

# HOW TO INTERVIEW FOR YOUR PODCAST



WHAT YOU NEED TO DO  
BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER  
A PODCAST INTERVIEW



PREPARATION

DELIVERY

FOLLOW-UP

When you're planning to grow your business through a podcast, one of your main goals is to develop and nurture a relationship with your guest that can lead to selling and networking opportunities, but you also need to prioritize creating fantastic content that your audience will benefit from, and that your guest will be delighted to have helped create.

That means developing your skills as an interviewer.

Do you need to be Barbara Walters? Of course not – but you do want to stand out from the gigantic pack of mediocre interviewers running through the same tired list of questions with EVERY guest they talk to.

And with this – you will.

This guide is going to cover how to prepare for an interview, how to conduct it, and what to do afterwards to increase your skill and confidence quickly.

We're also going to be covering how to weave the idea of future collaboration opportunities into your process of finding guests, interviewing them, and encouraging them to promote, so that the relationships you create with this process are primed to grow over time.

Striking the balance between creating exceptional content for your audience, and developing your business relationships is key to making podcasting a profitable part of your business. Not every podcaster will want or need to do this, so take what works, and leave what doesn't for your own business.

Let's get started.

# BEFORE THE CALL

## PREPARATION SEPARATES THE AMATEURS FROM THE PROFESSIONALS

A great interview begins long before you start recording.

Research your guest so you can ask unique, intelligent questions. You'll want to look at their digital footprint – their blog, their social media profiles, videos they've made, books they've written, and importantly – other interviews they have done. Learn about their opinions on the topic you'll be talking to them about, so you can set them up to sound great, AND dig into deeper, more complex topics than you would be able to if your research is only surface level.

Try to find in their work:

**What is relevant to your audience?** There won't always be a perfect overlap between your audience, and your guests area of expertise – but a clever interviewer can find the elements in almost any profession that will be fascinating to their own audience. Put yourself in your audiences shoes and think about what particular facets of your guest's work will hit home, generate engagement, or teach them something new.

**What is the most interesting to you, personally?** If you are genuinely interested in a topic, that is going to translate into an engaging conversation. If you're bored, the interview is going to suck, so look for things that pique your own curiosity as well as will be valuable for your audience.

**What is most controversial?** Are they an outlier in their industry? Are they on the record as going against the grain, or conventional understanding? Have they been dragged for something on Twitter? You should know about that, and not be afraid to get them to talk about it. Do they have an opinion or viewpoint on a generally controversial topic (You know what your parents taught you to never ask about? Sex, money, politics, religion etc? If it's related to your topic – ask away, they can always say no.)

**What is going on in their overall industry?** Having an idea of the current challenges and opportunities in your guest's industry will be great material for questions that your guest can get excited about answering. Everyone loves a chance to share their opinion, so if you're prepared with industry news related questions, you'll be able to get unique content, and increase your guest's energy

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when talking to you. News is always NEW, and so it's a great way to get your guest talking about something they haven't discussed on a dozen other podcasts.

Where do you have differing opinions? When you're talking to someone in your own industry, or in an industry that is closely aligned, you should be able to find certain elements in your work that you don't 100% agree with. You're not looking for something to fight about, of course, but you DO want to be able to present an opposing view and engage your guest in a real conversation about the different ways of looking at an issue.

You'll notice a fair amount of this centers on controversy and conflict. There's a reason for this. Conflict fuels an interesting conversation. You don't want to fall into a situation where you're constantly 'preaching to the choir.' It's OKAY for you and your guest to disagree, and as you'll see as we talk about preparing your specific questions – conflict creates the kind of narrative tension that your audience will enjoy and remember.

The other benefit of emphasizing where you and your guest disagree is the opportunity to demonstrate your OWN expertise. Since you may be approaching your guest for future work together, having your own clear viewpoint sets you up as the expert in your space that you are, and creates a context for follow-up communication once you're done your call.

(Does this sound like a lot of work? It can be! Advance research is a fantastic task to get your assistant to help you with. Have them do the legwork and give you a report with the most relevant details so you can reference them quickly when writing your questions. Even if you have your assistant prepare your questions for you, we would strongly recommend spending some time reviewing their research and doing a quick scan of your guest's online presence in case you get caught off guard by a guest response while you're talking.)

Now it's time to prepare your questions.

On the next page is a sample question list that you can modify to suit your own interviewing style and podcast goals.

# Preparing to Interview

## Intro and Greeting.

SHORT: welcome and who are you to the guest.

## Icebreaker Question

This can be where you start to develop your own style – the Icebreaker question can be repeated across guests, and the idea should be to put your guest at ease and give them a chance to be interesting or witty. Do not ask for or let them tell their life's story. It is badly overdone, it's usually not that interesting, and we've seen it cause major listener dropoff. Instead, ask about a specific kind of experience, for a story of something that happened recently or anything else that will allow them to demonstrate some personality without having to provide a biography.

## Setting the Stage Question

This is a question you ask to set the tone for the interview. You want to get close to what you're going to be REALLY getting into. Make this one fairly easy – ask your guest about how they came to have a particular idea, about what is interesting or exciting to them these days, or to give a brief description of how they came to be doing what they're doing.

## Topical Questions

*(Have 8-10 prepared, but know that you may not use all of them)*

This is the meat of your interview and should cover questions that will help the guest explain their viewpoints in a way that is interesting for your audience. Start with easier questions and move towards the conflict, controversy or different opinions that you've discovered through research.

Here is a sample Topical questions list:

- At your company, you do X. Where did that come from?
- What did other people at your company think about that?
  - i. If positive response: and how did that impact the service you were able to provide.
  - ii. If negative response: how did you manage the pushback? What did you learn because of [specific action or event]?
- Most people in your industry do X, why do you do Y – what do people think of it?
- Does doing Y make you do anything else differently? What are the broader affects?
- Recently [Industry news] happened – what challenges is that causing and what do you think should be done about it?

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- I know you believe X, I've always done Y – tell me about what benefits Y has for you and your company. What is X not addressing, in your opinion?
- If [Scenario that would challenge their beliefs] happened how would you respond?
- In you [BOOK/VIDEO/BLOG etc] you say [Quotation]- I find this interesting because [REASON] how does it apply to [Area of your audience's interest]
- [Other known figure in the industry] said X – what's your take on that?
- Can you tell us about a time when you were really uncertain about X – how did you navigate the situation?

## Closing and Wrap Up Questions

Now it's time to wind down the interview. Have one or two closing and wrap up questions. Like Icebreaker questions, these can be questions you ask many or all guests. This is a good opportunity to let your guest give advice, or mantras they live by like – what are the biggest mistakes in the industry that people should avoid? Or, What is the best way to end a workday feeling satisfied?

## Invite them to Promote

Its courteous to give your guest a chance to tell your audience where they can learn more, and how they can work together.

Along with your questions, you should have their vital information, and sources you are quoting, the names of their books and publications, direct quotes you want them to respond to, and relevant industry statistics that may come up. This information is great to have on hand so that you're not stumbling or searching for information in a way that can disrupt the flow of your call.

Prepare a set of questions like this for every interview you conduct, and your guests will be singing your praises. Now let's talk about actually conducting the call.

# DURING THE INTERVIEW

## REFLECT, RESPOND, EXTEND

There is a whole process to getting a person to arrive at a specific place and time (if you don't have it already, check out our Guest Management Workflow!), so we're going to jump right into what you do once you get your guest on the call!

Always start the call with the recording option OFF. (Unless you are afraid you will forget to hit record at the critical moment, in which case record from minute one, and let them know your producers will edit out the starting chatter.)

Please note that at some point you will forget to hit record. It will suck, but it happens to everyone. Sorry.) Chat with your guest for a few minutes to warm them up, make sure they sound good on their mic, and remind them of the process you're about to be following. Make sure to tell them the following:

- If they stumble or make a mistake – no problem. Just pause, breathe and start the sentence over.
- If you get into an area they don't want to discuss, they are free to say so, and you can redirect the conversation. Your producer will remove any reference to it.
- At the end of the interview, they should stay on the line for a few moments to debrief and talk about the next steps.

Then, ask them if they're ready, HIT RECORD then start with your introduction and icebreaker questions.

As you move the conversation along – do NOT be afraid to go off your list. When your guest says something interesting, follow it up! Ask them how things felt, or why they happened, or what they were afraid WOULD happen. Personal, human stories make great audio. Keep an eye on the time, and make sure you leave yourself a chance to dig into one or two of the conflict related questions, but otherwise, your list of questions is about being prepared for the different twists and turns that a conversation can take NOT a script that you must follow exactly.

No one will lose a leg if you only ask 5 questions and end up with a fantastic conversation. Really. It's far worse to leave interesting, juicy content sitting there on the table because you're feeling constrained by your questions list. You are the boss of your questions. Your questions are not the boss of you.

# During the Interview

Here are some common host mistakes to avoid:

- Verbal affirmations when the guest is speaking. It's fine when you're face-to-face, but it's incredibly distracting when listening. (Think: "mmm, yeah, uh-huh" while they're talking.)
- If you're not talking, lean back from the mic. We can hear you breathing. Ideally you are recording on two separate tracks so your breaths can be removed, but the fewer there are the easier and less expensive your editing will be!
- While it's okay to interrupt to clarify a point or dig deeper into something when a guest is moving on, be careful not to make it a habit.
- Talking over your guest. If you are speaking more than they are – that's a problem. The exact balance of conversation depends on the type of podcast you have, but even when you're making a play for thought leadership it shouldn't tip past 50/50 you and the guest!
- Believing the show is all about you and what YOU want to know. In fact, you are the steward who is connecting your audience with your guest because they have something wonderful to share. And as a steward, it's your job that what they're sharing is in alignment to your audience.

Also, remember that this is YOUR show, and you can stop an interview when you need to address something.

- If the guest is making noises, like kicking a desk, lots of coughing, etc., give them a little coaching, or have them get a drink of water.
- If the guest has stumbled a lot on a sentence, just have them back up and start over.
- If the guest is not sticking to relevant topics, gently direct them back to your topic.
- If the guest is shamelessly self-promoting or hijacking the interview... not cool. Stop the conversation and let them know that the two of you need to get back on track.

After you have closed out the official interview, stop the recording, and immediately thank the guest, and ask them how they thought it went.

Then, tell them the next steps on your end – that you'll get it into production, and be in touch with them with their release date. At this time, *ask them what you can provide them to help them share with their own communities* – you might say that many guests like an embed code to place on their websites, or some social sharing graphics with hooks to tease the content. (A share is never guaranteed, but asking in advance and getting a response creates a slight sense of commitment.)



# During the Interview

Then, if this is a guest that you would like to build a closer relationship with, you can plant the seeds of future ways to work together and be in touch. Some people might use this as part of a lead nurturing process, but it's equally effective for all kinds of networking! ONLY inviting people you want as clients is a tad on the sleazy side, but if there is a person out there who you think would be interesting to your audience, it stands to reason that they are a good person to know professionally for other reasons! Maybe they have a product or service you can recommend. Maybe they're really great at things you want to learn. Maybe you respect them and their and want to become friends. There are lots of reasons to want to get to know a podcast guest better, and while you're interviewing them is a wonderful chance to start that relationship off on a strong footing.

Here are some ways to do that:

- Tell them how much you enjoyed the conversation, and that you'd like to explore the idea of working together on another project.
- Say you have a couple of people in mind who it would be good for them to know – either other podcast hosts, or other professionals in your network – ask if you can make those introductions.
- Offer them a complimentary hour of your time by way of a thank you for joining you on the call, that they can use, or give away to their own audience.
- Let them know that you have another podcast in mind that they would be a great fit for. Likewise, if you know of any YouTube channels, books or blogs they might find valuable.
- If you have any kind of affiliate or referral fee program, you can mention it and ask if they would like information about it.

Whatever you end up suggesting – the most important thing is to keep the door firmly open to continue building the relationship and create a clear next step for something not directly related to the interview that was just conducted.

# AFTER THE INTERVIEW

## ALWAYS PLAN FOR FOLLOW-UP

This first thing you should do after exiting an interview is open a notebook or document, and jot down a few notes about it:

- What did you find the most interesting?
- What surprised you?
- Did any parts feel awkward?
- What kind of follow-up did you propose to your guest?

This will accomplish 3 things for you: 1) you'll be able to easily analyze and improve your interviewing skills, 2) keep your impressions and feelings fresh, and accessible when you're promoting the episode later and 3) help you track which offers for next steps are performing the best.

This is optional, of course, but we highly recommend it, and it will allow us to support you more fully and effectively as your show grows and develops.

The next steps don't have to happen immediately after an interview, but they will be actions you want to make sure to take consistently.

- **Listen to the interview.** This is so important. Hearing yourself interviewing is the single best way to improve your performance, even though it absolutely does feel weird at first.
- **Record an intro, outro, or hook for the podcast.** If you have different show parts in your episode structure, recording them while your impressions are fresh will make them much more impactful.
- **Send the sharing and release information** to your guest as soon as you have them available. along. We highly recommend adding a personal note of thanks!
- **Your follow-up.** Whatever you suggested to your guest by way of extending the relationship, make a note in your calendar IMMEDIATELY for when you want to reach out about it, and the specific details you mentioned. It's way too easy to forget follow-up, so don't give yourself the chance.

And there you have it – follow the information in this guide and your interviews will be professional, interesting and help you generate more leads, relationships and reach with your audience. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions! We're happy to help!