

Preparing For An Interview

Being properly prepared for a job interview is the first essential step toward a successful interview. The objective of the job interview is simple and singular — GET THE JOB OFFER!

The objective of any interview is to get the potential employer interested in you. Most candidates have the job when they go into an interview. It is only a lack of preparation, weak communication skills, or poor impression that can take the opportunity away! This may sound fundamental — and you're right, it is. You would be absolutely amazed at how many candidates either don't know it or forget it during an interview, sometimes with disastrous results. As you prepare for and participate in an interview, you should never forget the simple, singular objective — GET THE JOB OFFER! It is the most important thing you can do.

Do not let your opinion of the company distract you from your objective. You are not interviewing to decide if you would like to work for a company. If you don't get the job offer, it will make little difference whether or not you like the position offered or the company offering it. You are not interviewing to broaden your knowledge of available opportunities. There are far more effective and efficient ways to do this. A "ho-hum" attitude has no place in a job interview, leaving an employer with the impression that you are just shopping around is a fatal mistake. Thus, it is very important to remember the following do's and don'ts concerning an interview: Know the exact time and place of the interview, know the interviewer's full name, the correct pronunciation and their title. Your attitude, tone and demeanor are important. Always conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing. Never close the door on opportunity; the more positions you can choose from, the better. Additionally, prepare the questions you will ask during the interview. Remember, an interview is a two-way street. The employer will try to determine through questioning whether the company will give you the opportunity for the growth and development you seek. You will be the one possibly changing positions, so you have the right to know up front what you're getting into.

Probing questions to ask the interviewer:

- Why did my predecessor leave — or is this a new position? A detailed description of the position.
- What is the most important thing I can do to help your firm during the first 90 days of my employment?
- What obstacles must be overcome for the person in this position to succeed?
- What criteria will be used to evaluate my performance?
- What opportunities are there for growth in the next 12 months? 2 years? 5 years?
- What is the company growth plan?

The best rule of thumb for what to wear is to dress as if your biggest client were coming to visit your office! You want to present a clean-cut, conservative image to a potential employer. Your appearance will be complimented by your manners and demeanor. Be courteous, polite, and appreciative (but not subservient) with everyone you meet — from the receptionist to the president. You should project a confident (but not arrogant) presence to all who meet you. You can easily maintain your enthusiasm by simply focusing on the potential rewards of this process — a better job!

- Plan on arriving for the interview on time or a few minutes early. Late arrival for a job interview is NEVER excusable.
- Take several copies of your resume. However, if presented with an application, FILL IT OUT NEATLY AND COMPLETELY! Be SURE to use the information from your resume to complete the application.
- Do not sit. Stand in the lobby area if you have to wait. Do not drink coffee, tea or anything else while there.
- Do not chew gum.
- Greet the interviewer by his/her surname if you are sure of the pronunciation i.e. Mr. Taylor, Mrs. Wilson
- Conduct yourself professionally.
- Be aware of what your body language is saying.
- SMILE, make eye contact, don't slouch and maintain composure.
- Look your prospective employer in the eyes while you are talking to him/her.
- Follow the interviewer's leads, but try to get the interviewer to describe the position and duties to you early in the interview so that you can relate your background and skills to the position.
- Don't answer your questions with a simple "yes" or "no". Elaborate whenever possible. Tell those things about yourself, which relate to this situation and or job opportunity.
- DO NOT inquire about salary, vacations, bonuses, retirement or benefits on the initial interview unless you are offered the job.

Make sure that your point gets across to the interviewer in a factual and sincere manner. Keep in mind that you alone can sell yourself to this interviewer. Make him/her realize the need for you in their organization.

- Be well-prepared to answer the "typical" questions:
- Why are you willing to leave your current employer?
- What do you know about this position & the company?
- What are your short-term & long-term goals?
- How do you feel about your current supervisor?
- What are your strengths & weaknesses?
- What could be improved in your boss?
- What information is important to you in making a decision about this change?
- When are you available to start?
- Answer questions truthfully, frankly, and as to the point as possible.
- NEVER make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies!!!!
- Be careful to not "over answer" questions. The interviewer may steer the conversation into politics, economics or religion. Since there can be sensitive subjects, it is best to avoid these conversations. If you feel compelled to answer, make it very brief and honest, and try to steer the conversation to another subject.
- Conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing.

Commonly Asked Interview Questions

No one can predict the exact questions that an interviewer will ask, but your recruiter should be able to give you a good idea of the hiring authority's personality, his/her typical interview demeanor, and a few important questions the employer is likely to ask. To prepare, consider carefully how you would answer the following questions:

- What salary are you looking for? You should avoid discussing compensation on the first interview unless you're actually offered the job and want to accept it. If the interviewer asks specifically what your salary requirements are, your answer should be, "What I'm really looking for is the right career opportunity. I'm sure you'll make me a fair offer if you want to hire me."
- What are the most significant accomplishments in your career thus far?
- What job in our company do you want to work toward?
- How has your current job prepared you to take on more responsibility?
- What do you know about our company? Our products? Services?
- How would you describe your personality?
- What have you learned from the past jobs you have held that would benefit this company?
- What things are important for your job satisfaction?
- How do you perform under pressure?
- What is your major weakness? (You had better have one, too.)
- What do you think determines a person's progress in a company?
- What did you like least about your last position?
- How would your co-workers describe you?
- What are your goals in your career?
- Why should we hire you?
- Are you active in any professional organizations? Continuing education?

Watch Out For These!!

- Poor personal appearance (unshaven, clothing needs ironing, hair needs work, hygiene problems, etc.)
- Overbearing, overaggressive, conceited, egoist, know-it-all.
- Inability to express thoughts clearly — poor poise, diction, grammar. (Never swear!)
- Lack of planning for career. Lacking purpose. No clearly defined goals.
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm. Passive and indifferent.
- Lack of confidence and poise. Nervousness.
- Overemphasis on money. Interested only in best dollar offer.
- Evasive. Excuses for unfavorable items in your resume/records.
- Lack of tact, maturity, courtesy.
- Condemnation of past employers and companies.
- Failure to look interviewer in the eye.
- Lack of appreciation of the value of experience.
- Failure to ask questions about job.
- Persistent attitude of "What can you do for ME?"
- Lack or preparation for the interview. Failure to get company information, resulting in inability to ask intelligent questions during the interview.

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Closing the Interview

- Tell the key interviewer (probably also your future supervisor-to-be) that you are interested in working not only for the firm, but also for him personally. Interviewers like to hear positive things, too. If the "chemistry" is good between you, he needs to know it so he'll go to bat for you. Summarize what you can do to solve what you perceive to be the employer's greatest problem.
- Determine what the next step in the process will be (second interview, test, physicals, reference checks, etc.).
- Close with a firm handshake and a sincere "thank you" to the interviewer for his/her time.
- Call us so we can effectively follow up on your behalf. Let us take advantage of our third party status to learn about the employer's interest level and concerns.
- Good taste dictates that you should mail a follow up letter within 24 hours (e-mail appropriate)! Enhance your impact by sending a follow up letter thanking the interviewer for their time. Use the letter to summarize any key points in the interview that highlight the suitability of your skills and experience. Express your enthusiasm about the position, the company and the reasons for your interest. Limit the letter to a page and be sure it's error-free.