NO. 02 · INTERVIEW SERIES

The Interview Prep Checklist

A 7-day playbook to walk into any interview and walk out with the offer.

INSIDE

A 7-day countdown · STAR worksheet · 40 questions to expect · Smart questions to ask
Salary scripts for African markets · Follow-up templates · 24-hour debrief

HOW TO USE THIS PLAYBOOK

Prepare like a professional.

Most candidates lose offers in the days before the interview, not in the room. They wing the research, rehearse the wrong stories, and forget that interviewers are buying both competence and confidence.

This playbook is the exact system the CareerBuddy editorial team uses with senior African professionals — from first-time hires to executives moving across borders. Work through it in order. Tick each box. Walk in with nothing to prove and everything to share.

How this is organised

- A 7-day countdown — what to do at T-7, T-3, T-1 and on the day itself.
- Worksheets you can fill in by hand or on screen (STAR stories, salary script).
- Question banks you can quote and adapt by round and seniority.
- Templates for the follow-up email, thank-you note and 24-hour debrief.

> *"The interview is not a test. It is the first day of the job. Show up like the colleague they already want."*
>
> — CareerBuddy editorial

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DAY −7 · RESEARCH

Know the company better than they expect.

Forty-eight per cent of hiring managers say weak company knowledge is the single fastest reason they reject a strong CV. Spend two focused hours on this — not eight scattered ones.

The company file

- [ ] Read the latest 3 press releases and 5 news mentions from the past 90 days.
- [ ] Pull their last quarterly or annual report (or LinkedIn “About” + funding rounds for startups).
- [ ] Identify their top 3 competitors and one thing this company does better.
- [ ] Note their stated mission and the language they use for customers.
- [ ] Find one product, customer story, or initiative you can speak about with specifics.

The role file

- [ ] Print the JD. Highlight every verb and required outcome in yellow.
- [ ] List the 5 problems this role most likely exists to solve.
- [ ] Map each requirement to one concrete example from your career.
- [ ] Write the one-sentence answer to: “Why this role, and why now?”

The people file

- [ ] Look up every named interviewer on LinkedIn — note their tenure, last role, and one shared connection.
- [ ] Find one piece of content (post, talk, podcast) from the hiring manager.
- [ ] If unnamed, search “Head of [team] at [company]” to identify them anyway.

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DAY −3 · STAR STORIES

Build seven stories. Use them everywhere.

You do not need a story for every question. You need seven well-rehearsed stories that you can re-angle on demand. Build the inventory once; reuse it for the rest of your career.

The seven stories every candidate needs

- A measurable win — numbers, before-and-after, your specific contribution.
- A failure you owned and what changed afterwards.
- A conflict with a peer or manager and how you resolved it.
- A time you led without authority.
- A time you said no, or pushed back on a senior stakeholder.
- A time you learned something hard and fast.
- The proudest moment of your career so far.

The STAR template

SITUATION (1 sentence)
TASK (1 sentence)
ACTION (3 specific verbs)
RESULT (a number, then the lesson)

Rehearse each story out loud — twice — in under 90 seconds. Time yourself. If it runs over two minutes, cut the setup, not the result.

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DAY −1 · LOGISTICS

Remove every excuse to be nervous.

Nerves are mostly logistics in disguise. Settle the boring details a day in advance and the nervous energy turns into useful adrenaline.

If the interview is virtual

- [ ] Test the meeting link from the actual device, browser and account you will use.
- [ ] Charge laptop + phone overnight; have both nearby on the day.
- [ ] Plug in headphones with a working mic — not laptop speakers.
- [ ] Sit facing a window or lamp, never with light behind you.
- [ ] Tidy the visible background; close unrelated tabs and notifications.
- [ ] Have water, a printed CV, the JD, and your STAR sheet within reach.

If the interview is in person

- [ ] Travel to the office address the day before, at the same time of day.
- [ ] Iron and lay out the outfit. Match the company's formality, then go one notch up.
- [ ] Print three copies of your CV on plain white A4.
- [ ] Pack a slim notebook, two working pens, a bottle of water, and a charger.
- [ ] Confirm the receptionist contact and exact floor or meeting room.

The night before

- Eat a normal dinner, not a celebratory one.
- Set two alarms. Sleep as if it were a Sunday — not a Monday.
- Re-read your seven STAR stories once. Do not rehearse new material.

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DAY 0 · THE INTERVIEW

Walk in like a colleague, not a candidate.

The 60-minute pre-interview routine

- ☐ 60 min before — Eat. Hydrate. Walk for 10 minutes if you can.
- ☐ 30 min before — Re-read the JD and your one-sentence “why this role”.
- ☐ 15 min before — Power pose for two minutes. Smile at yourself in the mirror.
- ☐ 5 min before — Phone on Do Not Disturb. Open the meeting link or arrive at reception.

Body language that builds trust

- Sit forward, not back. Forearms on the table or your lap, never crossed.
- Hold eye contact for 3-second beats — soft, not staring.
- Smile when you greet, when they finish a question, and when you finish your answer.
- Mirror their pace. If they speak slowly, slow down. If they joke, allow yourself to be human.

Your opening line

When they say “Tell me about yourself”, do not narrate your CV. Use this structure:

- “I am a [role] who has spent the last [N] years [doing the thing this role needs].”
- “Most recently at [company] I [one outcome with a number].”
- “What drew me to this conversation is [one specific thing about their company or role].”

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THE QUESTION BANK

40 questions to expect.

Most interviews recycle the same 40 questions in slightly different language. Recognise the pattern and you can answer almost anything with one of your seven STAR stories.

Behavioural

- Tell me about a time you missed a deadline.
- Describe a conflict with a manager and how it ended.
- When did you have to influence someone who outranked you?
- Tell me about feedback that was hard to hear.
- When did you change your mind on something important at work?

Situational

- Your top performer is about to quit. What do you do this week?
- A peer takes credit for your work in front of leadership. Now what?
- You inherit a team where morale is low. Where do you start?
- You disagree with a strategic decision your CEO has made.

Role-specific

- Walk me through your last 30/60/90-day plan.
- Show me a piece of work you are most proud of and why.
- How do you measure success in this kind of role?
- What would you do in your first 90 days here?

The closers

- Why are you leaving your current role?
- Where do you see yourself in three years?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Why should we hire you over the other candidates?
- Do you have any questions for us?

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QUESTIONS TO ASK THEM

The questions that get you hired.

Strong candidates ask questions that sound like a colleague evaluating an opportunity, not a candidate hoping for one. Pick two for each round below — never more than three.

Recruiter screen

- How would you describe the team's working culture in one sentence?
- What does the interview process look like end to end?
- What is the salary band for this role and how is it benchmarked?

Hiring manager

- What does great look like in this role at the 6-month mark?
- What is the single biggest challenge facing this team right now?
- How do you give feedback, and how do you like to receive it?
- Why is this role open?

Skip-level / executive

- How does this team show up in the company strategy for the next 12 months?
- What would have to be true for this hire to be the best decision you made this year?
- How does the company handle disagreement between senior leaders?

Peer / panel

- What is the unwritten rule of working here?
- What surprised you most about this company in your first 90 days?
- What is one thing you would change if you could?

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THE MONEY CONVERSATION

Talk salary like an adult.

In African markets, salary bands are rarely published — but they are almost always negotiable. You will lose more money in the first 60 seconds of this conversation than in the next three years of raises. Slow down.

Before you walk in

- [ ] Decide your number in three tiers: walk-away, target, and stretch.
- [ ] Cross-check against CareerBuddy's salary guides and 2 trusted peers in the same market.
- [ ] Convert offers across currencies (NGN, KES, ZAR, USD) and tax regimes — base, gross, and net.
- [ ] Know what beyond base you will negotiate: bonus, equity, allowances, leave, remote days, learning budget.

Scripts that work

> *"I'm happy to share a number, but I'd like to understand the band for this role first — what range have you set aside for someone with my profile?"*
>
> — Deflecting the "what are your expectations?" trap

> *"Based on my last role, the market in [Lagos / Nairobi / Cape Town / remote-USD], and the scope of this role, I'm targeting [X]. I'm open to discussing the full package."*
>
> — When you have to name a number

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RED FLAGS · THIS WORKS BOTH WAYS

You are interviewing them, too.

A bad job costs more than a missed offer. Watch for these signals — one is a coincidence, two is a pattern, three is your answer.

In the process

- They cannot articulate what success looks like in 6 or 12 months.
- The role description changes between rounds without explanation.
- You are asked to do significant unpaid work as a “take-home”.
- Communication is slow, vague, or inconsistent across interviewers.
- No one has stayed in the role longer than 12 months in the last 3 years.

In the room

- Interviewers contradict each other on culture or strategy.
- You are asked questions that probe age, family status, or religion.
- Anyone speaks dismissively about ex-employees, customers, or competitors.
- You feel you have to perform a different version of yourself to be liked.

> *“Take the meeting, take the offer if it comes — but do not take a job whose first impression you would not want as your everyday.”*
>
> — CareerBuddy editorial

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AFTER · WITHIN 24 HOURS

The follow-up that actually moves you forward.

Send one email per interviewer within 24 hours of the conversation. Short, specific, no fluff — and always reference one detail only the two of you discussed.

SUBJECT

Thank you — and one quick follow-up on [topic]

Hi [first name],

Thank you for the time today. I left the conversation more excited about the [role] — particularly your point on [specific thing they said]. It's one of the reasons I'm drawn to this team rather than the alternatives I'm considering.

You asked about [topic] and I wanted to share one more example: at [company] I [outcome with a number]. Happy to walk through the specifics if useful in the next round.

Thanks again — looking forward to hearing the next steps.

[Your name]

When to follow up again

- If you have not heard back by the date they gave you — wait 48 hours, then nudge once.
- If they go silent — one polite check-in at one week, one at two. After that, move on.

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AFTER · THE 24-HOUR DEBRIEF

Make every interview the last bad one.

Whether the offer comes or not, sit with this checklist within 24 hours. The interviews you debrief compound; the ones you do not, repeat themselves.

Capture while it is fresh

- [ ] Write down every question you were asked, in order.
- [ ] Mark the three you answered best and the three you answered worst.
- [ ] Note one thing you wish you had said and one you wish you had not.
- [ ] Record any specific detail about the company, team, or role you learned.
- [ ] Rate the company on culture, role clarity, and your manager — out of 10.

Decide before they decide

- If they offered you the job at the salary you asked for, would you say yes? Write it down.
- What is the one thing that would make you walk away even from a generous offer?
- Who in your network do you need to speak to before accepting?

> *"The offer is rarely the decision. The decision is who you become in the year that follows."*
>
> — CareerBuddy editorial

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KEEP GOING

Where to go from here.

This playbook is one of a series. The full library lives at careerbuddy.blog — every guide is free when you sign up for the weekly briefing.

THE AFRICAN PROFESSIONAL'S CAREER GROWTH PLAYBOOK
careerbuddy.blog/resources

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> *"You don't need a better CV. You need to walk into the next room ready."*
>
> — See you on the other side of the offer.

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