**Transcript**

**Pamela Skillings**: This lesson covers the dreaded "Tell me about yourself" question. You hate this question, all of my clients hate this question, but it's a question that starts off 99% of job interviews. I highly recommend spending some time on this question because it's going can make a world of difference to your interview performance and your results.

Let's get started! Why does every interviewer ask this question? Along with variations like walk me through your background, tell me more about you, it sounds like a harmless way to start a job interview. It's very open-ended, not particularly difficult, everybody should know a little something about themselves that they can talk about, right?

From the interviewer's perspective, it's an easy way to get the conversation going. They just want to get you talking and dive into the relevant information. For the candidate, the dread comes from the fact that question is so open-ended. You could answer in so many different ways and people aren't quite sure what the best way is. What does this person want to know about me? They stumble, they falter, they talk too much about ancient history and that's a terrible way to start an interview - by fumbling around and sounding confused, or worse, boring your interviewer.

Instead, I want you to embrace this question because answering this question well is one of the most effective things you can do in the entire interview. It allows you to set the tone. It gives you some power and autonomy in this interview situation, where you may otherwise feel nervous and at the mercy of your interviewer. By starting strong, you make a great first impression and shape the dialogue that comes next. Take the time to prepare how you want to tell your story and ensure you make a first impression that leads to a job offer.

Here's how you should craft your "tell me about yourself" response. Think about it as an elevator pitch, a focused overview that's concise enough to deliver during an elevator ride. Your elevator pitch as a job candidate should include your top selling points for the position. Your top selling points are going to be a little bit different from job to job. You want to:

* Give a little bit of your personality and your interest in the opportunity along with your selling points.
* Sound natural and spontaneous while also covering the points that you want to communicate to make the best possible impression.

I'm going to teach you to outline a standard answer that can also be customised for different opportunities. I recommend a bullet point approach, not a scripted approach. Scripted answers tend to sound stiff and artificial. Interviewers don't feel like they're getting to know the real you.

Instead, I suggest that you outline the bullet points that you want to cover and leave room for spontaneity in terms of exactly how you deliver the points each time. Then with a little practice, you'll find that your answers will naturally evolve as you get comfortable with what you want to say. Once you know your key speaking points, you'll have room to be flexible and deliver differently in every single interview. It's not unlike how a celebrity prepares with a publicist before hitting the talk show circuit. They want to sound genuine and likable so they don't script their remarks but they do have an idea of the topics they want to cover - promoting the new movie, telling a funny story about their coworker, you know how it goes.

So let's get started with outlining your elevator pitch. We've got a great three-step formula for you.

**Step 1: who you are**

The first key component is a confident, compelling statement of who you are professionally.

The most common mistake I see is a candidate starting this answer by going back to the beginning of the resume and walking through their experience chronologically and often in way too much detail. This approach is weak because it leads with out-of-date and irrelevant information instead of leading with what's most impressive about you right now. For most candidates, this includes a reference to their current position as well as an overview of the breadth and depth of their related experience.

Let's take a look at a couple of examples to give you a sense of what I'm talking about here.

So here's our first candidate.

“Who are you?”

"Well, I'm a recent Columbia MBA graduate with a strong background in the pharmaceutical industry."

This puts the emphasis on that shiny new MBA and the candidate's industry experience.

Here's another approach from a different candidate.

"I'm an experienced HR executive who has managed all aspects of the HR function from recruiting to training to benefits."

This is a nice big picture, high-level introduction for someone who has a diverse skill set within the HR function. It concisely summarises a diverse background.

Now let's look at a not so good example.

"Well, I grew up in Cincinnati. As a child, I originally wanted to be a fireman then later became quite interested in dinosaurs. I excelled in the sciences from early on placing first in my fourth grade science fair. You know, funny story about that…"

OK, way TMI (too much information). Sadly, the interviewer does not really care. And I realise this is an exaggerated example but trust me, I have heard a lot of people go the TMI route. The idea here is to start strong and grab their attention before getting into the details. Tell them how you want them to see you.

**Step 2: why you're qualified**

Step two is kind of like the meat in the sandwich of your "tell me about yourself" answer. The idea here is to plan in advance which details to share that are most likely to knock the socks off of this interviewer. Remember, your interviewer doesn't have endless amounts of time. Focus on two to four, maybe five points that you'd like to make. The goal is to keep it under two minute’s total, so think about it.

What are those two to four points? There will be more time for detail later, so focus on the biggest selling points - the stuff that you think if you were the interviewer would make you perk up your ears and say, ah, this is interesting. This could be a classic reverse chronological overview of your last few positions or it could be a list of key accomplishments tailored to the job requirements. So let's look at an example here of how you might present that middle piece of the answer.

"I spent the last six years developing my skills as a customer service manager for Megacompany, Inc, where I won several performance awards and I've been promoted twice. I love managing teams and solving customer problems."

This is a very concise example, and yours can certainly have a bit more detail. Just keep in mind that the overall answer should be no longer than two minutes. What's good about this answer?

Well, the emphasis is on relevant experience and not just that but proof of performance. It's not a summary of job duties. A lot of people make that mistake both on the resume and in the interview. When asked about what you did somewhere you're not just going to rattle off the duties that any human would have done in the position. You're going to focus on what you did that was above and beyond - accomplishments, competencies, all of it tailored to what's relevant for the job description.

**Step 3: why you're here**

This is your chance to express enthusiasm for the position in one, maybe two, sentences. Keep it short and sweet here. Here's an example of one way to do this.

"Although I love my current role, I feel I'm now ready for a more challenging assignment and this position really excites me."

This is very general. You could use it for a lot of different positions. If you can make it a bit more specific for the job even better, but something along these lines will work well. You'll have time to get into more detail later, to show that you researched the company, to show why you're a great fit for the role. The goal in this moment is to wrap up your pitch in a concise, confident way and show your enthusiasm.

Once you've got bullet points for each of the three steps, it's time to put them all together into a polished, powerful elevator pitch. The key is to practice a bit and find your rhythm, find your flow. You can practise a time or two with your notes handy. Then once you've internalised the general outline, it's going to feel more natural and your personality is going to come through.

To give you an idea of how it can all come together, I want to share an example answer. Here's a candidate with their version of the answer to "tell me about yourself."

"I have more than five years’ experience as a technical project manager at top Wall Street companies. Most recently, I helped develop an award-winning new trading platform. I'm a person who thrives in a fast-paced environment so right now, I'm looking for an opportunity to apply my technology expertise along with my creative problem-solving skills at an innovative software company."

Your version will be even stronger, but more detailed, tailored for the particular type of opportunity.

Now that you know what you need to do to ace this answer, it's time to outline your own bullet points for each of the three parts and start practising. Big Interview has more sample answers and a fantastic practice tool to help you make the best possible first impression with "Tell me about yourself."

-------------------------------------------------------ENDS------------------------------------------------------