

From Plant Manager to General Manager — Operations

A complete interview preparation system built for one person, one role, one company.

PREPARED FOR

Ajay Kumar

Plant Head | 22 Years | BE Mechanical | Auto Components & EV Manufacturing

Target Role: General Manager — Operations

Built by SANDESH SIDDARAM

24 years in Operations, Engineering & Quality | Sr. Vice President level | Six Sigma Black Belt
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Before You Read Anything Else

Let me tell you straight why I built this.

I have spent 24 years in operations. I have run plants. I have sat on the other side of the table and interviewed hundreds of people for manager, senior manager, GM and VP level roles. And I have seen the same thing happen again and again.

A very good operations man walks into the room and comes out without the offer. Not because he is not capable. He is more capable than half the people who got selected. He loses because in those 45 minutes he could not show what he has done in 22 years.

Nobody ever taught him how. That is the whole problem.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

See, in our industry we train people on everything. Safety, quality, TPM, Six Sigma, IATF, SAP, lean, kaizen, 5S. Twenty two years of training.

But nobody spends even one hour teaching a plant manager how to talk about himself in a room full of strangers who will decide his next ten years in 45 minutes.

That gap is what I am filling. That is what this kit is.

This kit is not a list of questions and answers. You can get that free on Google. This is a complete system — it takes your 22 years, finds what is valuable inside it, translates it into the language the interview panel is listening for, and gives you the exact words, the exact order, and the exact way to say it.

Ajay Kumar is the person I built this one for. His name, his company and the identifying details are changed in this sample. But before I built it, I sat with him for 90 minutes and did a full mock interview. What I found in those 90 minutes is in Part B of this document. I want you to read that part carefully, because that is where the real money is.

Who this kit is for

- Plant Managers and Factory Managers going for GM Operations, Works Head, Site Head or Business Unit Head
- Senior Managers and AGMs who have been stuck at the same level for 4 to 8 years
- Technically brilliant people who keep reaching the final round and losing to someone less experienced
- Anyone with 15 to 28 years of experience who has never had a single hour of real interview training
- People moving from a single-plant role to a multi-plant or corporate role — this is the hardest jump of all

Who this kit is NOT for

- Freshers and people below 8 years of experience. Different game, different kit.
- Anyone looking for a magic script to read out. This needs 14 days of your practice. I give the system, you do the reps.
- Anyone who wants a job guarantee. I do not give that and nobody honest does.

⚠ SET YOUR EXPECTATION RIGHT

One honest line before we start. This kit will not make you a better operations leader. You are already that. What it will do is stop you from being underestimated by people who have known you for 45 minutes.

The 7 Reasons Senior Operations People Lose Interviews

These are not my theories. This is what I have seen sitting in the interviewer chair for 24 years, and what I now see every week in mock interviews.

1. You talk like an engineer. They are listening for a businessman.

You say "we improved OEE from 68 to 81 percent." The panel hears a number they cannot value. What they wanted to hear is "that released 190 units a day of hidden capacity, which is 34 crore of revenue we fulfilled without spending one rupee on capex."

Same achievement. Two completely different men in the room.

2. You say "we" when you should say "I".

This one is the biggest killer and almost nobody knows they are doing it. Operations people are trained for 20 years to give credit to the team. It is a beautiful habit on the shop floor. In an interview it makes you invisible.

The panel is not hiring your team. They are hiring you. If every sentence starts with "we", they walk out with no idea what YOU did.

3. You start at the beginning and walk forward.

"I completed my BE in 2003, then I joined XYZ as a GET, then in 2006 I moved to..." — by the third sentence the panel has stopped listening. I have watched interviewers check their phone while a very good candidate walked them through 22 years in order.

Start with what you are today and why it matters to them. History comes later, and only the parts that serve the story.

4. You have no numbers ready on your tongue.

Ask a plant manager his OEE and he tells you instantly. Ask him his plant's gross margin, his cost of poor quality as a percentage of sales, his manpower cost per unit, his inventory days — and there is a pause. That pause is expensive.

At GM level the panel is testing whether you think in money. If you have to calculate, you have already answered.

5. You cannot answer "why you and not the market?"

Your plant did well for four years. Good. But was that you, or was it a good product in a good market with a good team you inherited? Every serious interviewer asks some version of this. Most plant managers have never even thought about it, so they get defensive or they talk about the team again.

6. You answer for four minutes when ninety seconds was enough.

Long answers feel thorough to you. To the panel they feel like you cannot prioritise. A GM is judged on what he chooses to leave out.

7. You do not know what the role actually is.

This is the one that decides the GM interview. Plant Manager and GM Operations sound like a promotion in the same direction. They are not. One runs a plant. The other runs a business that happens to have plants in it. If you walk in describing how you will run their plant better, you have just told them you are a Plant Manager. Part C of this kit deals with this in full.

★ **SAN SPEAKING:**

Read those seven again. Be honest with yourself about how many of them are you.

When I do a mock interview, I usually find five or six of the seven in the same person. And that person has 20 plus years and a very strong track record. That is what makes it painful — the capability is there, the presentation is not.

Sample report
Sandesh Siddaram
linkedmaster.com/start

What Is Inside This Kit

Four parts. Roughly 40 pages. Every page built around one person and one role.

Part	What it covers	Why it matters
PART A	The honest diagnosis — why senior people lose, what this kit is, and why an AI prompt cannot do this	Sets your head right before you prepare
PART B	The Mock Interview Diagnostic — what actually happened in Ajay's 90 minute mock, with data	This is the part nobody else in the market gives you
PART C	The full preparation kit — 15 sections, from company research to salary negotiation	This is what you practise for 14 days
PART D	How to get your own kit, and what it costs	So you know exactly what you are buying

Part C in detail — the 15 sections

#	Section	What you get
1	The Company Dossier	40+ researched facts about the target company, its numbers, its leadership, its pressure points
2	The Role Decoded	What GM Operations actually is versus Plant Manager. The single biggest gap to close.
3	The Language Translation Table	Your 12 best achievements rewritten from plant language into business language, side by side
4	Tell Me About Yourself	A full word for word script with pause markers, pitch markers and gesture notes
5	Your 6 Signature Stories	Six career stories built in STAR-L format, with the numbers, ready to deploy against any question
6	The Number Bank	Every metric you must have on your tongue without thinking. One page. Laminate it.
7	Q&A Bank — 4 Tiers	Easy, Medium, Tough and Killer questions with your specific best answers
8	The 5 Questions That Break Plant Managers	The ones almost everyone fails. Handled properly.
9	The Case Round	How to handle "here is our problem, what would you do" without freezing
10	Your 30-60-90 Day Plan	A written plan you hand across the table. Almost nobody does this.
11	Salary Negotiation Script	Word for word. Operations people lose 15 to 25% here every single time.

#	Section	What you get
12	Body Language, Voice & Camera	How to sit, where to look, when to go loud, when to pause, how to set up a video interview
13	Reading The Panel	Who is in the room, what each person is actually testing, how to speak to each one
14	The 14 Day Practice Protocol	Day by day. What to rehearse, what to record, what to fix.
15	Final Checklist & Your Questions	Night before, morning of, and the questions you ask them

Sample report
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"Can I Not Just Do This With ChatGPT?"

You should ask this. I would ask it. So let me answer it properly instead of dodging it.

First, the honest part. Yes, AI can write you a good answer to "tell me about yourself." It can list 30 GM Operations questions. It can even research the company. I use AI in my own work every single day and I am not going to pretend otherwise.

Now the part that decides whether you get the job.

What you ask AI for	What you actually needed	The gap
"Write my self introduction"	To know that you say "we" 47 times and "I" 9 times	AI cannot hear you. It only reads what you type. Your problem is in your mouth, not on your screen.
"Give me GM Operations questions"	To know WHICH 8 of those 40 questions this specific panel will actually ask you	That judgment comes from having sat in that chair, not from a list
"Is my answer good?"	Someone to tell you the story is weak and to drop it	AI agrees with you. It will polish your worst story beautifully and never tell you not to use it.
"Help me prepare"	To be told which 4 of your 22 years matter and which 18 to leave out	You do not know what to leave out. That is the whole problem. A bad prompt gives a bad answer and you cannot tell the difference.
"Make me sound confident"	To actually be confident after 14 reps and someone correcting you	Confidence is a rehearsal outcome. A document cannot give it to you.
"How do I answer salary?"	To know the real band for GM Ops in EV components in your city, right now	AI gives you a global average. I give you what I have seen offered this quarter.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Let me put it the way an operations man will understand.

You can buy a very good CNC machine. Best in the market. But if nobody sets the tool offsets and nobody checks the first piece, you will produce 500 rejections very efficiently.

AI is the machine. What I do is the setting, the first piece approval and the in-process checking. Both are needed. One without the other gives you a nicely formatted document and the same result you got last time.

THE THING NOBODY WILL DO FOR YOU

And there is one more thing, which is the real reason people come to me. AI will never sit in front of you, listen to you speak for 90 minutes, and then tell you the uncomfortable truth about how you come across. Nobody in your life will tell you that. Not your wife, not your friend, not your boss. The interview panel certainly will not — they will just not call you back.

That 90 minutes of honest feedback is the most valuable thing in this entire offering. Everything else is the delivery mechanism.

PART B

The Mock Interview Diagnostic

90 minutes with Ajay. Recorded, transcribed and counted. This is what came out.

First, Who Is Ajay

Before I tell you what went wrong, you should know that Ajay is a strong candidate. This is important. If I show you a weak man failing an interview you will learn nothing. Ajay is genuinely good.

Name	Ajay Kumar
Age / Experience	45 years old, 22 years in manufacturing
Qualification	BE Mechanical Engineering, 2003. No MBA.
Current Role	Plant Head — Tier-1 auto components plant (machining + sub-assembly)
Scale he runs	₹430 Cr plant turnover, 840 people across 3 shifts, 6 OEM customers
Career path	GET → Production Engineer → Asst Manager Production → Manager → Sr Manager Ops → Plant Manager (2019) → Plant Head (2022)
Strong points	Launched 2 greenfield lines. Took OEE from 68% to 81%. Zero LTI for 41 months. Handled one long-term wage settlement without a single day of stoppage.
Target	GM — Operations at a large EV / auto component group. Multi-plant, P&L ownership, ₹65-90L CTC band.
The problem	4 interviews in 14 months. 3 reached final round. 0 offers. No feedback from any of them.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Note that last line carefully. Three final rounds and zero offers. That is not a capability problem. If you are reaching final rounds, the company already believes you can do the job.

Losing in the final round means one thing. Somebody else told a better story about the same 20 years.

The Mock: 90 Minutes, Recorded and Counted

I ran it exactly like a real GM Operations panel. No warm up, no "we are just practising" softness. I played three roles — the CHRO, the Group COO and the Business Head. I recorded it and I went back and counted things afterwards, because feelings are not data.

Here is what came out of the count.

47 : 9 times he said "we" vs "I"	11 min on "tell me about yourself"	0 rupee figures in that answer
23 filler words in 40 minutes	4 min 20s average answer length	1 question he asked at the end

Finding 1 — The "we" problem. 47 to 9.

In a 40 minute segment he used "we" 47 times and "I" 9 times. Ratio of about 5 to 1. At GM level the candidates who get selected sit around 1 to 1. They still credit the team, but they own the decision.

Actual line from the recording: "We looked at the bottleneck, we did the analysis, and we decided to shift the operation to the second line."

Who decided? The panel has no idea. It could have been his boss, his production manager, or a consultant. He gave away his own achievement out of pure habit.

HOW WE FIXED IT

The fix is not to become arrogant. The fix is one sentence structure: "The team ran the analysis. I took the call to move it, because the alternative was ₹4 Cr of capex we did not have." Team gets credit for work. You keep credit for judgment. That is exactly what a GM is paid for.

Finding 2 — Eleven minutes, and not one rupee

"Tell me about yourself" ran eleven minutes. In those eleven minutes he mentioned: his college, his first company, four job changes, his OEE improvement, his TPM implementation, his safety record and his current team size.

He did not mention once: any rupee figure. Any customer name. The word margin, EBITDA, P&L or cost. Any business outcome at all.

He described 22 years of operations without describing a single business result. And this is a man who has actually delivered business results. They were in his head. They just did not come out.

THE REAL COST OF A BAD OPENING

What the panel writes on their pad after 11 minutes like that:

"Solid plant guy. Process oriented. Not sure he thinks commercially. Probe P&L."

And now the rest of your interview is spent defending against a doubt you created in your own introduction.

Finding 3 — He started in 2003 and walked forward

Chronological order. Every single time. I checked the recording at the 90 second mark of that answer — by then he had reached only 2008. Fourteen years of his best work was still ahead, and the panel's attention was already gone.

The rule: start with today. Then one line on the journey. Then straight to the two or three things that prove you can do THEIR job. History is evidence, not narration.

Finding 4 — Twelve process metrics, zero money metrics

I counted every metric he quoted across the full 90 minutes.

Metric type	Count	Examples he gave
Process metrics	12	OEE, PPM, MTTR, MTBF, rejection %, absenteeism %, LTI, cycle time, changeover time
Money metrics	0	— nothing —
People metrics	2	Headcount, attrition

This is the single most common finding in every senior operations mock I run. Not a weakness in the man. A weakness in what he has been rewarded for measuring for 22 years. Nobody ever asked a plant manager for his gross margin. So it never entered his vocabulary.

Finding 5 — The question that stopped him for eight seconds

I asked him:

THE QUESTION

"Your plant went from 68% OEE to 81% and you had four good years. How do I know that was you, and not a good product in a growing market with a team that was already there before you came?"

Eight seconds of silence. Then he said, and I am quoting the recording:

"Sir, actually the team was very supportive... we had good people... I would not say it was only me..."

He apologised for his own achievement. In a GM interview. To a question designed specifically to see whether he can defend his own record.

THE ANSWER WE BUILT

What he should have said: "Fair question, and I will give you the test I use myself. The market grew 9% in those four years. My volumes grew 34%. The product mix got harder, not easier — we added two low-volume high-complexity parts. And the team was the same team that had delivered 68% for the three years before I came. Same people, same product, same market. What changed was the operating discipline. I am happy to walk you through exactly what I changed if that is useful."

Notice what that answer does. It does not brag. It gives the panel a way to verify. That is what senior people sound like.

Finding 6 — Answers running four and a half minutes

Average answer length was 4 minutes 20 seconds. For a senior interview the working band is 90 to 150 seconds, then stop and let them ask. Long answers do not show depth. They show that you cannot decide what matters.

Worse: in a long answer the panel has already heard your best point at 40 seconds. Everything after that dilutes it. By minute four they remember your weakest example, because it was the most recent one.

Finding 7 — Twenty-three filler words

"Basically" 14 times. "Actually" 9 times. In 40 minutes. He had no idea he was doing it. Nobody does until they hear the recording.

This is not a cosmetic issue. Filler words are what your mouth produces while your brain is searching. They are a direct signal that the answer was not ready. Panels read it exactly that way.

Finding 8 — One question at the end, and it was about joining date

At the close I said, "Any questions for us?" He asked how soon they would need him to join.

That is a candidate question. GM Operations candidates ask business questions. What is the capacity utilisation across the three plants today. Which plant is the problem child. Is this role created because of growth or because of a gap. What does the Board expect from operations over the next 18 months.

Those questions do two things. They show you think at the level of the role, and they get you real information you need before you accept an offer.

Finding 9 — The salary answer that cost him ₹14 lakh

I asked expectation. He answered in under two seconds: a number, followed by "whatever is as per company norms, sir."

Two problems. One, the number he gave was roughly 18% below the market band I see for GM Ops in EV and auto components right now. Two, "as per company norms" hands the entire decision to them and tells them you will accept whatever is offered.

On a ₹75 lakh role, an 18% gap is about ₹13.5 lakh a year. Compounded over three years with increments, that single two-second answer is worth more than ₹45 lakh.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

This is the finding that shook him the most. Not the "we" count, not the eleven minutes. This one.

Because he realised he had probably done the same thing in the last two negotiations of his career. Twenty two years of hard work, and the last two seconds of the interview decided the number.

Section 11 of this kit has the exact script so this never happens again.

The Scorecard — Where He Stood, Where We Took Him

I score every mock on 12 dimensions out of 10. Not to make anybody feel bad. To make the gap visible, so we know exactly what to work on and we can measure it again after practice.

Dimension	Before	What was wrong	Target
Opening / self introduction	3	11 minutes, chronological, no business outcome	9
Ownership language (I vs we)	2	47:9 ratio, gave away every decision	8
Commercial vocabulary	2	Zero money metrics in 90 minutes	9
Answer length discipline	3	4 min 20 sec average	8
Handling challenge / pushback	3	Apologised instead of defending	8
Story structure (STAR-L)	4	Situation heavy, result light, no learning	9
Company knowledge	3	Had seen the website. Nothing more.	9
Understanding of the GM role	4	Described it as a bigger plant manager job	9
Strategic questions asked	1	One question, about joining date	9
Salary negotiation	1	18% below band, instantly, then deferred	8
Voice, pace, fillers	4	23 fillers, flat pitch, no pauses	8
Body language & presence	5	Looked away when thinking, hands hidden	8

READ THIS NUMBER TWICE

Total: 35 out of 120 before. For a man with 22 years of genuinely strong operations delivery and three final-round interviews behind him.

That is the entire business case for this kit. The capability was always 9 out of 10. The presentation was 3. Nobody had ever measured it, so nobody had ever fixed it.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

One more thing about this scorecard.

Ajay did not know any of this before we sat down. Not one item. He thought he was losing because of his missing MBA, or because he is 45, or because the companies wanted someone from a bigger group.

None of that was the reason. The reason was on this page. And no amount of reading articles, watching YouTube or prompting an AI tool would ever have shown it to him, because you cannot diagnose your own delivery. You need someone to listen.

The Preparation Kit

Fifteen sections. This is what Ajay practises for fourteen days.

Section 1 — The Company Dossier

HOW TO READ THIS SECTION

A note for this demo. The company below — NexDrive Mobility Ltd — is a composite I have built from the real profile of large Indian auto component groups moving into EV. I have used a composite for this public demo so I am not making claims about a real listed company. In your actual kit, this section is built on YOUR target company, with real numbers pulled from their annual report, investor presentations, earnings call transcripts, recent press and LinkedIn movements of their leadership team. Usually 40 to 60 verified data points.

NexDrive Mobility Ltd — The Basics

What they do	Tier-1 auto components — drivetrain, precision machined parts, e-axle and EV powertrain assemblies
Revenue FY26	₹8,400 Cr, up 14% YoY
EBITDA margin	13.8%, with a stated Board target of 16% by FY28
Plants	7 — Pune (2), Chennai, Bengaluru, Pantnagar, Sanand, and a new EV plant at Hosur commissioning this year
People	~11,000 across all sites
Customers	Domestic OEMs across PV, CV and 2W-EV. Exports ~24% of revenue, mainly Europe.
EV mix today	22% of revenue. Stated target 40% by FY29.
Recent moves	PLI beneficiary. New CEO hired 14 months ago from a global Tier-1. Group-wide cost transformation programme running.

Now the part that actually wins the interview

Anybody can read a website. What separates you is understanding their pressure points — the things keeping the CEO awake. This is what you build your answers around.

Pressure point 1 — The margin gap

They are at 13.8% and the Board wants 16% by FY28. That is 220 basis points on ₹8,400 Cr. Roughly ₹185 Cr of EBITDA to be found. Not from price increases — customers will not allow it. It has to come from operations.

What this means for you: this GM Operations role exists mostly to deliver that 220 basis points. Everything you say should connect back to it. If you can walk in and show where 220 bps hides in a 7-plant network, you are having a different conversation than every other candidate.

Pressure point 2 — The EV transition is an operations problem, not a product problem

Going from 22% EV to 40% EV mix in three years is not just new products. It means lower volumes per part number, much higher part complexity, new supplier base, new skills on the shop floor, and legacy IC-engine lines that will start running empty.

The question nobody prepares for: what do you do with a machining line built for 300,000 IC components a year when that demand falls to 140,000? That is a real GM Ops problem and if you have a view on it, you will stand out enormously.

Pressure point 3 — Seven plants, almost certainly uneven

In any 7-plant group, two are excellent, three are average and two are bleeding. The GM Operations role usually exists because somebody at the top has realised the gap between the best plant and the worst plant is costing crores every year and nobody owns closing it.

Your line: "In most multi-plant groups I have seen, the difference between the best and worst plant on the same process is 10 to 15 points of OEE and 2 to 3 points of margin. My first job would be to measure that gap honestly, then build one operating standard and move every plant to the best-known method. That alone is usually worth 80 to 120 basis points before you touch capex."

Pressure point 4 — A new CEO 14 months in

A CEO who joined 14 months ago from a global Tier-1 will be under pressure to show results in year two. He will want people who move fast, speak in numbers and do not need hand-holding. He will also have low patience for anyone who talks about how things were done at their old company.

Pressure point 5 — Hosur EV plant commissioning

A new plant commissioning is the highest-risk activity in manufacturing. Ramp-up curves slip, yields are bad for the first 6 months, and the cost per unit is terrible until volumes come. Ajay has launched two greenfield lines. This is directly relevant and must be used.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Here is how you use this section. Do not recite it. Nobody likes a candidate who shows off research.

Instead, drop two or three of these into your answers naturally. When they ask about your approach to cost, you say "given that you are pushing from 13.8 to 16 percent, the place I would look first is...". Now you are not a candidate answering a question. You are a colleague discussing their problem.

That shift, from candidate to colleague, is the whole game at GM level.

Section 2 — The Role Decoded

This is the most important section in this kit. If you get nothing else right, get this right.

Plant Manager and GM Operations are not the same job at two sizes. They are two different jobs. Most plant managers walk into a GM interview and describe how they will run the plant better. The panel hears a Plant Manager asking for a bigger plant. That is why they lose.

Dimension	Plant Manager (what you do today)	GM Operations (what they are hiring for)
Unit of responsibility	One plant, one P&L line item	A network of plants, and a business result
Main question you answer	Is my plant running well?	Where should the next rupee and the next person go?
Time horizon	This shift, this week, this month	This quarter, next year, the 3-year capacity plan
Cost focus	Controlling the cost you are given	Deciding what the cost structure should be
Capex	Requesting it	Allocating it, and defending the return to the Board
People	Managing a team	Building a bench and deciding who runs which plant
Customer	Servicing the schedule	Sitting in the commercial conversation and shaping what we say yes to
Success looks like	Targets met, no escalations	Margin moved, capability built, a successor ready
Biggest failure mode	Firefighting	Being a very good Plant Manager for seven plants instead of a GM for one business

THE SINGLE BIGGEST FAILURE THEY ARE SCREENING FOR

That last row is the trap. When a plant manager gets promoted to GM Operations without changing how he thinks, he tries to run all seven plants personally. He travels 20 days a month, he knows every line, and he burns out in 18 months having improved nothing structurally. Every experienced interviewer has seen this happen. That is what they are screening for.

The one paragraph that proves you understand the difference

SCRIPT — MEMORISE THE SHAPE, NOT THE WORDS

[Use this when they ask “what do you think this role involves?” or “why do you think you are ready for GM?”]

“I want to be honest that these are two different jobs, not one job at two sizes. As Plant Head my question every morning is whether my plant is running. As GM Operations, the question changes to where the network is losing money and what I should change structurally so it stops. I will not be able to be the best plant manager in seven plants — and if I try, I will fail. My job becomes setting one operating standard, deciding where capex goes, building plant heads who do not need me daily, and owning the number that operations is accountable for.

I have been running one plant for six years. What I am asking you to believe is that I have spent the last two of those years thinking like the next level, not the current one — and I am happy to show you exactly how.”

★ **SAN SPEAKING:**

When Ajay delivered that paragraph in our second run, I stopped him and said — that is the moment you got the job.

Because he did something almost no candidate does. He said out loud the exact thing the panel was worried about, before they had to ask. When you name their doubt yourself, you take it off the table. When you let them find it, it becomes the reason you are rejected.

Sample report
Sandesh Siddaram
linkedmaster.com/start

Section 3 — The Language Translation Table

This is the page Ajay printed and stuck on his wall.

Left column is how you talk today. Right column is the same fact, said in the language the panel is listening for. Nothing is exaggerated. Nothing is invented. Same achievement, translated into money and decision.

What you say today (plant language)	What a GM sounds like (business language)
"I improved OEE from 68% to 81%."	"I released about 190 units a day of hidden capacity. That let us take ₹34 Cr of additional business without one rupee of capex — at a time when the alternative on the table was a ₹22 Cr new line."
"We reduced rejections by 40%."	"I took cost of poor quality from 2.8% of sales down to 1.6%. On a ₹430 Cr plant that is about ₹5.2 Cr straight into EBITDA, and it repeated every year after."
"I handle 840 people."	"I carry a ₹430 Cr P&L and an 840-person organisation across three shifts, with a long-term wage settlement that I negotiated and closed without a single day of production loss."
"We implemented TPM."	"I built a maintenance system that took unplanned downtime from 9% to 3%. That is the reason we were able to say yes to a customer programme that required 97% schedule adherence — we could not have committed to it before."
"I managed the customer audits."	"I own the customer scorecard. We moved from B to A rating at two of our six OEMs, which opened RFQ access we did not previously have. One of those RFQs became a ₹60 Cr annual programme."
"Zero LTI for 41 months."	"41 months lost-time-injury free across 840 people and three shifts. Beyond the human side, it is the reason our insurance premium came down and the reason two European customers cleared us as a preferred site — safety record is now a commercial qualifier in export business."
"I launched two new lines."	"I commissioned two greenfield lines end to end — layout, capex justification, equipment selection, manpower ramp and SOP approval. Second one reached rated output in 11 weeks against a 20 week plan, which pulled ₹18 Cr of revenue into the same financial year."
"We did a lot of kaizens."	"We run a structured improvement pipeline with a savings target attached. Last year it closed 140 projects worth ₹3.1 Cr of validated annualised saving, tracked by Finance, not by me."
"I reduced inventory."	"I brought inventory from 46 days to 31 days. That released about ₹18 Cr of working capital back to the group, and at our cost of borrowing it saved roughly ₹1.6 Cr of interest a year."
"We improved delivery performance."	"Schedule adherence went from 91% to 99.2%. We stopped paying premium freight, which was running ₹80 lakh a year, and more importantly we stopped being the plant that gets called by the customer's VP."
"I control manpower cost."	"Manpower cost per unit came down 19% over three years while wages went up 8% a year — through line balancing and multi-skilling, not through headcount cuts. That is the number I would run across all seven plants here."

What you say today (plant language)	What a GM sounds like (business language)
"I have good relations with the union."	"I closed a 4-year long-term settlement with zero days of stoppage, in a plant that had lost 11 days in the previous cycle. The settlement landed at 7.4% annual against a 12% opening demand, and the relationship held afterwards — which is the part that actually matters."

★ **SAN SPEAKING:**

Look carefully at what the right column is doing. Three things, every single time.

One — it converts the process number into a rupee number. Two — it says what became possible because of it, not just what improved. Three — it uses "I" for the decision and keeps the team for the work.

Take your own top twelve achievements and run them through those three steps. That exercise alone, done properly, is worth more than a hundred YouTube videos on interview tips.

DO NOT DO THIS

One warning. Never invent a number. If you do not know your cost of poor quality, go and find it out this week before the interview. If you cannot find it, say "directionally it was around 2 to 3 percent, I can get you the exact figure." Honesty with a range beats a confident lie every time, and senior panels can smell an invented number in about four seconds.

Section 4 — “Tell Me About Yourself”

Four minutes. That is all you get, and honestly it is all you should take. Ajay was taking eleven.

The structure I use for senior operations people is five blocks:

Block	Time	What goes in it
1. Who you are today	25 sec	Current role, scale you carry, in money and people. Not your college.
2. The one-line arc	20 sec	How you got here, in one sentence. Not a career history.
3. Proof block — three results	90 sec	Your three strongest business outcomes, each in money, each with "I" on the decision
4. What you have become	40 sec	The judgment you have developed. This is what separates GM from Plant Manager.
5. Why this role, why them	35 sec	Their pressure point, and your view on it. Then stop.

THE FULL SCRIPT — 3 MIN 50 SEC

[SMILE. Sit forward slightly. Do not start with "So..." or "Basically..."]

BLOCK 1 — Who you are today

"Thank you. I am Ajay Kumar. I am the Plant Head of a Tier-1 auto components plant — I carry a **₹430 crore P&L, 840 people** across three shifts, and six OEM customers. I have been running that plant for six years, and I have been in manufacturing for twenty-two."

[PAUSE 2 seconds. Let the numbers sit.]

BLOCK 2 — The arc, one line

"I started on the shop floor as a graduate engineer and I have done every job between there and here — production, maintenance, quality, new line commissioning. I mention that only because it is the reason I can tell very quickly whether a plant's problem is a machine problem, a method problem or a management problem. Usually it is the third one."

[That last line gets a smile or a nod almost every time. Deliver it lightly, not as a joke.]

BLOCK 3 — Three results. Slow down here.

"Let me give you three things I would want you to judge me on."

First — I took the plant from **68% OEE to 81%**. In money, that released about 190 units a day of hidden capacity, which let us absorb **₹34 crore** of additional business without any capex. The alternative on the table at the time was a ₹22 crore new line.

Second — cost of poor quality. I took it from **2.8% of sales to 1.6%**. That is roughly **₹5.2 crore** into EBITDA, and unlike a one-time saving it repeated every year after.

Third — and this is the one I am personally proudest of — I closed a **four-year long-term wage settlement with zero days of stoppage**, in a plant that had lost eleven days in the previous cycle. We landed at 7.4% against a 12% opening demand, and the relationship held afterwards. That last part is the part that matters."

[PAUSE 2 seconds.]

BLOCK 4 — What you have become

"What has changed in me over the last two or three years is where I spend my attention. Earlier I was the man who solved the problem. Now I spend most of my time on whether the system will throw up that problem again next month, and on whether my people can solve it without me. I have two section heads today who run their areas better than I did at their stage. **That is the shift I have made, and that is why I believe I am ready for the next level.**"

BLOCK 5 — Why them

"As for why NexDrive — you are pushing from 13.8% to 16% EBITDA across seven plants while simultaneously moving your mix towards EV. Those two things pull in opposite directions, because EV parts are lower volume and higher complexity, and your legacy lines will start emptying out. **That is exactly the problem I find interesting**, and I have a fairly clear view of where I would look first. I am happy to get into it whenever you want."

[STOP. Smile. Eye contact. Do not add anything. Let them pick it up.]

Why that last line is deliberate

"I have a fairly clear view of where I would look first" is bait, and it is bait that almost always gets taken. You have just told a panel with a margin problem that you have a plan. Nine times out of ten the next words are "go on, tell us."

Now you are not being interviewed. You are presenting. The dynamic in the room has completely changed, and you engineered it in your opening answer.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Compare this to the eleven minute version Ajay gave me the first time. Same man. Same twenty two years. Same achievements.

The only difference is order, language and stopping at the right place. That is all an interview ever is.

Section 5 — Your Six Signature Stories

Here is something most people do not realise. A GM interview does not have fifty questions. It has about eight, asked in fifty different ways.

So you do not prepare fifty answers. You prepare six stories, properly, and you learn to deploy them against whatever comes. A well-built story can answer four or five different questions depending on which part you emphasise.

Format: STAR-L. Situation, Task, Action, Result, Learning. The L is the one everybody drops and it is the one that separates senior candidates. Result shows you delivered. Learning shows you are still growing — which is what they need to believe about a 45 year old.

#	The story	Questions it answers
1	The OEE turnaround — 68% to 81%	Biggest achievement · How you drive performance · Cost reduction · Data-driven decision making · Why you and not the market
2	The wage settlement — zero stoppage	People leadership · Conflict · Negotiation · Pressure · Stakeholder management · IR exposure
3	The greenfield line — 11 weeks vs 20	Project management · Capex · Ramp-up · Cross-functional working · Relevant to their Hosur plant
4	The quality escape — the failure story	Biggest mistake · How you handle bad news · Customer escalation · Integrity · Accountability
5	The succession build — two section heads	Building a bench · Delegation · Why you are ready for GM · Leadership philosophy
6	The one you said no to	Commercial judgment · Pushing back on the customer · Saying no to your own boss · Prioritisation

Story 4 — the failure story, written out in full

I am showing you this one and not the OEE one, because the failure story is the one everybody gets wrong and the one that has the highest impact when it is right.

THE FAILURE STORY — DEPLOY THIS WHEN THEY ASK ABOUT A MISTAKE

S — Situation. In 2021 we had a quality escape. A batch of machined housings went out with a bore tolerance issue that our final gauge should have caught. About 2,300 parts reached the customer. Two of them reached the field.

T — Task. I found out at 9:40 in the night from the customer's SQA, not from my own team. That is a second problem sitting inside the first one.

A — Action. I called the customer plant head myself at 10pm rather than sending a mail. I told him exactly what we knew and exactly what we did not know yet, and I gave him a containment plan by 6am. I put our own people at his line for sorting at our cost. Then I did the harder part — I went back and asked why my team did not escalate to me. The answer was that the shift in-charge was afraid of what I would say. That was my fault, not his.

R — Result. Containment closed in 4 days. Customer kept us on the programme and we did not lose any business. Cost of the incident was about ₹31 lakh, all of it ours. We changed the gauge to a go-no-go with a poka-yoke and it has not repeated in four years.

L — Learning. Two things, and the second is the real one. First, a gauge that depends on an operator's judgment at the end of a 12-hour shift is not a control. Second — and this cost me more to accept — my team hid a problem from me because of how I had reacted to bad news in the past. I changed how I run my morning meeting after that. Bad news first, no questions asked about why for the first five minutes. Escalation speed in my plant is a completely different thing today.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Read that last paragraph again. That is the one that wins the room.

Almost every candidate answers the failure question with a fake failure — “I took on too much work”, “I was too much of a perfectionist”. The panel has heard it two hundred times and they mentally mark you down for not being honest.

Ajay tells them a real ₹31 lakh mistake, and then he says the reason it happened was his own behaviour. Do you know what a panel thinks when they hear that? They think: this man will tell me the truth when something goes wrong at eleven at night. And that, for an operations leader, is worth more than any OEE number.

REMEMBER

The rule for failure stories: it must be real, it must have cost money, it must be your fault, and the learning must be about you and not about a process. Anything softer than that and you have wasted the question.

Section 6 — The Number Bank

One page. Print it. Carry it. Know every single one of these without thinking, because at GM level a two-second pause on your own numbers costs you credibility you cannot get back.

Fill the blanks this week, not the night before. Some of these you will have to go and ask Finance for. That itself is a useful exercise — a GM candidate who does not know his own plant's margin has already told the panel something.

A. The money numbers (these matter most)

Metric	Your number	Why they ask
Plant turnover / P&L you carry	₹430 Cr	Scale test — are you in their league
Gross margin %	_____	Do you think commercially
EBITDA / contribution at plant level	_____	Same
Cost of poor quality as % of sales	2.8% → 1.6%	Quality in money, not PPM
Manpower cost per unit / as % of sales	19% reduction over 3 yrs	Biggest controllable cost
Conversion cost per unit	_____	The number a GM lives on
Inventory days / working capital released	46 → 31 days, ₹18 Cr released	Cash, not just stock
Capex you have justified and spent	₹22 Cr line + ₹____ others	Are you trusted with money
Total validated savings delivered (annualised)	₹3.1 Cr last year	Your track record in one number

B. The operations numbers

Metric	Your number	Watch out for
OEE — before and after, with timeframe	68% → 81% over 4 years	They will ask how you calculate it. Know availability, performance, quality separately.
Rejection / PPM — internal and customer	_____	Internal and external are different numbers. Know both.
Schedule adherence / OTIF	91% → 99.2%	Premium freight cost is the money version
Unplanned downtime %	9% → 3%	MTTR and MTBF back-up numbers ready
Changeover time (SMED)	_____	Directly linked to EV low-volume mix
Capacity utilisation	_____	They will compare with their 7 plants

C. The people and safety numbers

Metric	Your number	The GM angle
Headcount — direct, indirect, contract split	840 total, ____ / ____ / ____	Contract ratio is a GM-level question
Attrition — overall and for key skills	_____	High attrition in a good plant is a red flag they will probe

Metric	Your number	The GM angle
LTI / safety record	41 months LTI-free	Link it to insurance and customer clearance
Wage settlement outcome	7.4% vs 12% demand, 0 days lost	Your strongest people story
People you have promoted into bigger roles	2 section heads, ____ others	The succession proof
Multi-skilling / training man-hours per head	_____	Directly relevant to EV transition

★ **SAN SPEAKING:**

When I gave Ajay this sheet he came back three days later and told me something interesting.

He said, "Sir, I could not fill eight of these. I have been running this plant for six years and I did not know my own conversion cost per unit."

That is not a criticism of Ajay. That is how the plant manager role is built — nobody asks him. But the day he walks into a GM interview, that is the first thing they will test. And now he knows.

Section 7 — The Q&A Bank

Four tiers. Easy, Medium, Tough, Killer. Each answer is built from Ajay's actual record and shaped for NexDrive's actual problem. Nothing generic.

TIER 1 — EASY

These are warm-ups. The mistake here is not getting them wrong — it is being boring, and losing the room in the first five minutes.

● EASY

"Why are you looking to move?"

Why they ask it: Checking whether you are running from something or towards something. Bitterness here kills you instantly.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"I have had a very good six years running this plant. The team is strong, the numbers are good, and honestly it is a comfortable place to be. That is exactly why I want to move now — because I can feel that I have stopped learning at the same rate. I have taken this plant from 68 to 81 and I can take it to 84, but that is now an incremental exercise. What I want next is the harder problem, which is making seven plants perform like the best one. And structurally, in my current group, that seat is occupied and is not opening up. So this is a straightforward case of the job outgrowing the role, not of anything being wrong."

● EASY

"What do you know about us?"

Why they ask it: Ninety percent of candidates recite the website. This is a free chance to separate yourself in the first ten minutes.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"Beyond the basics — ₹8,400 crore, seven plants, 22% EV mix — what I found more interesting is the tension in your own numbers. You have told the market you will go from 13.8% to 16% EBITDA by FY28, and at the same time you are moving your mix from 22% EV to 40%.

Those two things fight each other, because EV parts come in lower volume with higher complexity, and your legacy IC lines will start running empty. So you are trying to expand margin at the same time as your product mix is working against you.

"I also noticed your CEO joined about fourteen months ago from a global Tier-1, and you have a group cost transformation running. Which tells me this operations role is probably not a replacement — it is being created to deliver a specific number. I would be interested to know if I am reading that correctly."

Then stop and let them respond. This question, answered like this, changes the temperature of the entire interview.

TIER 2 — MEDIUM

●● MEDIUM

"How would you approach improving margin across seven plants?"

Why they ask it: The core of the job. They want to see whether you have a structured method or you will just go plant by plant firefighting.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"I would work in three layers, and I would resist the temptation to start fixing anything in the first sixty days.

Layer 1 — Make the gap visible. In any seven-plant group, the spread between the best and worst plant on the same process is usually 10 to 15 points of OEE and 2 to 3 points of margin. Most groups do not measure it honestly because every plant reports in its own format. My first job is one common scorecard — same definitions, same denominators, published monthly to all seven plant heads. That transparency alone changes behaviour before I do anything else.

Layer 2 — Move everyone to best-known method. Not best practice from a book — best practice from inside your own group. If Pune does a changeover in 22 minutes and Pantnagar takes 70 on the same machine, I do not need a consultant. I need Pune's method written down and Pantnagar's team standing on Pune's shop floor for three days. This is the cheapest margin in any group and it is almost always sitting there unclaimed.

Layer 3 — Then structural. Only after those two do I look at footprint, make-versus-buy, and what to do with legacy capacity as EV mix grows. That is where the big money is but it is also where you can do real damage if you move before you understand the network.

"My honest estimate is that layers 1 and 2 are worth 80 to 120 basis points in the first 12 to 18 months, without capex. Layer 3 is where the remaining 100 to 140 comes from, and that is a two to three year conversation."

●● MEDIUM

"Your plants will have EV volumes rising and IC volumes falling. What do you do with the emptying lines?"

Why they ask it: Very few candidates have thought about this. It is the real operations problem of the next five years and it will separate you immediately.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"This is the question I would be worried about if I were sitting in your chair, because it is a slow problem that becomes an emergency.

"There are only four things you can do with capacity that is emptying, and you have to decide early which one applies to each asset. One — refill it with export or aftermarket volume, which buys you time but does not solve it. Two — convert the asset, if the machine is generic enough that it can take EV part families with tooling and fixture change. Three — consolidate, which means shutting one line and moving the volume, and that is a people conversation more than a machine conversation. Four — exit and monetise, if the asset has a resale market.

"What I have learnt is that the mistake is not choosing wrong. The mistake is not choosing, and letting all four options stay open for three years while the line runs at 40% and quietly eats your margin. I would want a written decision on every major asset with a date against it, and I would want it reviewed twice a year against actual EV ramp."

●● MEDIUM

"You have never handled multiple plants. Why should we take that risk?"

Why they ask it: The most predictable question you will face. If you have not rehearsed this, you will fumble it.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"You are right, and I am not going to argue with the fact. Let me tell you what I do have and you can judge whether it transfers.

"What does not transfer is scale of travel and number of direct reports. Those I will have to learn and I will be slower than someone who has done it before.

"What does transfer is the harder part. Running a plant through other people rather than personally — I already do that, and I have two section heads who run their areas without me. Setting a standard and holding people to it. Reading a P&L and knowing which line is lying to me. Making a capex case and defending it. Handling a customer escalation at the level where the customer's VP is on the call.

"And I would add one thing. The risk with an internal multi-plant candidate is that he already knows why each plant cannot improve. I do not know that yet, and for the first year that is an advantage. I will ask the stupid question about why Pantnagar takes 70 minutes when Pune takes 22, and nobody will have told me in advance that it is impossible."

TIER 3 — TOUGH

●●● TOUGH

"If I called your quality head, your union leader and your best customer — what would each of them say about you? Give me the good and the bad."

Why they ask it: A real senior-panel question. It tests self-awareness in three dimensions at once. Most candidates give three versions of "they would say I am supportive."

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

Quality head: "He would say I back him publicly even when it costs us dispatch, and that I have never once asked him to pass a doubtful lot. He would also say I sometimes push a corrective action closure faster than he is comfortable with, because I want the line running. That is a fair criticism of me."

Union leader: "He would say I do what I say and I do not surprise him. In four years I have not announced anything about workmen that he heard first from someone else. He would also tell you I am rigid on discipline cases and that I have not withdrawn a single one, and he does not like that. But he respects it, because it is consistent."

Customer SQA: "He would say I call him myself when there is a problem, at whatever hour, rather than sending my quality man with a letter. He would probably also say I negotiate hard on engineering changes and I do not accept cost without a discussion. Which I think is the right thing for my company, but from his side it makes me difficult."

Notice the structure — each one has a genuine positive and a genuine negative, and the negative is a real trait, not a disguised strength. That is what makes it credible.

●●● TOUGH

"Convince me that your plant's performance was caused by you and not by a good market and a team you inherited."

Why they ask it: This is the question that broke Ajay in the first mock. Eight seconds of silence, then an apology. Prepare it or lose on it.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"Fair question, and I would ask it too. Let me give you the test I use on myself.

"The market grew about 9% in those four years. My volumes grew 34%. So I was outgrowing the market, not riding it.

"The mix got harder, not easier. We added two low-volume, high-complexity part families in that period, which normally drags OEE down, not up.

"And it was the same team. The people who delivered 81% are the same people who had delivered 68% for the three years before I arrived. Same machines, same products, largely the same market. What changed was how the shift handover worked, how breakdowns were escalated, and what we measured daily versus monthly.

"Having said that, I will give you the honest other side. About 4 points of that 13-point improvement came from a machine replacement that was already sanctioned before I joined. I did not do that. I will not claim it. The remaining 9 points I will defend line by line."

That last paragraph is what makes the whole answer believable. Give back one thing you did not do, and everything else you claim becomes credible.

●●● TOUGH

"Tell me about a time you were pushed to report a number more favourably than you believed was correct."

Why they ask it: An integrity question. There is no clever answer. There is only a clear line, held politely. Any hedging here and you are finished.

▶ WHAT YOU SAY

"Yes. In my second year as Plant Head, our monthly dispatch number was going to fall short by about ₹3 crore. I was asked whether some material already on the trailer but not yet gate-passed could be counted in the month. Technically it had moved. Commercially it had not been invoiced.

"I said no, and I said it in writing in the same mail chain so there was no ambiguity later. I also offered the alternative — I told them exactly what was achievable if we ran the Sunday shift, which recovered about ₹1.8 crore of it legitimately, and I took the remaining shortfall on my own review.

"I do not think of that as a brave decision. I think of it as the only decision, because a plant head who bends a number once has told his entire team that numbers are negotiable. And then you can never trust anything you are shown again. In operations, the only asset I actually have is that the number I report is the number."

Section 8 — The Five Questions That Break Plant Managers

These five come up in almost every GM Operations interview in some form. I have watched strong candidates lose on every one of them. Handle these and you have handled 70% of the risk in the room.

The question	What it is really testing	How most people fail it	Your move
"Walk me through your P&L. What is your gross margin and what moves it?"	Whether you think in money or only in process	They quote OEE and rejection instead of margin. Or they pause.	Know the number cold. Then name the three biggest levers on it, in order of size.
"You have run one plant. We have seven. What changes?"	Whether you understand the role is different, not bigger	They say "same principles, larger scale". Instantly marked as a Plant Manager.	Say out loud that they are two different jobs. Then describe the shift in your own attention.
"How much of your plant's cost is genuinely under your control?"	Commercial maturity. Do you know what you actually own?	They claim everything, which is not credible, or they claim nothing, which is worse.	Give the split honestly. Material is 60-65% and mostly not yours. Conversion cost is yours. Say so with the percentages.
"Tell me about a time you said no to a customer."	Backbone. Will you protect the business or just please everyone?	They have no example, because saying yes has been their job for 20 years.	Have one ready. A capacity commitment you refused, a delivery date you would not sign, an engineering change you priced.
"Why should we believe the results were you?"	Whether you can defend your own record without arrogance or apology	They get defensive, or they hand it all to the team out of habit.	The three-part test — market growth vs your growth, mix got harder, same team. Then concede one point honestly.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

I want you to notice something about all five. None of them is technical. Not one.

Twenty two years of technical preparation, and the five questions that decide the outcome are about money, judgment, backbone and self-awareness. That is what changes at this level and nobody tells you.

This is exactly why reading "top 50 GM interview questions" on the internet does not help. Those lists are full of technical questions. The technical part you already know. It is these five that you have never been asked in your life.

Section 9 — The Case Round

At GM level, somewhere in round two or three, somebody will stop asking about your past and put a live problem on the table. "Our Pantnagar plant has been below budget for six quarters. What would you do?"

Most operations people panic here, because they instinctively want to give the answer and they do not have enough information to give one. So they either guess, or they hedge, or they go silent.

UNDERSTAND THIS BEFORE ANYTHING ELSE

The truth about the case round: they are not testing whether you know the answer. They know you cannot know it. They are testing whether you know what to ask, and in what order. A GM who arrives at a plant and immediately starts giving solutions is exactly the GM they are afraid of hiring.

The 5-step structure — use this for any case they throw

1. **Buy 10 seconds, out loud.** "Let me think about this for a moment so I give you something useful rather than something quick." Nobody has ever been marked down for that sentence. It signals composure.
2. **Ask three questions, maximum.** Not ten — three shows you know which three matter. For a plant below budget: Is the gap in volume or in cost per unit? Is it one product family or across the board? And has it been below budget since a specific event or has it drifted?
3. **Say your hypothesis out loud and label it as one.** "Based on what you have said, my working hypothesis would be... but I would want to verify that in the first two weeks." This is the single most senior-sounding move in the whole interview.
4. **Give structure, not a list.** Break it into three buckets and tell them the order you would attack in and why. Order matters more than content.
5. **End with what would change your mind.** "If I found that the gap was actually in material price and not conversion, then everything I just said is the wrong plan and I would go in a different direction." This shows judgment, not just method.

Worked example — Ajay's answer to the Pantnagar case

THE CASE ANSWER — ABOUT 2 MINUTES 30

[Pause. Then:]

"Let me think about this for a second so I give you something useful.

Three things I would want to know before I say anything confident. **One** — is the gap in volume or in cost per unit? If the plant is making its cost per unit and just not getting the orders, that is a completely different problem and it is not mine to solve alone. **Two** — is it across all part families or concentrated in one or two? Six quarters of drift usually hides inside one family that nobody has isolated. **Three** — did it start with a specific event, like a customer loss, a wage settlement or a key person leaving, or did it just slide?"

[Let them answer. Then:]

"My working hypothesis — and I want to be clear it is only a hypothesis — is that six quarters of steady under-performance is almost never a machine problem. Machines fail suddenly. Six quarters of slide is usually a management problem that has been normalised. Somebody started accepting 71% as the number and now everyone believes 71% is what that plant can do.

So I would attack it in this order. **First thirty days** — I go and stand there. Two full days on each shift, including night. I want to see the shift handover and the morning meeting, because that is where you can see whether a plant has given up. **Next sixty days** — I benchmark it against our own best plant on the same process, line by line, and I publish the gap. Not to shame anybody, but because in my experience a plant that has normalised under-performance genuinely does not know how far behind it is. **After that** — then we decide whether it is capability, capacity or leadership. And if it turns out to be leadership, that is a harder conversation but it is the one that actually fixes it.

"One caveat. If you tell me the gap is actually in material cost and not conversion cost, then everything I have just said is wrong and I would go down a completely different road — supplier base, make versus buy, and design. So my first question would really decide the whole plan."

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Read what that answer actually did.

He gave no solution. He did not know enough to give one. But by the end of two and a half minutes the panel has seen him think, prioritise, admit uncertainty, and put a caveat on his own answer.

That is what a GM looks like. The candidate who confidently gives a five point action plan for a plant he has never visited looks clever for thirty seconds and reckless for the rest of the interview.

Section 10 — Your 30-60-90 Day Plan

Print this on one page and carry it. When they ask "what would your first ninety days look like", you put it on the table.

I have seen this move work more times than any other single thing in this kit. Almost nobody does it. The panel is not expecting it. And it converts you from someone asking for a job into someone who has already started the job.

Period	What I will do	What I will NOT do	What you get from me
DAYS 1-30 See it honestly	Two full days at each of the seven plants, including a night shift at the three weakest. Sit in every plant's morning meeting. Meet all seven plant heads one to one. Sit with Finance and understand how each plant's cost is actually built up. Meet the top four customers' SQA and supply teams.	I will not announce a single change. I will not restructure anything. I will not tell any plant head how his plant should be run.	A written one-page read of each plant — where it actually stands, not where it reports it stands. Plus the top 10 gaps across the network with a rupee value against each.
DAYS 31-60 Make the gap visible	One common operations scorecard with identical definitions across all seven plants. Published monthly to every plant head. Identify the 3 biggest best-known-method transfers inside our own group. Start two of them.	I will not bring in consultants. I will not import a system from my previous company.	The first common scorecard, and a validated savings pipeline with named owners and dates. Target ₹8-12 Cr annualised identified, not yet delivered.
DAYS 61-90 Deliver something small and real	Close the first two best-known-method transfers with measured results. Agree the capex priority list with Finance for the next 18 months. Take a first honest view on legacy IC capacity against the EV ramp plan. Agree development plans with all seven plant heads.	I will not have solved the margin problem in 90 days and I will not pretend to.	First delivered savings, however small, with Finance validation. A written 18-month operations roadmap tied to the 16% EBITDA target. And my honest assessment of the leadership bench.

THE COLUMN NOBODY ELSE HAS

Why the "what I will NOT do" column is the most powerful part of this table. Every panel has been burnt by a senior hire who arrived and started changing things in month one. Putting restraint in writing tells them you have seen that movie. It is the most reassuring thing on the page.

Section 11 — Salary Negotiation

This is the one section I do not put in a free sample. Here is exactly why, so you can judge it for yourself.

Everything else in this kit is here in full. The whole mock interview, the scorecard, all four tiers of the Q&A bank, the five questions, the case round, the 30-60-90 day plan. Nothing trimmed, nothing summarised.

Every other answer in this kit is welded to Ajay. His plant, his 68 to 81, his seven-plant group, his union leader. You can read them and see exactly how the work is done. You cannot use them, because they are not about you.

The salary scripts are not like that. They are three scripts with blanks in them, and they work for a plant manager in Pune, a finance head in Dubai and a sales director in London without changing a word. That is the point of them.

So if I put them on an open page, two things happen. Anybody can take them without ever speaking to me, and I can live with that. But the panels sitting on the other side of the table read this page too, and a negotiation script stops working the day the person across from you knows it by heart. That part I cannot live with, because the people it stops working for are the ones who paid me.

What is in Section 11

- **The three rules.** Including why “as per company norms” is the most expensive sentence in an Indian interview.
- **Script A** — when they ask your current CTC and your expectation early, before you have any leverage.
- **Script B** — when they will not move on and insist on a number now.
- **Script C** — the counter, when the offer lands below where you positioned yourself and you still want the job.
- **The eight things you negotiate that are not fixed salary.** Grade, how the variable is calculated and who decides it, joining bonus, LTI and vesting, notice buyout, relocation, car and driver, and a written twelve-month review tied to one deliverable.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

You have already seen what happens without this section. Go back to Finding 9. Ajay answered the expectation question in under two seconds, gave a number about 18 percent below the band, and finished with “whatever is as per company norms, sir”.

On a ₹75 lakh role that is about ₹13.5 lakh a year, and over three years with increments, more than ₹45 lakh. He did it because he thought being reasonable would help him get selected. Panels do not reward a low number with a selection. They note it, and they pay it.

In your own kit this section is complete, with your band, your current package and the company across the table already filled in. Section 12 continues on the next page.

Section 12 — Body Language, Voice and Camera

Half the interview is delivery. You can have the right answer and still lose the room. Ajay scored 4 and 5 out of 10 on voice and presence, and he had no idea — nobody ever tells you.

The four things I fixed in Ajay first

Problem	What it signals	The fix
Looking up and away when thinking	Making it up, not recalling it	Look down briefly, then back at them. Downward reads as recall. Upward reads as invention.
Hands under the table	Hiding, low confidence	Hands visible and still on the table. Use them only to emphasise a number.
Flat pitch throughout	Low energy, not invested	Go up on numbers and outcomes. Come down when setting up a story. Vary or you will be forgotten.
No pauses at all	Anxious, cannot prioritise	Two second pause after every important number. The pause is what makes them believe it.

Voice map — where to go loud and where to go soft

Moment	Voice	Why
Your rupee figures and outcomes	Slightly louder, slower, clear	This is the point. Make sure it lands.
Setting up a story	Drop your voice, slow down	Lower volume pulls people in. They lean forward.
Admitting a mistake or a gap	Steady, level, no drop in energy	Never go apologetic in tone. The words admit; the voice stays confident.
Your closing line	Up, warm, and then silence	End strong and stop. Do not trail off into "so yeah, that is about it."
A question you did not expect	Pause first, then normal pace	The pause does more for you than anything you say next.

The ten do-nots

- Do not say "basically" or "actually". Ajay said them 23 times in 40 minutes and did not know.
- Do not apologise for anything — not your missing MBA, not your single-plant background, not your age.
- Do not criticise your current employer. Not even mildly. It never helps and it always registers.
- Do not say "we" when you made the decision.
- Do not answer for more than two minutes unless they have asked you to go deep.
- Do not fill a silence. If they go quiet after your answer, let them. Many panels test this deliberately.
- Do not name-drop your previous company's systems as if they are universal truth.
- Do not check the time, even once.
- Do not ask about salary, leave, or joining date in round one.
- Do not oversell. At 22 years, quiet certainty beats enthusiasm every time.

If it is a video interview — and increasingly round one is

- Camera at eye level. A laptop on the desk points up your nose and makes you look smaller. Put it on books.

- Light in front of you, not behind. A window behind you turns you into a silhouette.
- Look at the camera lens when you deliver your key number, not at their face on the screen. That is eye contact for them.
- Plain wall. No plant photos, no certificates, no moving background.
- Wear what you would wear in the room. It changes how you sit.
- Stick a small paper arrow next to the lens if you keep drifting your eyes to the screen. Simple and it works.
- Test the audio with a recording, not with a friend saying "yes it is fine". Bad audio loses more video interviews than bad answers.

Sample report
Sandesh Siddaram
linkedmaster.com/start

Section 13 — Reading the Panel

A GM Operations hire usually involves four different people across three or four rounds. Each one is testing a completely different thing. If you give the same answer to all four, you will satisfy one and lose three.

Who	What they are really testing	What they want to hear	What kills you with them
HR / CHRO	Stability, culture fit, how you handle people, and whether you will actually join	Clear reason for moving, no bitterness, real examples of developing people, honest self-awareness	Badmouthing your employer. Vague reasons for leaving. Talking only about machines and never about people.
Hiring Manager (COO / Business Head)	Can you actually do the job, and will you make his life easier or harder	Numbers, structure, a point of view on his problem, and restraint about changing things in month one	Generic answers. No rupee figures. Sounding like you will need to be managed.
Finance / CFO (often in round 3)	Do you understand money, or are you an engineer who spends it	Cost structure in percentages, capex payback, working capital, what you can and cannot control	Not knowing your own margin. Talking about capex without a return. Treating Finance as an obstacle.
CEO / MD (final round)	Judgment, character, and whether he can put you in front of a customer or the Board	A clear view, honestly held. Willingness to disagree. One thing you would change and one thing you would not touch.	Agreeing with everything he says. Having no independent opinion. Being impressive but not real.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

The CEO round is where most people over-prepare and under-perform. They walk in polished, agree with everything, and walk out forgettable.

A CEO is not testing your knowledge in that room. He has already been told you can do the job. He is deciding one thing — do I want this man in my leadership meeting every month for the next five years.

So be a person. Have a view. Disagree once, politely, with a reason. He will remember that far longer than your OEE numbers.

Section 14 — The 14 Day Practice Protocol

This is the part that actually creates the result. The kit is the plan. This is the training.

Rule one: record yourself on your phone. Every single day. You will hate it for the first three days and then it becomes the most useful thing you have ever done. You cannot fix what you have not heard.

Days	Focus	What you do	How you know it worked
1-2	Fill the Number Bank	Go and get the numbers you do not have. Ask Finance. Ask your MIS. Do not guess.	Every blank in Section 6 is filled with a real number
3-4	Tell Me About Yourself only	Record it. Play it back. Count your "we"s and your fillers. Repeat until it is under 4 minutes.	Under 4 min, at least 4 rupee figures, fillers under 3, "I" used for every decision
5-6	The six signature stories	One story per recording. STAR-L. Each under 2 minutes. The failure story twice as many times as the others.	Every story has a money number and a real learning
7-8	The five killer questions	Section 8. Record each one. These are the ones that will decide it.	No pause longer than 3 seconds, no apology, no defensiveness
9-10	Company and case round	Read the dossier until you can talk about their problem without notes. Practise the case structure on three made-up problems.	You can name their three pressure points from memory
11-12	Full run, end to end	45 minutes. Alone, with the phone recording. Then watch it with the sound off and look only at your body.	You can sit through your own recording without cringing
13	Live mock with a real person	A friend, your spouse, anyone. Give them the question list. Ask them for three honest criticisms.	You get feedback you did not expect
14	Light day	Read the kit once. Re-run Tell Me About Yourself twice. Sleep properly. Do not cram.	Calm, not tired

SHORT ON TIME?

If you only have three days, not fourteen: Day 1 — fill the Number Bank and rehearse Tell Me About Yourself until it is clean. Day 2 — the five killer questions plus the failure story. Day 3 — the company dossier and one full recorded run. That is 80% of the value in 20% of the time.

Section 15 — Final Checklist and Your Questions

The night before

- Read Sections 4, 6 and 8 only. Nothing else. Do not read the whole kit.
- Two printed copies of your CV, and one printed copy of your 30-60-90 plan.
- Notepad and two pens. Taking notes in a senior interview is a signal, not a distraction.
- Clothes ready and pressed. Shoes polished. At 45, being well turned out is expected, not noticed — but being poorly turned out is noticed immediately.
- Phone fully charged, on silent — not vibrate.
- Confirm the exact location and who you are asking for at reception.
- Sleep. Do not practise past 10pm. Tired beats unprepared in the wrong direction.

The morning of

- Eat something. A 45 minute interview at 11am on an empty stomach is a mistake you can feel in your voice.
- Arrive 15 minutes early. Not 40 — waiting that long makes you tense.
- One final run of Tell Me About Yourself in the car. Out loud, not in your head.
- In the waiting area, sit up and put your phone away. You are being observed from the moment you enter the building.

The questions you ask them

Pick four. Ask them at the end. The last one is your closer.

1. “Across the seven plants, where is the biggest gap today — and is it a capability gap, a capacity gap or a leadership gap?”
2. “Is this role being created because of the growth, or because there is a specific number that operations has to deliver that is currently not being delivered?”
3. “How much of the 220 basis points between 13.8 and 16 percent do you expect to come from operations versus from mix and pricing?”
4. “What does the EV ramp actually look like plant by plant over the next three years — because the operations plan depends entirely on that curve.”
5. “How do the seven plant heads report today, and how much autonomy do they have on cost and manpower?”
6. “What would you want to be able to say about this role twelve months from now that you cannot say today?”

SAVE THIS ONE FOR LAST

Question 6 is your closer. Ask it last and then stay quiet. It makes them articulate success in their own words, which tells you exactly what to say in your final line — and it is the question that gets remembered after you leave the room.

Your closing line

THE CLOSING — MEMORISE THE SHAPE

"Before we finish — I want to say one thing plainly. I have spent twenty-two years in manufacturing and six of them running a plant end to end. I am not going to pretend I have run seven plants, because I have not.

What I am confident about is that I know how to make a plant better through other people rather than by doing it myself, I know how to read a P&L and tell which line is lying to me, and I know that the first ninety days here are about listening and measuring, not about changing things.

I would very much like to do this job. And whatever you decide, thank you for a genuinely good conversation."

[Pause. Eye contact. Handshake. Do not add anything after this.]

★ SAN SPEAKING:

That closing does three things at once. It names your weakness before they have to. It replaces it with the three things that actually matter at GM level. And it says clearly that you want the job.

That last bit sounds obvious but you would be amazed how many senior candidates never actually say it. They are worried it makes them look desperate. It does not. It makes you look decided. Panels choose people who have decided.

PART D

How You Get Your Own Kit

Everything in this kit, built for you, your role and your numbers.

Where to start

Everything you have just read gets built for you. Your company, your role, your years, your numbers. Nothing here is a template with your name on top.

All offers at a glance. Same prices on every sample and on linkedmaster.com/start. Pick the one that matches where you are stuck today.

Offer	For whom	What you get	India	Outside India
The File (this report)	Not getting calls, or stuck at the same level	A written report like this one, built from your form, CV and a voice note. 48 hours. Your profile rebuilt line by line and a 90-day plan you run yourself. The AI tools are included for 3 months.	₹9,999	\$149
The File + The Hour	You want to ask questions, or an interview is coming	Everything in The File, plus a recorded hour with me. The report is written out of that conversation, along with your interview preparation and your first list of 40 names.	₹24,999	\$399
90 Days	You are making a real move. By application, 6 people at a time	Weekly for 3 months. The list built and worked with you, the profile rebuilt with you, and me between sessions.	₹30,000 a month	\$600 a month

Start at linkedmaster.com/start. India: pay on the page. Outside India: fill the short form first and I send a payment request by email the same day.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

Most people should start with The File. It tells you where the real block is. If it shows the problem is the interview room, add The Hour.

Putting it in perspective

A GM Operations role in auto components or EV manufacturing today sits somewhere between ₹65 and ₹95 lakh. If you are at ₹50 lakh today, the move is worth ₹20 to ₹40 lakh a year — and that is before you count the increments that compound on top of the new base for the rest of your career.

THE COST OF DOING NOTHING

And the thing nobody calculates. The real cost is not the fee. The real cost is another fourteen months of four interviews and three final rounds and zero offers — while the person who did prepare takes the seat you wanted.

What I do not promise

I want to be very clear about this because too many people in this space are not.

- I do not guarantee you a job. Nobody honest does. Too many things are outside both our control.
- I do not have a placement arrangement with any company and I will not pretend I can get you an interview.
- I will not write lies into your kit. If a number is not yours, it does not go in.
- If you do not do the fourteen days of practice, the kit will not save you. I give the plan and the training. You do the reps.

★ SAN SPEAKING:

What I do promise is this. You will know exactly why you have been losing. And you will walk into your next interview with a document that was built for one person, one role and one company — not for everybody. That is the whole thing. Nothing more, nothing less.

This kit was built by a human being
who has sat on both sides of the table for 24 years.

SANDESH SIDDARAM

24 years in Operations, Engineering and Quality · Sr. Vice President level
10 companies · 7 industries · 3 national performance awards · Six Sigma Black Belt
Founder, LinkedMaster.com · 95,000+ followers · 90M+ impressions, zero ads
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*Sample kit. “Ajay Kumar” and “NexDrive Mobility Ltd” are illustrative — built to demonstrate the structure and depth of a real engagement.
Development and preparation service only. No job guarantee, no placement promise.*

This sample kit is free to read, free to download and free to pass on.



This kit was built for one person.

Yours would be built for you. Your role, your numbers, your target company.

The File ₹9,999 in India · \$149 outside India

The File + The Hour ₹24,999 in India · \$399 outside India

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Scan the code, or type that address.

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