

UNDERSTANDING AND PREPARING FOR EFFECTIVE AND SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

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There may be no more important business hours than the ones you spend in an interview. Whether or not you are offered a position depends upon your preparation for the interview. You will obtain the **BEST RESULTS** if you follow these **seven steps**:

Step 1: RESEARCH

You must conduct research before each interview. The internet, company websites, new releases, and trade journals offer many sources. Be prepared to tell the interviewer why you are interested in this industry in general and this company (its products, processes, materials, services, markets, customers, or applications) in particular.

Step 2: SELF-EVALUATION

What are your strong points? Evaluate yourself in terms of the position you seek. **Write them down!** Stress your accomplishments such as those in school, in previous, and current employment. What is outstanding about you? What is **unique** about you? Why should you be hired? What can you contribute to the organization? **Where or how might you give this employer a competitive advantage?**

Step 3: JOB INFORMATION

You have done some research but there are other questions you will want to ask your interviewer. **Prepare a list. What are their unique problems, needs, and timely expectations?** What will the company expect of me?" "If I fulfill their expectations, what can I expect in return?" "Will my special talents (financial, technical, leadership, etc.) be utilized?"

Questions reflect your interest in **taking ownership** of the job. Avoid early stage interview questions about money, benefits, perquisites, etc. These should not be brought up by you during a first interview. However, if the interviewer begins to explore these issues with you, have a flexible tone in your response (i.e. I'm open to your best offer!).

Step 4: DELIVERY

You are the merchandise. Arrive early. Be sure the package is neat. Review your notes outside in your car. Then, go in with enthusiasm and **confidence!**

Step 5: THE INTERVIEW (Be a "Consultant" for the day!)

Greet the interviewer by name with a warm, friendly manner, a smile, and a handshake; rivet your eyes on their eyes! Conduct yourself with confidence and determination to get the job. Don't play coy. This is your first meeting, your

employment depends on your initial presentation. Act as a “**consultant**” for the day. Evaluate whether they will be receptive to your expertise. **Will your expertise satisfy their needs, expectations, and address problems to be solved?**

Step 6: THE CLOSE

You’ve prepared for the interview to display your character, abilities, and personality to the best possible advantage. Now you must “button up” the interview. A typical conclusion might be (use these words):

“I appreciate your time and consideration.” “I like what I’ve seen and have enjoyed talking with you.” “I’d like to work with you and I am interested in starting as soon as possible.” “**Do you have any concerns about my ability to do this job?**” (Address each concern and repeat your question until no concerns remain.) Then ask when the decision will be made. Tell them you want the job and that you look forward to working with them.

Step 7: THE FOLLOW THROUGH

Contact your “Headhunter” **immediately** following the interview; check in with the “Headhunter” who sent you. **This is vital.** “Headhunters” do not like to be embarrassed by employers who call to ask how the candidate liked the position when they themselves do not yet know.

50 NEGATIVE FACTORS EVALUATED DURING THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW THAT FREQUENTLY LEAD TO REJECTION OF THE CANDIDATE

Poor personal appearance or presentation.
Over-bearing, over-aggressive, conceited “superiority complex”, “know it all”, or interrupts others.
Inability to express self clearly—poor voice, diction, or grammar.
Lack of planning for career—no professional purpose or goals.
Lack of interest and enthusiasm, passive, indifferent, or apathetic.
Lack of confidence and poise—nervousness, ill-at-ease.
Failure to participate in activities.
Over-emphasis on money—high interest in solely the best dollar offer.
Poor scholastic record—just got by.
Unwilling to start at the available position level; expects too much too soon.
Makes excuses/is evasive, hedges.
Lack of tact or finesse.
Lack of courtesy—ill mannered.
Condemnation of past employers; badmouthing past colleagues.
Lack of social understanding.
Marked dislike for schoolwork.
Lack of vitality, animation, or personality.
Failure to look interviewer in the eye.
Limp, fishy handshake, or asocial.
Indecisive or wishy-washy.
Loafs during vacation—lakeside pleasures.
Family that’s unsupportive of the requirements (travel, hours, relocation, etc.) of the job.
Friction with parents/family or personal relationships.
Sloppy application form.
Merely shopping around or using interview/offer as leverage with present employer.
Wants job only for short time or solely as a stepping stone.
Little sense of humor; takes self too seriously.
Lack of knowledge in the field of specialization.
Spouse makes decisions for them.
No interest in company/industry.
Over-emphasis on who they know; excessive name-dropping.
Unwillingness to go where we send them; travel or relocation.
Cynical, peevish, or callous.
Low moral standards or poor character.
Lazy, slow moving, or sluggish.
Intolerant—strong prejudices.
Narrow interests, intellectually isolated, or shallow depth of thought.

QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED DURING EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWS

What type of position are you most interested?
Why do you think you might like to work for our Company?
What jobs have you held? How were they obtained and why did you leave?
Why did you choose your particular field of work?
What do you know about our Company? What do you like about our Company?
What are your ideas on salary? What are your compensation expectations?
How does your family feel about relocation?
If you were starting college all over again what courses would you take?
Do you prefer any specific geographic location? Why?
Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
What kind of boss do you prefer?
Can you take instructions without feeling upset?
How did previous employers treat you?
Can you obtain recommendations from previous employers?
What interests you about our product or service?
How long do you expect to work?
What type of work schedule do you maintain?
What is your major weakness?
Have you had any serious illness which affected your work or performance?
Are you willing to go where the company sends you?
What job in our Company would you choose if you were free to do so?
What types of people seem to “rub you the wrong way”?
Do you enjoy sports as a participant? As an observer?
What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
What job in our Company do you want to work toward?
Would you prefer a large or small company? Why?
What kind of work interests you?
What have you done which shows creativity or innovation?
Tell about an incident where you handled rejection?
Describe a time where you experienced severe pressure or stress?
How would your current supervisor describe you?
What have the major accomplishments in your career been?
What three things motivate you most?
What types of recreation or hobbies do you enjoy?
What’s the single most important thing you are seeking in a position?
Do you have any personal problems that might keep you from working everyday?
Tell me about your most memorable employee/employer conflict?
What percent of travel are you willing to conduct?
How do you measure success?
What concerns do you have about this job or company?
Have you ever been convicted of a felony?
Will you submit to a pre-employment physical and drug screen?
Will you compromise on vacation days so as to align with corporate policy?
What will be the cost of your COBRA coverage for 30/60/90 days?
How soon could you begin work?
Describe your management style?
Describe your leadership style?
Describe why and how you have terminated past employees?
Under what circumstances would you lie?
What’s the best work you’ve ever done?
What do you do when you lose your temper?
What do you do to let down your hair and have fun?

THE EFFECTIVE JOB INTERVIEW

Almost all of our careers were launched with a job interview; that anxiety filled, stressful encounter with a group of strangers, who have so much to say about whether or not you get the position that you want at their company.

Nonetheless, the worst that ever happened to a candidate after an interview was a “no”. And in fact, since most companies interview between three and ten candidates for each technical/professional, managerial, or executive position to be filled, it is obvious that a “no” is more likely than a “yes”.

Even so, the stakes are high. A “yes” can dramatically change your life for the better. It is possible to tilt the odds more in your favor by taking appropriate action to interview effectively. Many of the steps for doing so are based on common sense and are probably obvious. Other steps must be learned.

An “effective job interview” is one in which the candidate gains sufficient information to decide that he / she wants the position (or does not), and imparts sufficient information that the employer offers the candidate the position. **An interview should provide the information necessary for both parties to make an informed decision.**

THE FOUNDATION OF A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Knowing yourself may appear to be so simple, and yet it is not unusual to encounter interview questions about yourself that are not easily and smoothly answered. For example, why are you interested in making a change? Or what are the good and the bad aspects of your current position?

Take the time to list probable questions, examine your responses, and write out your answers. **These need to be rehearsed!** Do they stand the test of reality and reasonability? Will they sound reasonable to a prospective employer?

Most prospective employers realize a 100% fit between the candidates and position is rarely encountered. Typically, the position is filled with a candidate who has a 65% to 80% fit, who “has the right chemistry”, and who is also capable of learning or assimilating what he / she doesn’t bring to the position.

Admission of certain training, development, or orientation needs is not necessarily a self-defeating act, but caution is also advised. Don’t run yourself down. Normally the “hired” candidate carefully lists his / her strengths and weaknesses and assesses what it is that he / she really has that would be of interest to the prospective employer; and he / she does this before the interview.

Even candidates fired from their last position may compete effectively! A general rule of thumb is that 85% of all firings are based on “chemistry”, not on competence to handle the position. Thus, solid references from one’s former superior and two or three other professional points of view can be extremely useful. Your “Headhunter” will request and check all references thoroughly and completely.

KNOW ABOUT THE PROSPECTIVE EMPLOYER

Each firm has its “personality” and “style”, and these characteristics can have a decided effect on the quality of association and success of a new employee. At the minimum, the prospective interviewee should have information such as the annual report, a brochure on products, processes, services, employee benefits, relocation information, and job description.

KNOW ABOUT THE INTERVIEW PROCESS BEFOREHAND

The final cornerstone in preparing for a successful interview is to know the rules of the game. A sound approach requires that one has and knows the following information prior to the interview.

- Who will be seen (names and titles), for how long, in what arrangement (group or one-on-one).
- Whether or not a “hire decision” will be made at the end of one round of interviews, or if a second series, at later date will be necessary.
- Approximately what the company’s time frame is for making a decision (one day, one week, one month, etc).
- Who is the **decision maker** of all people who will be seen.
- Whether psychological, technical, or other testing will be used.
- Whether an offer will be given on the spot, or communicated in writing later, and whether it will be contingent on anything (medical exam, references, background check, drug screens, psychological/personality profile, etc).

It is recommended that the answers to these questions be obtained prior to the interview.

THE EFFECTIVE INTERVIEW (Become a Consultant for the day!)

The effective interview is seen by both parties as an information gathering and giving session as well as a **problem-solving situation**. Therefore, the candidate shows up a few minutes early, well groomed, and should consider himself or herself a “**consultant**” for the day, prepared to both give and receive information. The company reciprocates this insightful, courteous, and respectful treatment. **Remember, the company is interested in how well you can help them solve their problems and address their needs.**

The candidate, having done his homework, **should be prepared, to begin helping the company address needs or resolve problems through his expertise.** The company person, as host and owner of the “territory”, takes the initiative, exploring (at increasingly detailed levels) the candidate’s willingness and ability to help the company. The candidate gives complete, but **brief** and **relaxed** answers to questions. The percent of talking time is balanced, with the candidate being sensitive to what level of responsiveness is desired.

Positive response to the interviewer is important. Initially, requesting his / her business card, taking some written notes during the interview, sincere and complimentary references to the company and the interviewer, and expressions of interest in them both will establish a conducive interview environment.

At some point, a subtle shift will occur with the interviewer. The candidate will notice a more open posture, a friendlier tone, and words which sound as though the interviewer has accepted the candidate’s expertise and insight as credible. Words account for only 20% of communication, tone of voice 30%, and body language 50%. Pay attention to yours, and the interviewer’s! Crossed arms or leaning back are not usually a good sign. Smiles and leaning forward are good. Openness, candor, willingness, and personal acceptance can be visually observed. Affirmative and specific answers indicate things are going well. This is a good time to insert your questions and indicate a high level of interest (Remember, if you’re not offered the job, this **is not** an employment alternative!) You want the offer! Then you’ll decide! So don’t forget to conclude the interview by **asking for the job!** Many employers must be asked before they make an offer.

The “sales shifts” might be signaled by the question, “How much money are you looking for in this situation?” At all costs, avoid naming a figure and say that you are interested in fitting into their organization. Disclose your current compensation if asked directly then smile and say, **“I’m looking for your best offer!”**

Shortly after viewing this “sales shift”, try a series of closing questions with each interviewer even if you still have a few doubts.

1. How do you see me fitting into your organization?
2. What sort of **initial** orientation and responsibilities will I have?
3. **Do you have any concerns about my ability to perform on this job?** (A great interview closing question!)
4. When would you need me to start?
5. Now...**Ask for the job!**

THE INTERVIEW AS AN INTERPERSONAL TRANSACTION

Your basic “chemistry” (your social, communication, and personality style) are mostly unchangeable in the very short term. However, your awareness of your style, and the other person’s can help you.

Most interviews are one-on-one situations that lend themselves to establishing the relationship on a personal and friendly basis. Since you have obtained your prospective employer’s card and title, you should **prompt yourself into using his / her name**. It is easy to ask how the position you are being interviewed for relates to your interviewer’s own responsibilities. In fact, many interviewers welcome an opportunity to answer questions about their own experience or beginnings with the company, after all, cowboys and cowgirls all like to talk about their horses! So if you are interviewing with a company officer, you should “tap into their vision” of the past, present, and future of the company. Find out how your role fits in to their vision.

Your interviewer may “open up” and give you a complete rundown on who had the position previously and why it is open now and what it takes to succeed, and excel. By taking brief notes, you award this social exchange the status your

interviewer will believe it warrants, and will be able to better sort out the large mass of data following the interview. Do not relegate yourself to a stenographer by writing down too much. Maintain engaging eye contact at all times.

We orient our candidates to an effective interview by explaining our rule of the 12's (12 feet, 12 inches, 12 words).

- You are first observed at 12 feet, and your stature, grooming, and personal presentation are discerned and an initial opinion drawn by the interviewer.
- In the first 12 inches, the firmness of your handshake, eye contact, and facial conditions are evaluated.
- In the first 12 words, your poise, sincerity, energy, and openness are perceived and judged.

We recommend riveted eye contact, a sincere smile, a firm handshake, and “envisioning” the interviewer as an old friend. This advice makes a lot of sense so long as you don't burden your “old friends” with stories of all the unfairness or bad luck that has come your way from past employers.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

POST PHONE INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTER / EMAIL

Please notice we didn't say Post-Interview Text! You have not met this hiring authority face-to-face at this point, so you need to make certain that you demonstrate courtesy, polish, and thoughtfulness, and you also want to set yourself apart from other candidates in the interviewing process. So after a phone interview, you draft and send a brief (1/2 page to 1 page max) Thank You Note/Letter, on personal letterhead, attached to an email. Never send this, or any letter, to a prospective employer until you have received post-interview feedback and forward instructions from your "Headhunter". Ask your headhunter to proofread and provide feedback to you on the Thank You draft before you send it to the hiring authority.

YOUR PERSONAL LETTER HEAD HERE WITH YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, CITY, STATE, ZIP, AND CELL PHONE NUMBER

Date

Hiring Authority's Name
Their Title
Company Name
Street Address or PO Box
City, State, Zip Code

Dear (First Name or Mr./Mrs./Miss, or Ms./Dr., etc.)

Thank you for taking time to speak with me today about the _____ (Title of Position) opportunity with _____ (Name of Employer)! Your information and insights shared with me were very helpful!

While there is still much that I need to learn about this opportunity, the _____ (company Name) team, and your expectations of me, I like what I hear thus far!

I understand that you need a _____ (Title of Position) who can / or will:

- In one line state the #1 most important thing that needs done.
- In one line state the #2 thing that needs done.
- In one line state the #3 thing that needs done.

I will _____ (state a competitive advantage that you will bring to the position). I will also _____ (state a second competitive advantage you will bring to the position or company).

I look forward to meeting with you and your team in person at your earliest convenience. Thank you for your continued consideration!

Sincerely,

Your Name

POST FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW THANK YOU LETTER

This letter will be 1 to 1 ½ pages maximum length. You may begin drafting this after your face-to-face interview, but never send any letter to a prospective employer until you have received post interview follow-up and forward directions from your “Headhunter”. This letter will be attached to an email that you send to the Hiring Authority.

YOUR PERSONAL LETTER HEAD HERE WITH YOUR NAME, ADDRESS, CITY, STATE, ZIP, AND CELL PHONE NUMBER

Date

Hiring Authority’s Name

Their Title

Company Name

Street Address or PO Box

City, State, Zip Code

Dear (First Name or Mr./Mrs./Miss, or Ms./Dr., etc.)

It was a pleasure to have had the opportunity to meet with _____ (first name the others involved in the interview process) and you on _____ (date) to discuss the _____ (Title of Position) opportunity with _____ (Name of Employer)! Thank you for the time you spent describing the position to me and for the courtesies extended.

The position we discussed is of great interest to me! I am confident that my _____ (List Competitive / Operational / Technical / Market / or Customer Advantages You Bring) experience and knowledge will empower me to make a significant contribution to _____ (Company Name) in both the near and long term!

As we discussed, _____ (Company’s Name) needs a _____ (Position Title) who can or will _____ (State specific problems, needs, and timely expectations / objectives discussed).

As I mentioned, I can and have _____ (state past experience or achievements that precisely align with problems, needs, and timely expectations / objectives of the position). In addition I can / will bring _____ (State Specific Competitive Advantages, Knowledge, Skills, or Experience) that will create near term forward momentum in _____ (Company’s Name) and long term _____ (describe the Long Term Objectives / Expectations).

(You may also present some of your ideas/approaches to resolving problems or establishing programs). (You might also state related experience from your personal work history that might illustrate prior performance on this type of problem or program.)

I am sincerely interested in joining _____ (Company’s Name) and look forward to hearing from you at your earliest possible convenience.

Very truly yours,

Your Name

P.S. My expense receipts are enclosed and tallied for reimbursement.

LETTER OF RESIGNATION

YOUR PERSONAL LETTERHEAD HERE THAT INCLUDES, NAME, ADDRESS, CITY, STATE, ZIP CODE, AND CELL NUMBER

Today's Date

Your Superior's Name
Your Superior's Title
Your Company's Name
Street / Business Address
City, State, Zip Code

Dear _____(Boss' First Name):

Due to the acceptance of a very fine career opportunity that was recently presented to me, I have decided that I must leave the employment of _____ (Name of Company).

I have enjoyed the pleasant associations and friends that I have made since joining _____ (your company's name) and consider the experience gained here as personally and professionally beneficial. Nonetheless, my first obligation is to my family and myself as far as continued personal growth and career opportunity. Therefore, I would like to tender my resignation effective _____ (this date – TODAY).

I feel that it is only proper for me to provide a two (2) week notice, therefore, _____ (10 working days from today) will be my last official day. I would like to apply _____ days of my accrued paid vacation to my notice, making my last day of work _____.

I may want to continue my health insurance coverage for a period under COBRA. Therefore I would appreciate you directing me to the appropriate person and / or forms as soon as possible.

It has been a pleasure working with you and for you for the past _____ (time in job) years. Please accept my best wishes for _____ (company's name) and your continued success!

Sincerely,

(Your Signature and Title)

Note: Date the letter the day you are handing it to your Superior. Send one copy (blind) to your "Headhunter" and retain one copy for your records.

EMAIL NOTIFICATION TO COLLEAGUES AND FRIENDS

After you have accepted a new position, you may wish to send an email to business associates, past/present co-workers, or friends to let them know where you are going and what you'll be doing. It is useful to remain in contact with these people, as you may need to continue doing business with them in the future, or just to maintain professional or personal relationships. This letter can be varied to suit your personal style or the relationship situation in which it is used.

Hi!

I hope this finds you well and enjoying life!

Recently, I made a career decision to accept the position of (your new title) with (your new company) in (city, state). I believe that this situation offers me an excellent opportunity for both challenge and growth. While I have attached my E-Card to this email for your convenience, my new business address and number are as follows:

Your Name & New Title
Company Name
Company Address
City, State, Zip Code
Office Telephone Number
Cell Phone Number
Email

While this is an opportunity for me to move forward, I wish to maintain our relationship and contact so that we may continue to interrelate/work together in the future.

Sincerely,

(Your Name and New Title)

PREPARING TO HANDLE COUNTER OFFERS

A counter offer is an **inducement** from your current employer to entice you to stay **after** you have announced your intention to take a job with another company. Often, counter offer inducements come **before** resignations: 1) If irresponsible references leak knowledge of your job search, 2) If your performance, corporate commitment, or enthusiasm diminishes and suspicion of your involvement in a job “search” is questioned, or 3) If frequent days off to interview prematurely signal your imminent departure.

Inducements for you to stay might include a raise, a promotion, perquisites, better working conditions, or other **promises**. The emphasis is on the word “**promises**”. These **promises** are rarely put in writing, and they are often not kept.

Should you ever accept a counter offer? The answer is “**NO**”! Well managed companies don’t make counter offers. Their policies and salary structures are fair and equitable, and they will not subject themselves to counter offer pressures.

The two most important issues to consider are: **1) Do you really want to stay with a company where you must threaten to quit in order to obtain something you did not have before (more money, a better position, or better working conditions etc.)?** or **2) Where is the money coming from for the counter offer?** (Is this a raise you were to have received in the future? Or, is this the raise you should have received during your last salary review?) And finally **3) Do you really wish to better yourself or are you engaging in a form of blackmail?**

Here are some hard facts to consider: chances are that if you accept the counter offer, the same circumstances that are causing you to consider changing positions will arise again in the future. In fact, our experience has been that nearly **90%** of the people who accept counter offers wind up leaving voluntarily or involuntarily within six months of accepting the counter offer. You are not improving the situation, you are only forestalling the inevitable.

Once a counter offer has been accepted, career suicide with that employer is imminent (the fuse has been lit). Your employer now knows that you are unhappy and your loyalty will always be in the question. The relationships that you have enjoyed with your co-workers will be adversely affected once word gets out that you have accepted a counter offer. And consider this...whatever might motivate your employer to make a counter offer may be the fact that he / she is buying time until he / she can find a suitable replacement...and may later replace you at his / her convenience! After all, when you resign, you are actually **firing your boss**.

Let’s face it, when someone quits, it’s a direct reflection upon the boss. While there are some good bosses, who may be glad to see you growing beyond what their company can provide, most won’t be happy about your departure. Unless you’re really incompetent or a destructive thorn in his side, the boss might look bad by “allowing” you to go. The typical boss’ gut reaction is to do what has to be done to keep you from leaving until he / she is ready. This is just simple human nature.

We recommend that you make your resignation in writing and in person. We recommend that you ask your present employer to be happy for you, your family, and the colleagues and close relationships you have made with this company. We recommend that you position yourself appropriately by stating, “Please don’t embarrass me or yourself by offering me a counter offer...be happy for me.” Your emphasis is on your desire to be “wished well” and sent on your way so that both you and your employer can move on with your careers and lives.

So remember, if the urge to accept a counter offer hits you, keep on cleaning out your desk, as you count your blessings!

MANAGING TRANSITION

As human beings, we are forced to endure transitions that are sometimes not of our choosing; death, demotion, rejection, termination, etc. Many individuals choose to never bring about a transition on their own volition. By choosing to take on a career transition, you are initiating prospective transitions impacting where you work, with whom you work, and where you live. While these transitions are exciting, there will be times during which your desire to know or decide will exceed the information available. Normally, this is when candidates and their families “freak out” or “flake”. When your desire to know, plan, or decide exceeds the information on hand, call your Headhunter and say...“I’m freaking out or my family is flaking”. Your Headhunter will work with you to obtain necessary information which will empower you to better manage the transition. While you may change jobs or relocate three to five times in your life, your Headhunter manages these types of transitions by the dozen. And while your Headhunter has access and experience, some information will only come with time. So be patient, recognizing that your Headhunter and his client want you to make an informed decision.

Executive Directions’ & Pinnacle Internationals’ leaders and staff resolutely believe “**people make the competitive difference**”; striving to refer those candidates who solve our clients’ problems, address our clients’ needs, and meet or exceed our client’s expectations. Once these “problem solvers” are recruited, we then select the most qualified candidates through extensive reference checking, prior to candidates being submitted to our client. Our referred candidates are

actually “finalists” in the interview process, normally selected due to their unique ability to provide our clients with problem solving, leadership, and future ascension which produces a competitive advantage for our client’s organization.

With traditional search firms averaging interview to hire ratios of 7:1, Executive Directions typically achieves interview-to-hire ratios of under 3:1. You will undoubtedly perceive the thoroughness of our disciplined approach. As a candidate, we seek your patient cooperation with “our process”...the “due diligence” upon which our clients have come to trust.

We view our relationships with candidates as career long associations. If we place you with one of our firm’s clients, we will look forward to collaborating with you on our continued Team Building endeavors with that client’s organization. If our first encounter does not result in your placement, we encourage you to keep us informed of your career progress, enabling us to contact you as future search ventures reveal suitable opportunities for you. Because you work within one of our market niches, a sustained relationship should prove to be mutually advantageous. Continued association with our firm may help to advance your success. Please accept our best wishes for your continued success!

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