

BBC Learning English  
Talk about English  
*Business Language To Go*  
*Part 1 - Interviews*



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*This programme was first broadcast in 2001.*

*This is not a word for word transcript of the programme*

**Carmela** This series is all about *chunks of language* - now, forget about dictionaries and grammar books. You don't have the time for that! You want short cuts to quick, fluent and natural-sounding English.

I'll be joined each week in the studio by business English expert David Evans.

So David, why are *chunks of language* seen as the way forward?

**David** Well, I think the basic idea is that that's the way that native speakers learn the language, so why shouldn't non-native speakers do the same thing?

**Carmela:** But traditionally, non-native speakers have learnt pieces of grammar, they've learnt the rules about grammar and individual words.

**David:** Yes, and obviously there's nothing wrong with that learning a language "word by word" or - rule - by rule; is an effective way of doing it. The trouble is that in the business world you need to be able to communicate quickly and under pressure -and it can often be hard to find that grammar rule or find that

word if you've been learning the language in that way.

**Carmela** And, of course, the business world is full of these chunks, can you give some examples?

**David:** Yes, business as you say - is full of collocations, that's words that go together; 'stock expressions', idioms, I mean the list goes on...To give you an example, I suppose, just with the word "business" - you can be "in business", you can go away "on business", you can travel "business class", you can "go around the business world" - there are hundred of these examples.

**Carmela** Now each week David and I will look at a different work scenario and explore the kinds of English expressions commonly used within that situation.

It may be useful to have a pen and some paper ready to write down what you hear.

In this first programme in the series, we're starting at the beginning - and helping you to get the job you've always wanted because today we're looking at **interview language**. Job Interviews are difficult anyway, even more so in a second language. But don't worry, today's programme is a useful guide to some of the most common English expressions that you'll need in an interview.

Let's get started - here's an example of an interview situation.

**CLIP** **Mary & JOHN** **0'33"**

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**Mary:** John, hi. Sit down, make yourself comfortable.

Tell me, you're already an office manager in a medium-sized finance company, why do you want to come and work here?

**John:** Well, I don't know how much you know but the company have been having some problems. quite a few staff have been **laid off** actually

**Mary:** ... right...

**John:** ... and although my job isn't immediately under threat, I'm not sure **what the future will hold** and, in any case, I felt that it was **time to start moving up the career ladder**. And I feel I want a little bit more responsibility. And that combined with the state of the company, convinced me that it's **time to move on**, really.

### **END OF CLIP**

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**Carmela:** Now the interviewer there, asked a classic question that people often ask in interviews - they come straight out and say: "**why do you want this job**".  
And what was John's response?

**David:** Well, John was actually a bit negative at the start, he said that he was a little bit worried about his position in the company at the moment. He said "quite a few people have been laid off".

That's another way of saying "quite a lot of people have been **made redundant**", **they've been asked to leave the company**, because the company is experiencing some kind of difficulties and so they're reducing the number of staff. So, he says that he doesn't know **what the future will hold**, he doesn't know what's going to happen in the future.

**Carmela:** So, he begins the interview then a little bit negatively,  
but then he changes and starts to emphasize the positive.

**David:** Yes. He says that he wants to '**move up the career ladder**'. We often talk about careers as being a kind of '**ladder**' - because it's something that you try

to climb up. So, he begins to be a bit more positive and, he then goes on to say **'it's time to move on'**, it's time for him to make a change and take the next step on the ladder of his career.

**Carmela:** Well, it's time for us to move on too.

This time we're going to hear language in another interview it's Christopher Beale, he's a Recruitment consultant and he is interviewing someone for the job of salesman for a pharmaceutical company. Now, that expression **move up the ladder**, is something that you'll hear again, so, listen out!

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**CLIP** **Christopher Beale** **0'30"**

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-So let us suppose you had **moved up the ladder** in our pharmaceutical company, **what would be your priorities in approaching your job.**

-The first would be to make sure that I had the support of the people working underneath me. The second would be to make sure my immediate boss also understood the role that I was trying to play within the company and third, would be to make sure that the customers were satisfied.

**END OF CLIP**

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**Carmela** Can you tell us a bit about the question form that we heard used by the interviewer there, David?

**David:** The interviewer, I think said - **"if you had moved up the ladder what would be your priorities in approaching the job"**. So, what he's doing there, is he's not asking the interviewee about a real situation, he is asking about a hypothetical one.

**Carmela:** So, this is an imaginary situation then ?

**David:** Right, an imaginary situation and he clearly marks this with language that he uses, he's using there a structure ...which I think we call 'second conditional' and you'll often hear interviewers ask things like :

*“what would you say .. if you faced this situation? how would you cope if you dealt this problem?”* - those kind of things...

**Carmela:** .. and why are “hypothetical” or “*what would you do*” questions so common in interviews?

**David:** Well, I think it gives the interviewer an opportunity to ask not about the interviewee's past, but it gives them a chance to understand how the interviewee might behave in the future if he or she should get the job. And, I think, the important thing from the interviewee's point of view - is to remember this is a hypothetical situation, so choose the correct language, in other words you should answer the question with “*I would*”, “*if I faced that situation I would behave in this way, if I had to deal with that problem, I would do this*”

**Carmela** You're listening to “*Business Language to Go*” from the BBC World Service.

Something that's very common in interviews is asking people about their good points and bad points. Could you elaborate, David.

**David** Well, it's a pretty typical interview question. You know, **what are your strengths and weaknesses, what are your good points and bad points.** And, for the interviewee obviously the thing is to make sure that you've got lots of strong points, good points and not so many bad ones. You know, you

shouldn't be too hard on yourself. And when you do mention a bad point, it's often a good idea to show that you're not only aware of it - but you're also trying to improve. So, you could say 'oh, my bad point is ... I'm not very good at Arabic, for example, but - I'm taking lessons every week'.

**Carmela** You'll now hear our two interviewees talking about their own strengths. Listen out for the language that they use.

**CLIP** **Mary & John** **0'31"**

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**Mary:** John, any other strengths that you feel you bring to the job. What are your **strengths and weaknesses** in the workplace?

**John:** What I'd bring to the job are very, very good organisational skills. I'm **strongly motivated**, I'm **highly committed**, very much a **self-starter**. I feel that my **people skills** are fairly well developed and I feel there's scope to carry out that side of my duties even better. And **I firmly believe** that the combination of my **people skills** and my **organisational ability** is the right **combination of skills** to do this job really well.

**END OF CLIP**

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**CLIP** **Christopher Beale** **0'20"**

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**Christopher:** If you were assessing yourself on your own **strengths and weaknesses** how would you summarise them?

**Interviewee:** Well I would look at it that I'm **self motivated**. I can also work with a group of people. I know that I can motivate them in a manner that is good for the company.

**END OF CLIP**

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**Carmela** Let's look at some of the language that was used there to talk about personal strengths, David?



## **END OF CLIP**

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**David** Did you notice the expression **pretty much**? The interviewer there said, I think **“right, well, that’s pretty much all I what to ask at the moment”** - and this phrase “pretty much” is a typical phrase in English - it’s what we would call **“a vague marker”**.

**Carmela:** *Vague* ...meaning... ?

**David:** ...Well.. meaning.. not precise. It’s an indication here, that the speaker is thinking about something, in this case, changing the subject, bringing the interview to an end.

. And we heard the interviewee reply.. **“I’d just like to know what the time scale is”** - Again that word “just” which the interviewee is using to make everything a little bit softer, a little bit gentler, so that he doesn’t come across as being too aggressive

**Carmela** OK, thanks David. And ,just to say that David Evans will be joining me next time for more **“Business Language to Go”**.