

JOB INTERVIEWING TIPS

PREPARING FOR THE PERSONAL INTERVIEW

Job opportunities are won-or-lost during the personal interview. This is when you are evaluated on important qualities, those which cannot be conveyed in a resume. Remember it is not necessarily the most qualified person who will get a job offer, but rather the person who makes the best presentation of his/her qualifications. In other words, hiring decisions are based largely on how well you interview. A job interview is a "screen test."

SELL YOURSELF

No matter how talented you are, or how great the demand for your experience, you must learn to sell your assets to a prospective employer. Start by approaching the interview and negotiation process with a POSITIVE ATTITUDE. Avoid being arrogant or "hard-to-get," but never undersell yourself. Learn to think and speak in positive terms. SELL!! Approach the first face-to-face interview with one objective—Get them to like you. **People don't hire people they don't like.**

During the first interview, you will usually have the opportunity to learn about the position and the company, but offers normally come on the second or third interview. Take one interview at a time. Keep selling yourself. You are the salesperson selling your abilities.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Company interviewers are always amazed by the number of job candidates who arrive at an interview with no knowledge of the company and only a vague idea of what they will say during the interview.

Write out the questions you will ask during the interview. An interview is a two-way street. The employer will try to determine through questioning if you have the qualifications necessary to do the job. You must determine, through questioning if the company can provide you the opportunity to fulfill your professional and personal goals. Skillfully worded questions also give you a degree of control over the interview, by guiding the conversation into your areas of expertise.

By rehearsing interview questions, you'll become more familiar with your own qualifications and will be well prepared to demonstrate how you can benefit an employer. Some examples:

- **"Tell me about yourself."**
Make a short, organized statement of your education and professional achievements, and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.
- **"Why do you want to work here?" or "What about our company interests you?"**
There are few questions more important than these. Answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company, and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company. Unless you work in sales, your answer should never be simply: "money." This answer will make the interviewer wonder if you really care about the job.
- **"Why did you leave your last job?"**
The interviewer may want to know if you had any problems on your last job. If you did not have any problems, simply give a reason, such as: relocated away from job; company went out of business; laid off; temporary job; no possibility of advancement; wanted a job better suited to your skills. **If you did have problems**, be honest. Show that you can accept responsibility and learn from your mistakes. You should explain any problems you had (or still have) with an employer, but don't describe that employer in negative terms. Demonstrate that it was a learning experience that will not affect your future work.



- **“What are your best skills?”**
If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, then give examples where you have demonstrated these skills.
- **“What is your major weakness?”**
Be positive; turn a weakness into a strength. For example, you might say: “I often worry too much over my work. Sometimes I work late to make sure the job is done well.”
- **“Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?”**
The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.
- **“What are your career goals?”** or **“What are your future plans?”**
The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company’s goals are compatible. Let him/her know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be as specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you set for yourself.
- **“What are your hobbies?”** and **“Do you play any sports?”**
The interviewer may be looking for evidence of your job skills outside of your professional experience. For example, hobbies such as chess or bridge demonstrate analytical skills. Reading, music, and painting are creative hobbies. Individual sports show determination and stamina, while group sport activities may indicate you are comfortable working as part of a team.

Also, the interviewer may simply be curious about your life outside of work. Employees who have creative or athletic outlets for their stress are often healthier, happier and more productive.

- **“What salary are you expecting?”**
You probably don’t want to answer this one directly. Instead, deflect the question back to the interviewer by saying something like: “I don’t know. What are you planning on paying the best candidate?” Let the employer make the first offer.

However, it is still important to know what the current salary range is for the profession. Find salary surveys at the library or on the Internet, and check the classifieds to see what comparable jobs in your area are paying. This information can help you negotiate compensation once the employer makes an offer.
- **“What have I forgotten to ask?”**
Use this as a chance to summarize your good characteristics and attributes, and how they may be used to benefit the organization. Convince the interviewer that you understand the job requirements and that you can succeed.

Here are some other job interview questions you might want to rehearse:

Your Qualifications

- What can you do for us that someone else can’t do?
- What qualifications do you have that relate to the position?
- What new skills or capabilities have you developed recently?
- Give me an example from a previous job, where you’ve shown initiative.
- What have been your greatest recent accomplishments?
- What is important to you in a job?
- What motivates you in your work?
- What have you been doing since your last job?
- What qualities do you find important in a co-worker?

Your Career Goals

- What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- How will you judge yourself successful? How will you achieve success?
- What type of position interests you?
- How will this job fit in your career plans?
- What do you expect from this job?
- Do you have a location preference?
- Can you travel?
- What hours can you work?
- When can you start?

Your Work Experience

- What have you learned from your past jobs?
- What were your biggest responsibilities?
- What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?

- How does your previous experience relate to this position?
- What did you like most/least about your last job?
- Whom may we contact for references?

Your Education

- How has your education prepared you for this position?
- What were your favorite classes/activities in school?
- Why did you choose your major?
- Do you plan to continue your education?

ASKING QUESTIONS DURING AN INTERVIEW

At most interviews, you will be invited to ask questions of your interviewer. This is an important opportunity for you to learn more about the employer, and for the interviewer to further evaluate you as a job candidate. It requires some advance preparation on your part.

Here are some guidelines for asking questions:

- Prepare five good questions. Understanding that you may not have time to ask them all. Ask questions concerning the job, the company, and the industry or profession. Your questions should indicate your interest in these subjects and that you have read and thought about them. For example, you might start, "I read in *Business Week* that . . . I wonder if that factor is going to have an impact on your business."
- Don't ask questions that raise warning flags. For example, asking "Would I really have to work weekends?" implies that you are not available for weekend assignments. If you are available, rephrase your question. Also, avoid initiating questions about compensation (pay, vacations, etc.) or tuition reimbursements. You might seem more interested in paychecks or time-off than the actual job.
- Don't ask questions about only one topic. People who ask about only one topic are often perceived as one-dimensional and not good candidates.
- Clarify. It's OK to ask a question to clarify something the interviewer said. Just make sure you are listening. Asking someone to clarify a specific point makes sense. Asking someone re-explain an entire subject gives the impression you have problems listening or comprehending. For example, you can preface a clarifying question by saying: "You mentioned that ABC Company does [blank] . . . Can you tell me how that works in practice?"

COMMON MISTAKES

Want to know what **not** to do at the job interview? Learn from the mistakes of others. Here's a list of deadly interview mistakes job seekers make:

- Arrive late for the interview.
- Look disheveled and inappropriately dressed.
- Slouch in your seat.
- Don't maintain good eye-contact with the interviewer.
- Do your company research at the interview by asking, "What do you guys do here?"
- Fail to make a connection between your skills and the needs of the employer.
- Brag about how great you are, but neglect to cite evidence of your accomplishments.
- Respond in an unfocused, disorganized, and rambling manner.
- Remain low-key and display no enthusiasm for the job.
- Answer most questions with simple "yes" and "no" answers.
- Appear desperate for a job—any job.
- Call the interviewer by his/her first name, or use the wrong name.
- Give memorized responses, forgetting parts in the process.

- Badmouth your current or former employer.
- Ask "How am I doing? Are you going to hire me?"
- Blurt out, near the beginning of the interview: "I need to make at least \$35,000. I hope this job pays at least that much."
- When asked "Do you have any questions?" reply "No."

LOOKS CAN KILL THE CHANCE OF GETTING A JOB. DRESS RIGHT.

The wrong look for a job interview can do a lot of damage. Here are some looks that can be fatal:

- Unusual hair color or style: Keep it natural, focus is on you not your hair.
- Visible tattoos and body piercings: These styles connote youth and irreverence, so make sure you're taken seriously by covering up tattoos with sleeves and hemlines, and remove your piercings.
- Short sleeves: Long sleeves give the impression of authority and professionalism. If you remove your blazer during an interview, make sure your shirt is long sleeved.
- Too much makeup and perfume: Makeup should enhance your appearance. Shoot for natural and minimal with makeup and perfume, so you don't overwhelm your interviewer.

These are absolutes when preparing for an interview:

- Suit and/or Blue Blazer with conservative, up to-date tie for men, white or blue plain or pinstripe long sleeve dress shirt/blouse, shined shoes, and a well groomed haircut. For men, be clean shaven, or have a neatly trimmed beard and/or mustache.
- Safe colors of clothing: navy blue, neutral colors of black, gray or brown. Pick the color that makes you feel and look your best.
- Do a pre-interview dress rehearsal, just to make sure your chosen ensemble makes you feel comfortable, confident and secure. It's a mindset. If you look good, polished and smart, you will walk in there with that confidence.

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

It is important to close the interview on a positive note. A company will often have two or three candidates who are somewhat equally qualified and in the same salary range. The individual believed to be most likely to accept an offer will invariably be the first one invited back for a second interview, or to actually receive an offer based on the results of a single visit. You must therefore leave the interviewer with the strongest possible impression of your likely acceptance, without losing your prerogative to ask some tough questions, should you be asked back for subsequent interviews or have an offer extended.

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
- Review the requirements of the position as you understand them.
- Express confidence in your abilities to fulfill those requirements.
- Express interest in pursuing the matter further.

An appropriate closing statement might be: "I appreciate the time you have spent with me. I'm very interested in this opportunity, and would like to pursue it further. What is the next step and when can we move forward?"

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Immediately after the interview, write out the remainder of the names and titles of everyone you spoke with and review the topics of discussion. Also, write down your understanding of the job requirements, why you can do the job, the next step in the interviewing process, how the interview concluded, and any questions you might have about the position. All this information will be required for your follow-up correspondence and subsequent communication with the company.

Call Dick Williams or Kenn Giles as quickly as possible after the interview. We want to hear your impression of the interview and your degree of interest in the position before the company calls us. If you are interested in the position, we will work with you to maximize your chances of obtaining an appropriate offer.

If you are not interested in the position, we will inform the company. A brief note thanking the company representatives for their time is still appropriate. This note will be remembered if another position more compatible with your interests comes available in the near future.

INTERVIEW ACKNOWLEDGMENT

At this point the company will either continue interviewing or make a final selection from the existing candidates. In either case, you want to keep your name in front of the hiring officials by writing a short follow-up letter immediately after the interview. The other serious candidates will do the same thing, and you will look uninterested if you don't follow suit. Here are a few suggestions you will want to keep in mind:

- Type the letter on your own personal stationery, taking care to be neat and accurate.
- Never use your current employer's letterhead, fax machine or postage meter.
- If you want to be considered, say so. Ask for the job.
- Express appreciation for the time and courtesies extended to you.

CALL AND LET US KNOW HOW YOU DID

Good luck and have fun!

Dick Williams, Kenn Giles, Bill Hoban

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