



INTERVIEW PREPARATION TECHNIQUES

INTRODUCTION

An interview will typically take an hour or two, yet these hours may be some of the most important in your working life — a first-rate interview will land you a great job and determine your career and financial status for the years ahead!

WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

The fine details vary from position to position, but the main qualities sought by the majority of employers are:

Positive attitude

A genuine interest in the company and position

Communication skills

High performance standards

Stable work history

PREPARATION

Failure to prepare means that you are preparing to fail. The more information you are armed with the better the chances of your interview being a success.

Research the company. Research will give you a good idea beforehand of whether the company might be for you, and will also give you questions to ask. Web-sites now provide a wealth of information about companies. Your consultant may also provide details, and often a brochure can be obtained from the company directly. Trade magazines are another source of information. Your local library may have directories such as Kompass, Dunn & Bradstreet and Kellys.

Know where you are going. Timing: Plan a reliable way of getting there which allows you to be a few minutes early (not too late or too early and probably not on time because this means late when you've been delayed in reception or walking round their buildings). Know whom you are seeing. Prepare questions. See later

Dress appropriately. Are you well dressed, in a way that follows conventions in this job sector, at the conservative end of your own range? Ask the consultancy what the client's dress code is. A dark business suit, white shirt, conservative tie, neat hair and polished dark shoes are always a safe bet. Personal: First impressions count. Are you well groomed with tidy hair, shoes and clothing?

Stay positive

Who are you? Think about your skills, competence's, qualifications and experience. How are you perceived? Talk to friendly colleagues, present or recent, about their view of you as a team member, your strengths and of your CV as it shows these.



What are your objectives? What job function(s) can and should you do and in what sector or environment? Take advice on this too. Getting to an interview is not the objective just part of it.

Who are your targets? Recruitment consultancies have access to vacancies that have not been advertised. Once you have been offered an interview, what do you need to know about the company? Products, size, locations, style, reputation both as employers and suppliers, and the sort of job they'd have for you. Phone the company and ask them to send you an annual report and product brochure if applicable. Read a good book on body language, so you can strengthen your good signals, curb the weak ones.

Review anticipated questions. Preventing stumbling over your words by having a good idea of how you would answer common interview questions.

Prepare extra copies of your resume. Also, take something to make notes on, as long as it isn't too bulky.

Prepare a presentation binder and take it with you. You will be remembered if: you can show good sales figures; contacts that you have that are relevant to this position; any letters of commendation or certificates that show relevant qualifications; brochures of some of the products that you have sold; examples of the types of projects you've been involved in.

Interviews can vary, from being very formal to being very informal. **There is no single way in which an interview is conducted**, but there are some standards that apply to almost every time. Their assessment of you begins before the actual interview.

AT THE INTERVIEW

PRE-INTERVIEW

First contact. A firm handshake, with an enthusiastic greeting and a good amount of eye contact and a self-introduction should make a good impression.

Never carry anything in your right hand, as this is the hand that you will shake with.

Do not sit down in the reception area or read magazines. This way, when you meet the interview, you are on level terms and not showing any nervousness.

Be polite to support staff you meet including those at the consultancy. They count too - and may influence a decision in your favour.

Break the Ice. In most interviews small talk will fill the small gap before the point of getting down to business.

Respond enthusiastically and pleasantly to the interviewers' questions and remarks.

Never smoke. Also, it is probably safer not to accept tea or coffee as it can get in the way.



DURING THE INTERVIEW

Let the interviewer lead the conversation early on, but try to establish or clarify the role and the duties involved early on. This way you can apply your previous experience and skills to the position.

Try not to monopolise the meeting - let your interviewer talk. Avoid overbearing, overaggressive or egotistical behaviour.

Show confidence and poise. Avoid nervousness.

Show tact, maturity and courtesy.

Keep an attitude of 'what I can do for the company', not 'what can the company do for me'. Sit up straight. Maintain a good posture. Keep good eye contact.

Build a rapport. People like to hire those they are comfortable with.

Stress your positive points that are relevant. These are likely to include Sales records, awards won, business developed.

Always keep a positive emphasis. Do not say 'I can't' or 'I haven't'. Instead, say, for example, 'That sounds good. It is something I am sure I would be able to do.' Relate answers to the position. Show you have done some research - but don't be contrived.

Stay positive even when things appear to be going bad. A genuinely interested interviewer may be testing your reactions by making the interview appear to be going badly for you.

Do not discuss salary at the first interview. If the interviewer insists, consider a neutral response such as 'I will consider any reasonable offer' or state your current or previous salary, but state that you're more interested in a position than a salary. Furthermore, do not discuss holidays, bonuses etc. until you are sure of being offered the job. Let them know why you're interested.

Talk about what appeals to you about the company, and what you can offer.

Keep your replies simple. Offer positive information - don't give bad news unasked. Don't harp on problems or criticise previous employers.

Don't make unnecessary derogatory remarks about current or former employers. If the interviewer starts to make derogatory remarks about your current/previous employer, stay neutral - they may be trying to test you.

CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

Enthusiasm is infectious. Let them know you're enthusiastic about the position, and why.

Clarify what the next step is. When would the next interview be, who will you be hearing from etc?

Ask them what else they need to know about you.

State you can do the job. Show confidence in your ability to fill the position



QUESTIONS TO ASK

Remember to ask questions. A lack of questions could be mistaken for a lack of interest. Many of these you may already know from your research.

- What will be my responsibilities?
- Where will I fit into the overall organisational structure?
- Who will I report to?
- Where does he/she fit in the structure?
- Who will report to me? How experienced are they?
- What do you expect me to do in the first 6 months?
- What level of performance do you expect from me?
- Who are your customers?
- Where is the company going? Upwards? Expansion plans?
- What are the chances of advancement/promotion in this position? When?
- What will be my salary, benefits and bonuses? [Do not bring this up too early in the interview - wait until they are sold on you.]
- Will travelling be required in this position?
- Will relocation be required now or in the future?
- What training do you provide?
- When will you decide on the appointment?
- What is the next step?
- What would I be expected to accomplish in this position?
- What are the greatest challenges of this position?
- How do you think I fit the position?
- What is the job actually selling? To whom?
- What is the exact geographical area?
- What's the mix of new to existing business?
- How long is the sales cycle?
- What are the reasons for the vacancy?
- Why should someone come and work for you?
- What concerns do you have about my ability to do the job? How do you think I fit the position?
- How do I compare to other candidates? (Use questions like these to impress them further/remove any doubts they may have.)
- Can you see yourself working with me?

QUESTIONS TO ANSWER

Here is a selection of questions that employers might ask you.

- Tell me about yourself. (Ask them to clarify this question - what they want to know, and where they want you to start.)
- What are/were your primary responsibilities in your current/previous vacancy?
- What were your earnings when you started?
- What is/was your earnings currently/when you left?
- Why did you leave/are you considering leaving?
- What are your proudest accomplishments in this position?
- What was the most difficult part of your job, and how did you deal with it?
- What qualities are necessary to be successful in this role?
- Describe a typical workday.
- How did you feel about your workload?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What are your career goals?



- What is your short-term / long-term objectives?
- What is your management philosophy?
- Do you consider yourself successful? Why?
- What was the most challenging aspect of your job?
- What kinds of rewards are satisfying to you?
- What have you done to improve your skills?
- What are you looking for now?
- What other kinds of positions have you applied for recently?
- What do you know about us?
- What aspect of this job interests you least? Most?
- Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?
- How long would it take you to make an impact with us?
- How would you describe your personality?
- Were you satisfied with your performance in your previous position? Why?
- Why should I hire you above another candidate?
- Do you set goals?
- Describe a major goal you set and what steps you took to reach it?
- When you fail to reach target, how do you deal with it?
- What did you find hard to do in your previous role? Why?
- Do you feel you were sufficiently recognised for your work by your managers?
- What steps do you take to overcome a problem?
- What do you do when faced with a decision where no company policy exists?
- What problems do you face in getting a typical days work done?
- How would your managers describe you?
- What types of people do you dislike working with?
- How do you handle criticism?
- What would you change about your former/current employer?
- What was your best/worst manager like?
- What outside activities are most significant to your personal development?
- Describe a time when you have had a conflict with a colleague. How did you overcome it?