

# EXPLORING THE AUTHENTIC SELF

A Guide to Introspection in the Context of an Interview



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# BACKGROUND/CULTURE

Coming to college means constant exposure to new people. For many students around the country, there is an initial shock that comes along with the vast diversity of demographics at their university. Race, ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic status are just a few of the most prominent demographic characteristics that college students may grapple with as they adjust to life in a new place. Some students may find themselves in the majority at their school, while others may be left wondering if there are others within their new community who grew up with similar experiences as them. For both of these kinds of students, the interview process offers an opportunity to look introspectively into how the aforementioned demographic categories have shaped them into the people they are today, and who they want to become in the future.

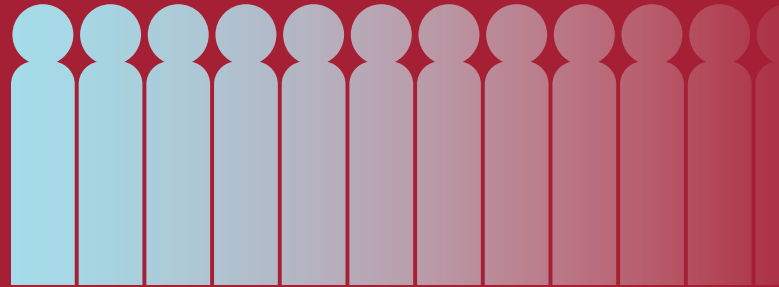
## ACCEPTANCE IS KEY

To find inspiration for embracing identity, we need not look further than our own Generation Z. As noted in a study by McKinsey & Company, Gen Z behavior tends to be characterized by an overarching “search for truth.” What this search for truth involves is seeing value in “individual expression,” as well

as an avoidance of labels. Going through life with this attitude is an incredibly unifying experience for our generation. But in preparing for an interview, your challenge is to apply this idea of widespread acceptance for others in a new way: fully accepting yourself. Due to this desire to be unique outside the confines of the words that define them, many Gen Zers might shy away from digging deeper into these labels, trying to forget them altogether. What you must keep in mind is that it is precisely these labels that make you unique. They allow you to tell a story unlike anyone else’s. When analyzed and understood in the distinct context of your life, understanding them and knowing how to articulate their impact might be what convinces interviewers that they want you in their office. They want to sit next to you, they want to have conversations in the hallways, and they are truly intrigued to learn more. The key is to remember that the demographic labels that define you might not mean much, as you don’t get to choose them, but looking more closely at the way in which they lead you to act and live out your life is imperative to exploring your authentic identity.

## CHOOSE THE PATH

While growing up, fitting in seems like the biggest deal, and a major goal that most college students can admit to attempting to achieve. Many have grown up suppressing their uniqueness to better align themselves with the people around them. One of the first forms of self expression to go in youth and teen years is often the habits and traits of one’s cultural background. Rather than embracing who they are and where they or their ancestors come from, many college students reach a crossroads at some point in college where they can either decide to continue on this path towards a false and often dull identity, or they can choose to begin to make their background a bigger part of their story and project it outward.



## CONNECTION TO ETHICS

In the real world, a perfectly ethical workplace does not exist. What can we do, as employees, as interns, or even as consumers to improve the way people are treated in regards to their background, culture, and heritage? Change begins with education. It begins with a genuine interest to learn about what is happening in the now and what needs to change. This takes great time and effort, and education about diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace can be an intimidating topic to dive into. Let this Harvard Business School Podcast on minorities in the workplace be a starting point in this learning journey.



HBR IdeaCast: “Why Opening Up at Work is Harder for Minorities”

# HEAR FROM YOUR PEERS!



**ADÁN GONZÁLEZ**  
MAJOR: ACCOUNTING

## EMBRACE VULNERABILITY

Embracing your background and culture, your identity, are actions that are often thought of as something we should suppress in interviews. People believe it might make the interview awkward, or uncomfortable. There exists a general fear of opening up about gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic background, but what I have learned is that talking about the aspects of my background that are important to me has allowed me to better connect with interviewers. Whether they share the same background and culture or not, it increases the intimacy of the conversation. You are no longer just talking about the interview questions, but you are telling them something deeper about yourself and showing vulnerability. Once you pass the initial feeling of discomfort this topic might bring, you are actually more comfortable as an interviewee because you are talking about yourself and your background and culture—and what more do you know about than yourself? I've found that bringing my background and culture into an interview is truly a strength. It not only shows the interviewer a personal side of you that companies care about just as much as your professional side.



**DANIELLA RUFO**  
MAJOR: ACCOUNTING

## QUICK REMINDERS BEFORE INTERVIEWS

**1. You are interesting!** We are often too humble and fail to give ourselves enough credit where credit is due. This can lead to feeling unqualified and unconfident before the interview. To prevent this, assess your resume and acknowledge all that you have learned from your different leadership positions and club involvement. These achievements are more than just bullet points; these are life experiences that have helped you grow and develop – professionally and personally. Rather than overthinking about what makes you interesting, focus more on why you are interested in the specific company and position.

**2. You are more than your resume!** If recruiters only considered resumes, then interviews would not exist. This is the time to provide stories and meaning behind those bullet points on your resume. Remember to be personable and friendly while telling these stories (a smile never hurts) and show that you are engaged. Interviewers are people too, and no one likes forced and awkward conversations. Companies want to hire someone that they can have genuine and natural conversations with. While it is beneficial to practice common interview questions beforehand, it can be detrimental if it sounds too much like a memorized script. All in all, remember to showcase your personality along with your qualifications.

**3. Breathe!** This should be a fun and memorable learning experience. The worst that can happen is that the position goes to someone else. Although upsetting, there are other opportunities out there to learn about and pursue. Regardless of the outcome, take pride in the fact that you made it this far in the recruitment process. Keeping this in mind will help boost your confidence and calm those inevitable nerves. Overall, it is less about the rejections and more about what you do after them.

# VALUES

## MAKE THINGS CONVERSATIONAL

While taking part in an interview, a mindset that can help ease stress is to make your goal to convince the interviewer that they don't want this meeting with you to be the last. An approach to this that is often appropriate in behavioral interviews is to try and make the interview conversational. The end goal of the conversation will be not only to have shown the interviewer who you are and why you add value to the company, but also to leave the conversation having learned about the person who interviewed you. One of the easiest ways to connect with another person is through a conversation related to each of your personal values. Remember that this is an interview we are talking about, so what you must learn how to do is to weave points related to your personal values into your responses to the interview questions. Another avenue for conversation about personal values is to connect your personal values to the values of the company that you are interviewing for. This is a step you should take before even applying for a position at any company, so the goal will be to fine tune your personal values so that you can articulate them confidently in the context of your interview questions.



**MARINA MENENDEZ**

c/o 2022

“ I think one element of interview prep that I overlooked throughout my early years at Santa Clara was how important it is to highlight your values. Last summer I interviewed with Apple for a summer internship and I was surprised by the number of questions they asked me that were values driven rather than Finance based or quantitative. That being said, I answered the questions honestly and I even got the opportunity to ask questions about the working environment at Apple and what the company's values are. To my surprise, a few days later I got an email confirming my acceptance into the 2021 summer internship program. The entire application process with Apple really opened my eyes not only to the importance of making sure your values align with any place you want to work, but also what an asset it can be. In other words, if a company can see that you are a person who holds certain values, whatever they may be, and that they are important to you, that only makes you stand out that much more as an applicant. All in all, what I hope to explain with this anecdote is that while grades, experience, references, etc. are all important aspects of an application, remaining true to who you are is equally as valuable an asset in my opinion.

**GET A HEAD START ON  
UNDERSTANDING YOUR  
PERSONAL VALUES:**



Harvard Business Review:  
“What Are Your Personal Values?”

# STORYTELLING

## SMALL MOMENTS MATTER

When participating in an interview, it can be helpful to think of yourself as a storyteller. Your life is a collection of stories. How you tell these stories of your life is key. You may be thinking that your life hasn't been interesting enough to talk about in an interview, that your stories have no connection to a potential job. The reality is that we don't always need to highlight giant battles or triumphs in life to be interesting and memorable. The smallest nuances in life can actually serve as the greatest stories highlighting one's character.

Take this example: what if I asked you to tell me what your friends say your realistic superpower is? Is it empathy? Talking to strangers? Whatever the answer is, there have to have been actions that you have taken to receive this label. Immediately, there is a potential story to tell. As you can see, it doesn't take a major life event to have a story worth sharing.

## START ARTICULATING YOUR LIFE STORIES

### STEP 1: WRITE

A great way to begin is to write out a list of these 3-5 stories, with bullet points outlining key events that you will want to mention.

### STEP 2: PRACTICE

A key to successful interviewing is being natural and conversational, even when your answer is meticulously planned. One way that storytelling can become natural is by practicing telling the stories out loud so many times that the storyline simply becomes second nature.

## YOUR ANGLE IS EVERYTHING

When sharing about your life experiences in the context of an interview, finding the content of your stories is only the first challenge. Arguably even more important, is the next step of understanding that your angle is everything. What this means is that you must learn to hear a question, immediately connect it to one of your stories, and use this narrative to answer the question. The stories you have floating in your mind are the foundation of your answers to interview questions, but how you decide to make your story fit that question is what is most crucial. Storytelling in an interview allows you to give your interviewer a glimpse into who you are beyond the words on your resume. For example, stories should align with your personal values, and highlight them without even having to explicitly mention what those values are.

## DON'T FORGET!

When your interview comes to an end, it isn't actually over. Always remember to send your interviewer a brief thank you note. This will reflect positively on your character, and highlight your attention to detail. If possible, include a detail related to your conversation within the note. This note can be sent through your recruiter, or directly to the interviewer if you have their contact information.

# CONFIDENCE

Typically, when we think of professional development, our minds go directly to hard skills. Of course these skills are crucial to finding success in any field, but as highlighted by Cengage Learning, students are more likely to perform well under pressure, respond to setbacks, and step out of their comfort zone if they have a high level of self-confidence. Confidence is a highly personal journey, and no two people will have an identical experience with the topic throughout college. But the question students often have as they enter the world of professional development is, *where do I start?*

## TALK, TALK, TALK!

“Networking” is an intimidating word to most college students, and it can seem like a daunting task. The reality is that networking doesn’t have to be that way! A great way to begin practicing networking is to simply set up a chat with your professors during office hours to get to know what their career has been like.

Another key way to begin building confidence talking to people and networking is to set up a coffee chat or call with an older student! It can be someone you know, or someone who you reach out to on LinkedIn. It is always a great idea to ask older students about their involvement in clubs, organizations, or jobs within the university, because it could offer you a connection to join something new! One of the most rewarding aspects of going through college is the opportunity to undergo the mentorship cycle. You begin your journey through college as a mentee, learning from those who have previously been in your shoes. Over time, you begin to become equipped with the knowledge, the tools, and the confidence to then be that mentor to the students who come after you!

Alumni are another resource to work on growing your confidence as a communicator. In the context of an interview, the more experience you have speaking with professionals, the more easily the interview conversation will flow for you, because you will have had practice! Students are often intimidated to reach out to alumni, but the reality is that most of those alumni were once in this same position, and are more than willing to give back to the community that helped shape them into the professionals they are today.

## CONNECTION TO ETHICS

A key reason that confidence propels us towards career success is that it leads us to believe that we have the ability to lead. When we talk about what it means to be a leader, success is not merely about getting results. As a group influenced by a Jesuit education, students at SCU are equipped with the tools to be thoughtful, ethical leaders. To better understand what it means to exemplify ethical leadership, we can look to the Markkula Center’s visual explanation of a leader’s scope of influence, and how we can blend the pursuit of success with moral excellence.



Markkula Center for Applied Ethics:  
“The Practice of Ethical Leadership”

## **GET OUT THERE AND GAIN EXPERIENCE!**

Gaining experience only happens if you take a chance and get involved! Throughout college, many clubs and organizations will return to you what you put into them, so approaching things with an “all in” attitude is a key to success for many students. With this said, make sure that you are balancing your involvement with fun by being involved in clubs and organizations that you genuinely enjoy! It is far easier to be motivated to jump into new experiences when they align with your interests and passions. Fear is typically a huge obstacle for college students when it comes to trying something new. It’s important to remember that most of your peers feel the same way, and nobody expects you to enter a new experience knowing everything.

## **COMPARISON IS THE THEIF OF PROGRESSION**

If you look around at your peers, there is a good chance you might compare yourself to others who you think “have it all together”. Don’t forget that everyone is on their unique path towards their future career, and that even those who seem like they’ve got it all together are struggling too! For this reason, we mustn’t compare ourselves to each other, and must focus on bringing a positive attitude to our interactions with our peers. It takes the support of the community to help propel anyone towards success, and that includes how you treat yourself and others!

## **REMEMBER THAT CONFIDENCE IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION**

Confidence is not a static feeling. There will always be ups and downs in life, both personal and professional, and that’s part of what makes up your story! Use the high points of confidence in your life to propel you further forward and take more risks, and utilize the low points as motivation to reach your next peak. The important thing is to remember to be in constant pursuit of the growth of your confidence!



## **GOOD LUCK BRONCOS!**

**If you have any more questions, reach out to the author:**

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