

Interview Guidelines

Preparation

Advance preparation will increase your confidence, help overcome interviewing inexperience, and enable you to sell yourself and your qualifications.

Today's employers are committing considerable time and resources to recruiting and interviewing. They need to quickly identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities candidates have to help them be successful on the job. As a candidate, your goal is to demonstrate how your knowledge and experience can benefit the employer.

Just as an actor learns his or her lines and attends rehearsals before a performance, a candidate should prepare for his or her very important performance - the job interview. Though this may seem like common sense, interviewers are continually surprised by the lack of preparation on the part of most candidates. You can make yourself stand out from the rest by following a few simple tips:

Get the facts straight:

Know who, what, where, when, and why. Know the place and time of the interview, full name and title of interviewer, title of position you are applying for, and if possible why the position is open.

Research the company:

Gather information pertaining to the annual sales revenue, principal lines of business, and technology they employ. Corporate profiles and financials are available from a variety of sources including databases of corporate sites on the world wide web and reference materials in local libraries such as Dunn & Bradstreet, Thomas Registers, Moody's Directories.

Qualifications needed:

Try to get a sense of why the employer is interested in your qualifications and how your qualifications solve the needs of the company.

Goals of the Interview

The goals of an interview differ depending on the type and level of interview. However, the purpose of each is to move to the next level in the hiring process.

Phone Interview:

The phone interview is a process in which a representative of a company will initially screen the applicant to see if he or she has the basic skills needed for the position. The goal of the applicant is to get a second "face to face" interview.

Initial "Face to Face" Interview:

This interview allows the company to probe in depth the applicant's professional appearance, communication skills, problem solving abilities, and personality traits. During this interview the company will decide whether or not the applicant will be able to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the position. They will also be able to evaluate whether or not the applicant will fit with the company culture.

Second "Face to Face" Interview:

At this point the company has determined that the applicant has the ability to fulfill the duties and responsibilities of the position. However, they need to either (a) bring senior executives into the picture for their approval, (b) compare the applicant with other possible applicants, or (c) to finalize the compensation package with the applicant.

The Interview: Part I

Dressing for success:

Men:

- Wear a suite (navy, gray, or charcoal) with a neatly pressed white shirt
- Keep ties conservative
- Wear dark, over the calf socks that match the suit
- Shoes should be black and polished (wing tips or loafers)
- Minimize jewelry (watch, wedding ring, or school ring are acceptable)
- Conservative hair cut (collar length above ears and neatly combed)
- Either clean shaven or neatly trimmed facial hair

Women:

- Wear a solid color conservative dress or suit
- Avoid open toe, sling back, or stiletto shoes
- Be conservative with jewelry (avoid big earrings and things that jingle)
- Wear nude or tan hose
- Avoid patterns and bright colors
- Hair should be neatly combed, not hanging in the face
- Keep makeup light and natural
- Do not over perfume

Positive Body Language:

- Greet the interviewer politely and with confidence
- Look him/her in the eye and smile
- Be sure to have a firm handshake
- Show how glad you are to meet the interviewer
- Sit upright and lean forward to show interest
- Be an attentive and patient listener (never interrupt the interviewer)
- Speak clearly and confidently
- Smile as you talk and try to convey your enthusiasm for your working experiences
- Never sit down before the interviewer

Questions typically asked by employers:

- What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself five to ten years from now?
- Describe your most rewarding accomplishment.
- What qualifications do you have that will make you successful in this position?
- Describe a challenge you encountered and how you dealt with it.
- Why are you interested in working for our company or organization?
- What do you know about our company?
- Tell me a little about yourself.
- How would you describe yourself?
- What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
- Why should I hire you?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- If you were hiring somebody for this position, what qualities would you look for?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- That qualities should a successful manager possess?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our company?
- How do you evaluate or determine success?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
- How do you think a friend, teacher, or former employer would describe you?
- Which is more important to you, money or type of job?
- How do you plan to achieve your career goals?

- What are your long range/short range goals and objectives?
- When and why did you establish these goals?
- How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
- Why did you leave your last assignment?
- Describe your ideal job.
- Would you like to work for a large or small company?
- What did you like most/least about your previous job?

The Interview - Part II

Some Critical Questions generally asked by employer:

Q: What salary are you looking for?

A: Well, I am currently at \$___ , but my main concern is an opportunity with a company that will allow me to develop my skill sets and grow as an individual.

Q: Why are you leaving your present position?

A: Although I enjoy my work, and ___ is a great company, my current situation does not allow me to grow. When I heard about this opportunity, it seemed to be more in line with my career goals. (Always be positive, but give a reason for leaving)

Q: What is your weakness?

A: Unfortunately, I am a perfectionist and set high expectations for myself and I always expect my peers to demand as much of themselves. (Always answer with a positive rather than a negative attribute)

Q: Tell me about yourself.

A: Preplan a five to ten minute answer describing your education and then each job in terms of accomplishments or performance indicators.

Behavior based approach to answering interview questions:

This approach to interviewing focuses on examples of how the candidate has applied his or her skills. Behavior based interviewing is built on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. To be successful using a behavior based approach, you must have analyzed your experiences and know how to relate them to the current position the company is seeking to fill.

Example: State a problem you were given, describe the action you took, and explain the results of that action.

Storytelling:

Think about how you can describe your experiences and skill sets to an employer in the form of a story. Explain the situation you were in (or the problem you were responsible for), tell what action you took and list the results.

Successful candidates can demonstrate "hands on" action with results. Prepare three or four stories including how you used each of the key skills you have identified.

Questions to ask Employer:

Never go to an interview without preparing questions beforehand. Your knowledge of the profession and the information you gather through research will help you formulate questions of high quality. The following are some possible questions you may ask in an interview:

- What is the philosophy of the company or organization?
- What do you consider to be the company's strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the company's plans and goals?
- Describe the work environment and company culture.
- What attracted you to this organization?
- Why do you enjoy working for this company?
- Describe the typical responsibilities of the position.
- What are the challenging facets of the position?
- Describe the opportunity for training and professional development.
- Are there opportunities for advancement within the organization?

- Why is the position open?
- Who previously held this position?
- What was their performance and where are they today?
- What type of responsibilities and authorities does the position hold?
- Does the company see this position as important for its growth?
- When I have succeeded in accomplishing the tasks of this position, where would be my next step?
- Is there a defined career path?

Closing the Interview

Closing questions that the applicant should ask:

- Do you have any other questions regarding my background?
- Is there anything else that you need to know to make a decision?
- This is a great opportunity and I am more than just interested in the position.
- At this time, I would like to set up with you a second interview.

Get the interviewer's business card and send a thank you letter IMMEDIATELY. Also, copy anyone else that was involved in the interview process. Getting your name back in front of the interviewer is crucial. Address the envelope with the proper name, title and address listed on the card.

CALL YOUR RECRUITER WITH FEEDBACK IMMEDIATELY AFTER YOU ARE DONE! THIS IS FOR YOUR BENEFIT, NOT OURS

Often during the interview process there are miscommunications between the applicant and the company. The recruiter must debrief you prior to speaking with the company. Often, candidates find themselves excluded from proceeding further in the interview process because the recruiter cannot counter the objections of the interviewer

Communication Tips and Techniques

- Have a clear beginning and ending. Don't let your sentences run together or trail off.
- Avoid using vocal pauses and slang words (um, uh, like, you know ...)
- Plan what you want to communicate to the interviewer (practice answering questions in previous pages)
- Answer question asked and volunteer relevant information
- Don't ramble
- Don't use slang or other forms of poor English

Interview Negatives

The interviewer will be evaluating your negative as well as your positive characteristics during interview, following are some negative factors that can lead to the rejection of an applicant:

- Unprofessional appearance
- Aggressive, overbearing, or egotistical behavior
- Lack of affirmative purpose
- Passive or indifferent behavior, indicating lack of enthusiasm and interest in the position
- Nervousness or lack of poise and confidence.
- Excessive focus on compensation
- Not forthcoming or seemingly evasive
- Making excuses for questionable factors in work history
- Unprofessional bearing, lacking tact, courtesy, immaturity
- Criticism of present or past employers, colleagues, technology, projects

- Failure to maintain and actively participate in a conversation
- Insignificant demonstrated commitment to the position
- Lack of questions about the position
- Pervasive "what can you do for me" attitude
- Poor preparation for the interview, lack of info about the company, failure to ask informed questions.

Common Interview Pitfalls

- Don't respond to questions with yes or no answers
- Explain and expand answers into compelling reasons to hire you when possible
- Don't exaggerate your accomplishments - be positive but honest
- Don't provide too much information or go off into tangents
- Answer questions fully and frankly, but to the point
- Don't make opinionated statements unless the employer invites you to do so.