

Tips for a Successful Interview

By preparing carefully and thoroughly for your interview, you will increase your confidence and likelihood of you getting the job you are being interviewed for. In today's information-rich environment, you may as well not bother turning up for your interview, if you haven't done your research.

Ensure you have a copy of the job description, re-read the advertisement, check through your application form (if you have filled one out) and make sure you have your up-to-date CV, and then highlight what you can offer to match their requirements.

The following section provides some helpful hints on how to have a successful interview. Remember, if you are prepared, you can answer and deal with anything that might crop up during your interview. And most importantly, you are 'advertising' yourself to a potential 'buyer'!

Know Yourself

It might feel uncomfortable telling someone about yourself, but it's worth it. Practice by writing a short statement that answers questions like the ones listed below. You might even want to conduct a 'mock' interview with a friend or partner who is willing to give you some feedback.

- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What are your short and long term goals?
- Evaluate yourself in terms of the position you are applying for.
- Formulate responses by asking the question: "Why should they hire me?"
- Remember that you're there to sell yourself and secure a job offer.

Research the Company

Do your research and go that extra mile that will distinguish you for the other job applicants.

- Use the library to review annual reports, trade magazines and newspaper articles.
- The Internet offers a wealth of company information and industry statistics.
- Know the company's products and services.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is attractive to you.

The Interview Day

Dress smartly and do what you can to make yourself feel good. If you feel good inside, you will present yourself well on the outside. Make sure you know where you are going and arrive promptly.

Remember that the interviewer is hoping that you are the right person for the job, so try and relax and be natural. This is your opportunity to show the interviewer that you are the person they are looking for.

Items to Bring to the Interview

References (if possible and suitable)

- Use a couple of former supervisors who are familiar with your work.
- Include their name and company as well as home and work phone numbers.
- Always consult with your references for their approval and to ensure that their remarks will be positive.

CV

- Review your CV thoroughly and be prepared to discuss all points.
- Always bring a résumé copy identical to the one supplied to the interviewer.
- Bring along samples of your work, if possible. Never discuss or show proprietary information.

Other Items

- Bring a folder and pen to the interview to jot down notes.
- Prepare and review your questions as well as specific responses.
- Bring directions to the interview location as well as the interviewer's phone number in case you're running late.
- Bring along your recruiter's phone number (if you have gone through a recruitment agency) to give immediate feedback after the interview.

During the Interview

Relax. The interviewer will be interested in the quality of your answer, not the quantity. So pause briefly before you speak, and listen actively to what is being said or asked. If you do need to clarify the question, please do so. Sometimes you might be asked questions the interviewer knows you will find difficult to answer, and these will be asked to see how you respond under pressure. Don't get stressed, and again, think before you answer the question.

You obviously won't know what the interviewer will ask you during your interview. However, you can prepare by practicing some more common questions. Some of those that you might potentially get asked are listed below.

Questions to be prepared for

“Tell me about yourself”

- Answer this question in terms of the qualifications required of the position.
- Keep responses concise and brief and avoid being derogatory or negative about previous jobs and bosses.
- "Tell-me-about-yourself" means, "Tell me about your qualifications." Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications. Start with education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovation designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.) What are your greatest strengths?
- Interviewers like to hear abstract qualities. Loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, fast-learner, technical skills, politeness, and promptness, expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid the simple generalisation "I like people". It's not a good answer.

“What are your greatest weaknesses?”

- Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state "not being able to go to work on Mondays", or "coming in late", etc.). Present your weakness as professional strengths, (i.e., "Sometimes work too hard to make sure things are done accurately").

“What do you do in your spare time?”

- Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Your answer gives you dimension. Name some hobbies.

“How can you contribute to this company?”

- Be positive and sell! Bring strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

“Why should I hire you for this position?”

- Explain your qualifications and how they "fit" the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it's work that you enjoy. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

“Why do you want to work for our company?”

- Make a compliment about what the company does, its location, or its people. Other positive remarks might be about the company's product or service, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement. Research about the company is important here.

“Where do you hope to be in five years?”

- Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years, and that their investment in you will pay. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you'll be more successful than they are. But do show a strong desire for promotions.

“What interests you most about this position?”

- Testing the interviewer with a truthful one or two-word answer such as "the challenge" or "the opportunity", will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a choice to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

“How long do you plan to be with this company?”

- As with marriage, most employers expect a till-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field", is a reasonable response.

“What are your career goals?”

Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:

- Short term "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
- Long term "After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

“What are you doing to achieve your goals?”

- "I look at continued learning as the key to success. I continue my education, as you see from my CV, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organisations in my field."

“Why did you leave your previous employer?”

- Never speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

“What did you like most/least about your previous job?”

- An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you like most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

“Why are you looking for another job?”

- Again, be positive. I have to say that I have really enjoyed working for XYZ Company. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organisation with greater opportunities for growth and recognition. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions and advance my career.

“Are you applying for any other jobs?”

- In your answer, show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective. Make it known that your talents are applicable to other businesses and that you have explored ways to maximize your potential and are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don't give an indication that you are just shopping.

“What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?”

- Again, be truthful and admit not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit so as not to instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

“What are your greatest accomplishments?”

- Be ready to recant one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

“What kind of worker are you?”

- Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

“What type of salary do you have in mind?”

Salary discussions should be avoided, if possible.

- Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer."

“What is your current salary?”

- Answer truthfully. Remember that "salary" includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits, and vacations as well as sick and personal days. Also, if you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

Other questions you should be prepared to answer truthfully:

- Are you willing to relocate?
- May we check your references?

Answer a question to the best of your ability and then relax. If there is a period of silence before the interviewer asks the next question, stay calm. Interviewers often use silence to see if you can handle stress and maintain poise.

Questions you can ask

“Why do you want someone for this job?”

- Force the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by one of his/her current employees. The answer may give you a valuable job description.

“Why isn't this position being filled from within the company?”

- You may discover that nobody in this organisation would accept it or that your future fellow employees are a weak lot.

“How many people have held this job in the last five years? Were they promoted or did they leave the company?”

- If the turnover has been high, you have the right to suspect that the job may leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you can expect to be promoted quickly.

“How did you get started in the company?”

- A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

“What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?”

- Here you may discover you are overqualified or in a position to ask for considerably more money.

Additional Questions

- What would my responsibilities and duties be?
- What are the most difficult aspects of the position?
- Describe a typical day on the job.
- Describe the department's company's growth in the next 2 years.
- What is the philosophy on training and development here?
- How do you think I'd fit into the job and into your organisation?
- What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?
- Who would I be working for and with?
- What is the person doing who used to hold this position?
- When would you need me to start?
- May I see my work area?
- May I meet some of my future co-workers?

Reasons for not asking you back!

Poor attitude. Many candidates come across as arrogant. While employers can afford to be self-centered, job applicants cannot.

Appearance. Many job seekers do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are quickly made in the first three to five minutes.

Lack of research. It's obvious when job applicants haven't researched the position, company or industry prior to the interview. Visit the library or use the Internet to research the company, and then talk with friends, peers and other professionals about the opportunity before each meeting.

Not having questions to ask. Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position. Prepare a list of intelligent questions in advance.

Not readily knowing the answers to interviewer's questions. Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as a recent termination or an employment gap. Practicing with your partner or a friend before the interview will help you to frame intelligent responses.

Relying too much on CVs. Employers hire people, not paper. Although a CV can list qualifications and skills, it's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsive team player.

Too much humility. Being conditioned not to brag, job seekers are sometimes reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them.

Not relating skills to the employer's needs. A list of startling accomplishments means little if you can't relate them to a company's requirements. Reiterate your skills and convince the employers understand what you can do for them.

Handling salary issues ineptly. Job applicants often ask about salary and benefits too early. If they believe an employer is interested, they may demand inappropriate amounts and price themselves out of the jobs. People who ask for too little undervalue themselves or appear desperate.

Lack of career direction. Job hunters who aren't clear about their career goals can't spot or commit to appropriate opportunities. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.

Good luck with your interview!