

Interviewing Tips

Purpose

The interview is a mutual exchange of information between an employer and a candidate for a position. The primary objectives are:

- To supply information about yourself that is not contained in your resume; to show that you understand yourself and have a sense of direction in your career.
- To enable the employer to evaluate your personality and attitudes related to the demands of the organization and the possible position.
- To enable you to gain information about the organization and the job which is not available through other sources.
- To give you and the employer an opportunity to discuss the desirability of further contact or an offer of employment.

Interview Preparation

Knowledge of Yourself

To impress an employer you must be well prepared and understand the value of what you have to offer and to be able to relate your assets to the position and the organization. Rather than trying to determine what level you are currently functioning, some interviewers want to see how you have grown over time in areas related to their position. Some will compel you to talk about your failures and mistakes to find out what you have learned or have since done differently.

Knowledge of Company/Organization

You must be familiar with the position and the organization so that you can demonstrate how and why you will be an effective employee. Try to find out as much as you can about the organization prior to your interview. Ask the company to send you material, such as annual reports, brochures, in-house newsletters or magazines. This knowledge will also help you to decide whether you want to be associated with a particular organization.

First Impressions

Your success in the interview can depend on your appearance and the interviewer's first impression of you. It has been said that employers make their hiring decisions within the first 60 seconds of the interview.

During the Interview

Don't worry about being nervous during the interview—this is normal and will be expected. Just remember that the interviewer wants to hire you if you have the right qualifications and interest in the position. Many interviewers will begin the interview with some "small talk" to help you relax. This may seem irrelevant to the position, but you are still being evaluated.

The second phase of the interview consists of the interviewer asking you questions to try to determine your match to the specifications needed to do the work well. The most reliable way for an interviewer to project how you would perform in the future is to examine the past. Therefore, many employers prepare some behavior-based questions. Which ones are asked depends on the work you are interviewing for.

Behavior Based Questions

Tell me about a time when you had to go beyond what is ordinarily expected of an employee in order to get a job done.

- Give me an example of an important goal you set and describe your success in reaching it.
- Discuss occasions when you adapted to a wide variety of people and situations.
- Describe a time when you had an angry customer on the telephone.
- By analyzing the questions asked of you, you will be able to find out more particulars about the job for which you have applied. What emphasis does the interviewer seem to be placing on which skills, knowledge, personality traits and attitudes. That insight can help you focus your answers more easily to the employer's position.
- Think about why the question is being asked. What does the employer REALLY want to know?

Typically asked questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your short-term goals?
- What is your own vision/mission statement?
- What do you think you will be looking for in the job following this position?
- Why do you feel you will be successful in this work?
- What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
- What experience have you had working on a team?
- What have been your most satisfying/disappointing experiences?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What kinds of problems do you handle the best?
- How do you reduce stress and try to achieve balance in your life?
- How did you handle a request to do something contrary to your moral code or business ethics?
- What was the result the last time you tried to sell your idea to others?
- Why did you apply to our organization and what do you know about us?
- What do you think are advantages/disadvantages of joining our organization?
- What is the most important thing you are looking for in an employer?
- What characteristics do you think a person would need to have to work effectively in our company with its policies of staying ahead of the competition?
- What courses did you like best/least? Why?
- What did you learn or gain from your part-time/summer/co-op/internship experiences?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- If I asked your friends to describe you, what do you think they would say?
- What frustrates you the most?
- What things could you do to increase your overall effectiveness?
- What was the toughest decision you had to make in the last year? Why was it difficult?
- Why should I hire you?

Evaluating your performance

Evaluate how well you did after each interview. Ask yourself:

- What points did I make that seemed to interest the employer?
- Did I present my qualifications in the best manner possible, giving appropriate examples as evidence?
- Did I pass up opportunities to sell myself, to demonstrate the work I do, and to show how profitably I could do it for both the organization and myself?
- Did I talk too much? Too little?
- Was I too tense? Passive? Aggressive?
- Did I find out enough about the employer and the job to help in making my own decision?

Identify any changes you would like to make for your next interview.

Tips

- Get a good night's sleep before your interview. Believe in yourself!
- Be punctual. Arrive at least 15 minutes early to allow yourself time to collect your thoughts.
- Take the opportunity to observe the working environment. Keep your eyes and ears open.
- Be friendly with everyone.
- Your responsibility is to convince the employer that you are the best person for the job. Since the interviewer may not draw it out of you, remember the points that are important about your qualifications. Give descriptive examples or proof whenever you can throughout the interview. Try to paint a visual picture that the employer will remember. The true stories you tell about yourself will differentiate you from the other 10 to 20 applicants.
- Watch the interviewer for clues on how the interview is progressing. Is the interviewer's face or body language telling you that your answers are too long, not detailed enough, too boring, etc.? If in doubt, ask the interviewer if more details are needed. Listen carefully to the question and the way it is phrased. If it can be interpreted in more than one way, and if you are unsure what the interviewer really wants you to discuss, ask for clarification.
- If the interviewer becomes silent, look for the reason. Has the person momentarily run out of questions? Is the person testing you to see how comfortable you are with silence? Is the interviewer finding your answers too brief and waiting for you to elaborate more in order to get a better sense of who you are?
- If the interviewer outlines a hypothetical situation and asks you what you would do if you found yourself in those circumstances, imagine yourself in that situation. Give the best answer you can if it is a situation that you have not already experienced and successfully dealt with. In many instances, the interviewer is more interested in finding out how you would react under those circumstances, and in your thinking/analytical process than in your final answer. In your analysis, think about which are the most important facts. Watch for a "red herring". Do you need to get additional information from someone else in the scenario before you could make a decision? Do you want the interviewer to supply more detail for clarification on a key point?
- When the interviewer asks about your weaknesses, choose something work-related, but not so serious as to disqualify you. Briefly mention one, always ending on a positive note. Show what you have learned from the experience or what you are doing to change.
- Practice in a mock interview with another person. Check for quality of information in your answers, and the positive, non-verbal reinforcement of your words.

Your Rights in the Interview

The Human Rights Commission (HRC) publishes a chart that illustrates the type of questions that are appropriate or inappropriate in employment interviews. Following are the categories that have restrictions on what can be legally asked:

- birthplace, ancestry, ethnic origin, place of origin
- sex, sexual orientation, marital status, family status
- age
- race, colour
- religion, creed
- handicap
- references and membership in organizations

Although it is ultimately the responsibility of the interviewer to know the law, this may not always be the case. It is to your advantage to be informed on the subject.