

How to Succeed on Interview

Employers want to fill their vacancies with the best possible person – they hope this person will be **you** – we hope these guidelines will help you present yourself well.

Some of us are confident in an interview situation; some of us, however capable, dread the thought. There are so many different kinds of interview and, in fact, interviewers. You will need to remember that the interview is a two way meeting. It is the time for them to find out about you and you to find out about the job on offer and the company.

Preparation

- 1 It is important to do some preparation before attending an interview. The more you prepare the less likely you will need to think on your feet on the day.
- 2 Find out as much as you can about the company, get on the internet or get some information sent you from the company. There is absolutely nothing wrong in phoning the company and asking them to send you company brochure, especially if you tell them you are coming for an interview in the next couple of days.

Your consultant should be able to help you with all of the above.

IMPORTANT

- 1 People who find out about the company's services or products, their size, their culture and their reputation prior to interview usually impress employers.
- 2 In most cases the employer will already be in possession of your CV. Think about what skills or experience you may have that matches their job description and be prepared to highlight these on the day.
- 3 Take a copy of your CV, and any certificates or references with you. Not all employers will ask for them but you will be prepared. Have them prepared in an A4-pocket folder; you could use your record of achievement folder from school if you have one. (This folder can also hold you questions and give you something to hold during the interview rather than you not knowing what to do with your hands)
- 4 Plan your route and start off early. Do a dummy run if you are not sure where the company is. Should you be delayed in any way, ring your consultant or the company to keep everyone informed.

N.B. - Please be considerate - if you decide not to go for your interview it is essential you let us know and we will inform the client on your behalf.

ON THE DAY

Please remember, PUNCTUALITY is of key importance. You will probably need 15 minutes to complete an application form upon your arrival but not in all cases, our advice is to arrive 15 minutes before your interview is due to start.

Prepare some relevant questions – a helpful question guide is provided below – “Questions to ask at interview”

First impressions count –

- 1 Are you well groomed with tidy hair,
- 2 Conservative make-up, jewellery, clothes and shoes?
- 3 Regardless of what you think you are not going to a fashion show!
- 4 It is worth remembering that different types of companies may accept different standards of dress, e.g. a bank would be very different from a music company. But as a rule of thumb

appearances do count and the first few second are vital. If you need advice ask your consultant.

- 5 Be polite to the receptionist and any staff you may meet before your interview as they could influence the decision.
- 6 Fill in your application form neatly and watch out for spelling errors as some people will judge you by the way you complete this form.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS.

They say that you never get a second chance to make a first impression, and this old cliché is especially true in a job interview.

Research has repeatedly shown that an interviewer can make a decision about a candidate within the first ninety seconds, and even in these days of the equal opportunities interviewing, where nothing other than your response to set questions should matter, a negative early impression can be hard to shake off. In these first moments, before the questions begin the value of positive body language cannot be underestimated. Not only can it score you valuable points it might also help you settle your nerves into the bargain, so here's a few points to bear in mind:

Smile; This is an extremely powerful form of non-verbal communication, and if genuine and sincere, it will convey a message of warmth that trustworthiness that is hard to ignore. "Genuine and sincere" are the key here, however an idiotic grin will do you no favours.

Eye contact; Used correctly, eye contact can convey honesty and trust, whereas the avoidance of eye contact can make a person appear slightly "shifty," as if you have something to hide. A cautionary note, there is a thin line between good eye contact and psychotic glare. So let common sense prevail

Handshake. There is nothing worse than a limp handshake, so make it firm but intentional. Once again, however, do not go to the extremes, an overly vice- like grip, continued for far too long, could do more harm than good.

Remember: SMILE- EYE CONTACT- FIRM HANDSHAKE.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

Offer precise and detailed answers to questions, highlighting any previous experience of a similar situation.

- 1 Don't waffle!
- 2 Be natural!
- 3 Be yourself!
- 4 Be positive!
- 5 Be assertive about your replies!
- 6 Don't criticise your last employer, it can make you look bad!

Remember all the preparation in the world will not guarantee your success but it might just help you get the job you want.

Watch your body language. Your posture is important so sit upright; look keen and interested (if you slouch this may be taken as a sign that you are not interested). Keep control of your hands – touching your hair, fiddling with a pen or button etc, can be distracting. Cross your legs and place you hands in your lap - it will stop you fiddling if you are nervous.

During the interview if you are someone who uses his or her hands when speaking continue to do so as this is your natural way of explaining a point.

Maintain eye contact but do not stare. It is important to smile and look as if you are enjoying the conversation. If they enjoy talking to you they are more likely to want to meet you again.

Experienced interviewers will be looking at how you compose yourself.

As we stated earlier, an interview is a two way meeting so try not to monopolise the conversation but definitely don't just sit there and say nothing.

If they don't tell you the key areas of the job ask as you can show them how your experience matches.

Try to show, without overselling the fact, that you have done some research. If you do not understand a point, ask for clarification.

The interviewer will be trying to envisage you doing the job, fitting into their culture and interacting with the other team members.

Try to remember questions you have been asked at other interviews. Try to be diplomatic. It is important to consider what is going to make YOU stand out in a crowd. Make sure the employer knows the benefits of employing you. However if you go "blank" on a question, be sure not to panic, just take a deep breath and ask if they could repeat the question. At the very least this will buy you a little more time to get yourself together.

If you're still struggling after that, just apologise and admit it. The chances are that this on its own won't lose you the job. Just don't panic, put it behind you and focus on the next question.

At some point towards the end of the interview you will be asked if you have any questions to ask – YOU MUST PREPARE SOME PRIOR TO YOUR INTERVIEW – There are some detailed below – "Questions to ask at interview"

- 1 Ask what are the three most important qualities a candidate should possess for the role you are being interviewed for?
- 2 Ask what does it mean to the person interviewing, to work for the company and can they describe in three words what the company stands for.
- 3 Ask if there is anything else they need to know. When the interview seems to be drawing to a natural close and all questions seem to have been asked and answered, don't allow an uncomfortable silence to develop.
- 4 If you are interested in the position, say so. Ask what the next stage is. Ask if the interviewer thinks that you are suitable for that job, stand up, smile, shake hands and thank them for their time.

Ring your consultant to give them your impressions and feedback or ask any questions you want answered that you may have forgotten to ask. Prepare your consultant should any negotiations be necessary, e.g. if you like the job but the package is not your expectations.

Never smoke – unless invited and even then, this is distracting so try to avoid it at all costs.

Finally - Good Luck!

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

So, you went for the interview. Everything went well, you thought it was in the bag and then you get the letter: “Thanks, but no thanks”. Rejection is one of the most difficult challenges we have to face in life and when we get turned down for a job we’d set our hearts on it can be hard to take.

However, it is still possible to take something positive from the experience and improve your chances of success next time. Here are a few thoughts:

Firstly, don’t waste your time blaming other factors, i.e. “they’d already decided who they wanted and were just going through the motions”, or “my face didn’t fit, they were against me from the start”, etc. etc. This kind of negative thinking will only ensure you miss out on valuable lessons that may be there to be learnt. Don’t wallow in self-pity, just learn lessons and move on.

Secondly, ask yourself in all honesty,

- 1 Did you really give it your best shot?
- 2 How well prepared were you?
- 3 Did you get your strengths across as effectively as you could have done?
- 4 Did you research the company beforehand?
- 5 Is there anything you feel you could have done better?

Thirdly, and this is important, contact the employer and ask for feedback on your performance and why you weren’t successful. Some people are reluctant to do this, but in my view you have a right to feedback – you’ve filled in the application form, and you’ve taken the time and the trouble to attend the interview, so it’s perfectly reasonable for you to expect some feedback. Our consultants will normally do this for you.

Were they not convinced of your ability to do the job or was it your commitment that they doubted? Were they happy with your answers to their questions or was it something else that bothered them? Whatever they say, don’t take it personally because the majority of us will get turned down for a job at some point in our lives, it isn’t just you. Learn lessons and get on with your next application

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Although there are lots of potential questions that an employer could ask you, it really comes down to just three basic questions, which will be on the employers mind:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Will you do the job?
3. Will you fit in?

However, there are certain questions, which do have a habit of recurring with amazing regularity, and whether this is due to their profundity or simply through the interviewers’ lack of imagination; it’s worth listing some of them here:

- 1 What are your strengths? (You need to be aware of your strengths and how they relate to the job you’re applying to)
- 2 What are your weaknesses? (You need to be aware of your weaknesses and how they may affect the job or show how you have improved upon them)
- 3 How do you deal with Criticism? And can you give me an example of where you have had to handle criticism.
- 4 If you could remove any part of your job what part would it be?
- 5 What do you know about the company? (Make sure you do some research)
- 6 Why do you want to work for us? (Please don’t say “for the money”)

- 7 Why should we give you the job? (Explain what you could do for them and why you would gain satisfaction from the position)
- 8 What do you think makes a good team? (Unless you are a lighthouse keeper you probably work as part of a team and the employer will want to know your view of teamwork)
- 9 Please can you give me an example of working under pressure? (Don't panic, prepare for this question with an instance where you were working at full pace but you were enjoying yourself make it a positive answer)

These are a few of the questions that seem to come up frequently at interviews and if you can answer them with confidence you won't go far wrong.

QUESTIONS TO BE PREPARED FOR

Question: "Why are you leaving your current position?"

AVOID: Company lied to me about how things would be. Compensation is too low. Too much overtime, poor benefits, not enough vacation, etc. Management doesn't know what they are doing. I am not unhappy; I am just shopping the market. No promotion potential. (Avoid using the 'P' word. Better to say; "current position lacks opportunity to grow and learn professionally.")

HELPFUL: Limited opportunities to learn. Company lacks a vision of its future. Commute is too far. Bored. Been there too long. Need new challenges. (For candidates with 4-5 years at one company) Industry is retrenching. Remember, don't bash your current company or position. You want to be perceived as someone that makes intelligent career decisions and picks good companies to work for.

Question: "What do you like about your current position?"

AVOID: Flexible work schedule. The amount of vacation I am getting. Company benefits. The vast amount of resources available to me. Not having to deal with the nitty gritty details. Having my own office.

HELPFUL: The high level of responsibility I have been given. Continuing learning experience. The juggling of multiple projects. Visibility of the position. Caliber of people I get to work with. Complexity of work.

Question: "What do you dislike about your current position?"

AVOID: Bad manager. Too much detail. Too much overtime. My job is too unstructured and chaotic. Too many interruptions.

HELPFUL: Lack of challenge and responsibility. Pace is too slow. Not learning anything new. Company's culture is very rigid and lacks an entrepreneurial spirit.

Question: "What are your career objectives and why are you here talking to us?"

This is your opportunity to, 1) separate yourself from the crowd by demonstrating a unique connection between you and this company and its employees, 2) demonstrate a high level of maturity and confidence by articulating a clear vision about where you are going with your career. Why are you talking to us? "I have always respected and heard/read good things about your products or services", "I have known people that work or have worked for your company", "Your opportunity helps me meet some or all of my career goals". Career objectives? These days you must have functional career objectives that are not necessarily tied to specific job positions. Examples: Stronger industry knowledge, improved management skills, better business strategy understanding, enhancement of certain technical skills, etc. Whatever you do, DON'T say you want their job. It is a dumb and flippant remark.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT INTERVIEW

We recommend that you take these written down in a presentation folder that can be easily purchased from any good stationers for approx £10. Use these questions as a tool at the end of the interview,

rather than sitting at the end and looking dumb trying to search for the question you want to ask but can't. This stops you thinking when you have left the interview "Oh I wish I had asked" It will also show your interviewer you have prepared properly.

PROBING QUESTIONS TO ASK

- 1 What are the core values of the company? What are the company's objectives?
- 2 What kinds of changes have taken place at the company in the last few years? Management, culture, financial, etc.?
- 3 Do you foresee any imminent changes with the company or management that may affect this position?
- 4 What are some fair criticisms of the company regarding; it's use of employees, general business practices, competitiveness, management, etc.?
- 5 Why is the position available?
- 6 What defines a successful person within your organization? Has this changed over time?
- 7 What should be the most important objectives for the person filling this position?
- 8 Is there a formal performance evaluation process?
- 9 What kind of person would not be happy in this position? Company?
- 10 What is the most common reason used for leaving your company?
- 11 What departments or individuals will I be working with outside of my immediate group?
- 12 How does the rest of the organisation view what this department or business group is doing? Does it fit with the company's core objectives?
- 13 Assuming the success criteria for this position is met, what will be the opportunities for growth?
- 14 Is there opportunity to move to other projects, business groups or divisions within the company?

Don't be timid about asking these questions. Asking tough questions demonstrates that you are prepared, genuinely interested, and respectful of the interviewer and the interview process. Also, it is perfectly acceptable to bring a list of questions to your interview and take notes.

- 1 What is the hardest part of the job?
- 2 Who will train me on the product knowledge?
- 3 When are the busiest parts of the week
- 4 When are the busiest parts of the month
- 5 When are the busiest parts of the Year?
- 6 How much does the work pile up and what assistance is in place to help prevent this
- 7 Who do I report to?
- 8 What are they like to work for?
- 9 What growth does the company expect in 5 years time.
- 10 What happen to the previous employee (resigned, promoted, dismissed) and was it because of the job.
- 11 Before I came here for interview, you will have had an idea of the type of person you were looking for – have I managed to reflect your ideal candidate. IF not what am I missing.

IDEAL EMPLOYEE QUALITIES

Flexibility

You can't run a business if your employees are unwilling to accept change. Companies will continue to have turnover, change strategic direction, change product lines, and get in and out of different technologies. If you can't demonstrate an ability to deal effectively with change, you won't be very happy in today's corporate climate.

Team Player

NO LONE WOLVES! Just keeping your head down and doing your job is not enough these days. You

must make an effort to be more involved with your colleagues. This means forcing yourself to get out of your office and interact. No one likes to be misunderstood, but if people don't get the opportunity to work with you, and thereby get to know you, it will be your own fault if you don't get their support in critical situations. There is an old saying..."MAKE FRIENDS BEFORE YOU NEED THEM".

Breadth of Skills

As organisations flatten, career growth will be found horizontally, not vertically. You must be willing to work outside of your respective niche from time-to-time to broaden your abilities. Having a specialisation is fine, but being able to help out in others areas will make you more valuable to the company and more marketable as a candidate.

Being Aware of the BIGGER Picture

Employees that understand and show an interest in the bigger picture of the business itself, as opposed to only their area of focus, aren't as likely to be blind sided by change and tend to better understand and cope with the associated turmoil.

Presentation Ability

If you think only sales people should be concerned about presentation skills, you're WRONG. Improving your ability to give effective presentations on any subject, to

Small or large groups, is a skill that you must make a priority if you want to be more than just a role player.

Remember the interview process is a two-way thing – relax and enjoy the experience – you have nothing to lose.

Most important thing after the interview

CALL YOUR CONSULTANT IMMEDIATELY AND DISCUSS THE INTERVIEW WHILST IT IS FRESH IN YOUR MIND REGARDLESS OF WHETHER YOU THINK YOU HAVE DONE WELL OR NOT OR WANT THE JOB OR NOT. WE WILL LIAISE WITH THE CLIENT AND GIVE YOUR FEEDBACK – WE ARE HERE TO HELP