prepared to replace you.

**What kind of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they pay you what you're worth?**

The things they'll say:

"You can't leave, the department really needs you."

"We were just about to give you a raise."

"I didn't know you were unhappy. Why didn't you come to me sooner? What can we do to make things better?"

Again, stay focused on your decision and your opportunities.

You need to ask yourself:

What kind of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they pay you what you're worth?

Where did the money for the counteroffer come from? Is it your next raise or promotion just given early? Are future opportunities limited now? Will you have to threaten to leave again for another raise or promotion?

You've demonstrated your unhappiness and will be viewed as having committed blackmail in order to get a raise. Your loyalty will also be questioned come promotion time.

Well managed companies rarely make counteroffers since they view their employment policies as fair and equitable.

If you do consider being "bought back", obtain the details of the offer in writing, as well as a one-year "no cut" contract from the employer. If they refuse, as two-thirds of counteroffering employers do, your decision to leave is made.

Look at your current job and the new position as if you were unemployed, then make your decision based on which holds the most *real* potential. It's probably the new job or you wouldn't have accepted it in the first place.

## Pre-Employment Physical

The use of drug testing as part of a pre-employment physical examination is becoming more prevalent. It is predicted, that within five years, drug testing will become one more standard for getting a job. Some firms are testing for drug use as part of a pre-employment physical without telling the applicant that he/she is being tested for drugs, *Personnel Journal* reports.

Some over-the-counter products can produce positive drug-test results. Among them: Alka-Seltzer Plus, Allerest, Bronkaid, Contact, Donnagel, Nyquil, Primatene, Promlamine capsules, Sinutab, Sudafed and Triaminic. Poppy seeds in your food can also produce a positive drug-test result.

You should not take any medication 48 hours before your pre-employment physicals, but if you must, be sure to list all drugs taken and advise the examiner.

*Reprinted from Courier Journal & Times, August 28, 1987  
Careers by Joyce Lain Kennedy*

## Eleven Reasons for Rejection

1. **Poor attitude.** Many candidates come across as arrogant. While employers can afford to be self-centered, candidates cannot.
2. **Appearance.** Many candidates do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are quickly made in the first three to five minutes. Review the appearance checklist.
3. **Lack of research.** It's obvious when candidates haven't learned about the job, company or industry prior to the interview. Visit the library or use the Internet to research the company, then talk with friends, peers and other professionals about the opportunity before each meeting.
4. **Not having questions to ask.** Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position. *Prepare a list of intelligent questions in advance.*
5. **Not readily knowing the answers to interviewers' questions.** Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as a recent termination or an employment gap. Practicing with your spouse or a friend before the interview will help you to frame intelligent responses.
6. **Relying too much on resumes.** Employers hire people, not paper. Although a resume can list qualifications and skills, it's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsive team player.
7. **Too much humility.** Being conditioned not to brag, candidates are sometimes reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them.
8. **Not relating skills to employers' needs.** A list of sterling accomplishments means little if you can't relate them to a company's requirements. Reiterate your skills and convince the employer that you can "do the same for them".
9. **Handling salary issues ineptly.** Candidates often ask about salary and benefit packages too early. If they believe an employer is interested, they may demand inappropriate amounts and price themselves out of the jobs. Candidates who ask for too little undervalue themselves or appear desperate.
10. **Lack of career direction.** Job hunters who aren't clear about their career goals often can't spot or commit to appropriate opportunities. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.
11. **Job shopping.** Some applicants, particularly those in certain high-tech, sales and marketing fields, will admit they're just "shopping" for opportunities and have little intention of changing jobs. This wastes time and leaves a bad impression with employers they may need to contact in the future.

# PASS SHEET

Candidate's Name

Position

Compensation

## PROBLEM

*Describe specific problems you have encountered during your career.*

## ACTION

*Describe the action(s) taken to resolve issues or solve problems.*

## SOLUTION

*Describe the solution or benefits achieved by solving the problem.*