THE GOAL OF THE INTERVIEW IS TO RECEIVE THE OFFER

Interviews can be tough - even for seasoned professionals. The interview is, however, your best opportunity to gain insight into the position and company, and to determine how your experience and talent can contribute to the company’s growth and profitability.

Remember, an interviewer develops an impression of you in the first few minutes of your meeting or telephone screen, and spends the rest of the interview confirming, not altering, their initial impression. You can’t come back tomorrow with another, more complete, answer to a question. Keep your guard up for the entire interview; there are no places through which you can coast.

An important aspect of interviewing that many candidates, particularly inexperienced ones, overlook is the following: The company is interviewing you, but you are also interviewing the company. The interview process provides the best information you are likely to get about what being an employee of the company is really like.

Key information you should watch for is covered in the various sections below, included are a list of things that you can do to make your interview as successful as it can be. No tricks or gimmicks here - just good, solid information to help you prepare and win that job.

* Do your homework - on the company. Find out as much about the company, its history, its current situation and its future as you can. Sources: the Internet and the library - for periodicals and trade journals, articles, annual reports and 10K reports; friends and business associates (keep the position confidential). Be prepared to ask good questions about the company and its direction.

* Do your homework - on the position. Have a thorough understanding of the position, its key duties and primary responsibilities, and what is expected. Be prepared to ask good questions: Who has been successful and why? Who has failed and why? Who does the position report to? Who does the position supervise? What needs to be done in the first 6 months; in the first year?

* Do your homework - on yourself. Review your career history thoroughly. Review dates, positions, duties and responsibilities, and accomplishments. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to cite specific examples of accomplishments and how your specific experience can help the company solve some of its problems. Concentrate on your most recent positions, but don’t neglect your early career.
26 WAYS APPLICANTS STRIKE OUT WHEN INTERVIEWING

In a recent survey of 150 companies who were questioned as to why they did not hire a qualified applicant, resulted in the following answers:

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Lack of interest and enthusiasm
3. Over-emphasis on money
4. Condemnation of past employers
5. Failure to look at interviewer while conversing
6. Limp, fishy handshake
7. Late for the interviewer
8. Failure to express appreciation for interviewer’s time
9. Asks no questions about the job
10. Indefinite response to questions
11. Overbearing, over-aggressive, conceited “know-it-all” complex
12. Inability to express oneself clearly
13. Lack of planning for career; no purpose or goals
14. Lack of confidence, ill at ease
15. Lack of factual information
16. Lack of manners, courtesy
17. Lack of maturity
18. Lack of vitality
19. Indecision
20. Merely shopping around
21. Cynical
22. Low moral standards
23. Lazy
24. Intolerant
25. Inability to take criticism
26. High pressure type

INTERVIEWING TIPS “SECURE YOUR SUCCESS”

1. Arrive fifteen minutes early to the interview.
2. Fill out all applications neatly and completely. Write negotiable in the salary needed section.
3. Greet the interviewer by his/her surname with a smile and a firm handshake.
4. Wait to be seated.
5. Do not answer questions with a simple “yes” or “no”. Sell yourself by using examples and paint a clear picture of where, when, how, what, and why you did it.
7. Answer all questions to the point; do not ramble on.
8. Do not make derogatory remarks about previous or present employers.
9. Do not concern yourself with salary, commission, bonuses or vacation on the initial interview.
10. Tell your possible employer what you are going to do for them, NOT what they can do for you.
11. Always represent yourself honestly.
12. The prospective employer will make his hiring decision based on these factors: Attitude, Image and Communication skills, Experience, Education and Correlation
13. Tell the employer why you want this particular position with this particular company.
14. Tell the employer why you can do the job.
15. Ask for the position! Be enthusiastic about the position and the company.
16. Ask good, specific questions. Respond positively to the interviewer’s questions whenever possible.
17. Sell your attitude during the interview

Talk to mentor/counselor about specific issues that may be addressed in the interview. Also talk about the individuals you will be meeting and their interview styles.

In essence, an interview is a time for storytelling. Your “stories” are 90 second to two minute snapshot anecdotes of the successes from your work history. Practice beforehand what you want to say about your accomplishments and your experience. During the interview, you want to have the content down pat so you’re not stumbling for what to say, and instead can focus on your delivery of the information… being smooth and polished in your presentation. When answering questions, be succinct; don’t ramble. Practice beforehand – into a mirror or to another person – how you might vividly and enthusiastically describe your accomplishments in 90 to 120 seconds.

Your preparation will allow you to enter the interview relaxed and confident that you can fulfill the needs of the company and that they have an opportunity that can enhance your career.

**ALWAYS** put yourself in the shoes of the interviewer. Employers want to hire “difference makers,” individuals who can propel their companies ahead. Your anecdotal information on accomplishments should always be geared to showing how your involvement, your ideas, your drive, helped a company advance and meet its goals.

But - you are only a part of the way there. During the interview you will be asked difficult questions. These questions are designed to see how you will react under pressure and unfamiliar territory. There are no “pat” answers to these questions. Interviewers ask different questions and look for different responses. However, by being familiar with the types of questions you may be asked, you will give yourself the opportunity to answer these questions comfortably and confidently.
Following is a list of typical stress questions, followed by some examples of how they might be answered.

- What are your short-range objectives? Long-range objectives?
- What do you look for in a job?
- What is the difference between a good position and an excellent one?
- Why are you leaving your current job?
- Why did you select my organization to interview?
- What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
- Why should we hire you?
- Tell me about yourself.
- Can you work under pressure, deadlines, etc.?
- How are you best managed?
- What are your five biggest accomplishments in your present or last job?
- Why did you not do better in college?
- What is your biggest strength? Weakness?
- What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this business?
- How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?
- How long would you stay with us?
- If you could start again, what would you do differently?
- What new goals or objectives have you established recently? Why?
- How have you changed the nature of your job?
- What qualities have you liked or disliked in your boss?
- What was the most difficult ethical decision you have had to make? What was the result?
- How do you show your anger or frustration?
- What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?
- Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?
- How would you evaluate your present firm?
- How successful have you been?
- What was the last book you read? Movie you saw?
- How do you spend your free time? What would you do if you had more of it?
- What interests you most about the position we have? The least?
- Do you not feel you might be better off with a different size firm than ours?
- Are you a leader? Analytical? Give an example we can verify.
- How would you describe your own personality?
- Have you helped increase sales? Profits? Reduced costs?
As indicated earlier, there are no “pat” answers to these questions. Review the questions and your responses. While some of the questions seem difficult, the keys to answering effectively are to be direct, be truthful, be positive and be succinct.

Some examples:

**What is wrong with your present firm?**

I really do not feel there is anything wrong with the firm. I have enjoyed working there and think they have some good people in management. It is a good company but I am ready to handle additional responsibilities now and the opportunities do not exist in my present position.

**How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?**

I would want to be sure that I understood the operating environment and the personnel, but I feel that I have the skills and experience to make a contribution in a very short time. What do you feel will be the main focus of the position for the first six months?

**Why are you leaving your present position?**

I enjoy my work but I am anxious to expand my knowledge and take on more responsibility. Frankly, these opportunities do not exist in my present position.

*If you are interested in the position, ask for it, or ask for the next interview. If you want this job, say this: “I am very interested in your company. I am confident I can do an excellent job for you. What is the next step?”*

**BE PREPARED TO ANSWER THIS QUESTION:**

"**What do you consider your weaknesses to be?**"

Never answer this question with comments like..."I work too hard" or "I tend to take on too much responsibility." Some interviewing books suggest these kinds of answers to spin a negative into a positive. In my opinion it has just the opposite effect.

You can say..."I sometimes can be short or abrupt with people. I could be more diplomatic.” OR, ” I need to work on dealing with people who are don’t carry their weight or whose workmanship is shoddy."
MULTIPLE INTERVIEWERS:

Some jobs involve interviewing with a variety of people, either on the same day or at separate interviews. Some interviewing sessions last a full day. In cases like this, it's important to pace yourself so you don't come across as tired or bored by the time you get to your eighth interviewer - remember the company is looking for someone bright and energetic! Many companies regard the all-day interview as a test of whether the candidate's energy level is high enough to cope with the job. It's also important to give consistent answers when asked the same question by different interviewers, although sometimes a question that is essentially "the same" can be posed with a different spin by different interviewers, and can therefore be answered using different "stories"; still, the answer should be fundamentally the same. They you will be getting together, usually the very next day, to discuss your answers, so consistency is very important.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

1. Who are your major competitors, and how do compare in terms of product, market share, marketing, and strengths and weaknesses?

2. Tell me about the history of growth of the company.

3. In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance and what has been the biggest setback?

4. What is your highest priority in the next six months, and how could someone like me help?

5. Tell me about a typical day.

6. Tell me about your training program.

7. What are the characteristics of your top people?

8. Where do you see your company going in the next five/ten years?

9. What are three main qualities you are looking for in a candidate?

10. How do you see me fitting in with your company?

11. If I were to ask your top rep what he/she likes most/least about the company, what type of responses would I get?
12. How do I compare with other qualified applicants?

13. Do you have any hesitations about me being successful with your company?

14. What does your interview process entail?

15. When is my next visit?

16. What are your personal satisfactions and disappointments since you have been with the firm?

17. What are the firm's overall strengths?

Also consider asking to meet a few current employees.

**KEY QUESTION YOU MAY CONSIDER ASKING AT THE TAIL END OF INTERVIEWS:**

"Now that you've had some time to talk with me about this position, what do you think are my strong points and where do you think I'm a little light?"

Why ask this? Most especially to hear them state their concerns and cite the negatives. Once they do this, you get a chance to overcome them on the spot. If you don't ask the question, you may never know what their concerns were.

**PHONE INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

Phone interviews are frequently a first step in the interviewing process. In these times of increased need for efficiency and time demands, companies often opt for an initial phone interview for screening of potential candidates. These phone conversations are, in most cases, your first contact with a company. Do not disregard the importance of this first impression.

Your interviewer will have a copy of your resume; have one in front of you as well. Have a pen and paper ready to take notes both on areas to which they are drawn and to jot down areas you want to emphasize. With your resume, have in front of you the job description. This gives you the ability to question the interviewer about specifics. “I see you are asking for xyz scripting…my experience with xyz for XYZ Company may be of value because…”.
Here are a few useful hints to help you through the process:

- Work with the company/interviewer to set up either a specific time or “window of time” for the call. This will allow you to be fully prepared and avoid situations where you are unable to conduct an effective interview.
- Make sure your phone is audible or in good working order. Avoid speaking on speaker on your cellular phone.
- Make sure family members/roommates know how to answer the phone and take messages in your absence. Reinforce how important their cooperation is to your search success.
- Be aware of any potential distractions, i.e.: radio, television, background conversations, etc.
- If you have the “call-waiting” feature on your phone, do not interrupt your conversation to answer a call. Should a call come through and there is a distinctive break in the conversation, either ignore it, or make light of the situation.
- If you have a bad connection and/or have difficulty hearing the other party, either have the person call you back, adjust the phone or ask them to speak louder.
- Be fully prepared with your notes with regard to: 1) the company, 2) the position, and 3) yourself (résumé). You then are able to come across as an organized and articulate interviewee.

Again, do not take this step in the interview process lightly. This is a great opportunity to sell yourself and to find out more about the position. Last, but certainly not least, the phone interview is the opportune time to set up your face-to-face meeting. DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR THE APPOINTMENT!!! Have your calendar at hand so you may suggest dates that would be convenient to interview.

**FOLLOW-UP E-MAIL (LETTER)**

A well-written, timely follow-up e-mail (or letter) can give a positive impression of the kind of employee you would be. It is an example of both your work habits and writing skills.

To gain full advantage of this opportunity, here are a few points to consider:

- Get the business card of the person with whom you interview, or if on the phone, ask for his/her email address. After the interview, make sure to send an email to this individual. You want the email to add value.
- Send the e-mail/letter as soon after the interview as possible. You can then convey a sense of urgency and importance to your candidacy.
- Be as brief as possible. You show respect for other’s time.
• The body of the letter should address four main points:
  o Thank them for their time
  o Express interest in and enthusiasm towards the company and position
  o Highlight experiences or accomplishments that amplify your qualifications
  o Ask for the next meeting to be set up.

The nature of the e-mail should depend on your level of interest in the position. If you left the interview quite sure that the company is not a good fit for you, a simple "thank you" to each interviewer for their time and information is sufficient. If you are excited about the company and want to maximize your chances of a job offer (or a further interview), a much more detailed e-mail is appropriate.

One, don’t just express thanks for the interview. One of your jobs during the interview is to find out the hiring authority’s hot buttons. Your follow up email explains how you can help solve those key issues, thus emphasizing why you're an outstanding candidate for the position. So plan on asking during the interview: “What are the three most pressing (top) issues (challenges) you need resolved?

The follow up email also allows you to do damage control. You can respond to a question that you did not, in hindsight, answer to the best of your ability. “Jim, I forgot to mention when you asked about my supervision experience that I led a four person team at…”

You can also take a pre-emptive position on an area in which you know you are a little light. You take the weapon out of the interviewer’s hand by acknowledging a weakness and how you will minimize it if hired.

The better e-mails are ones that might truly advance your candidacy. One final point here, you never know how many other people your email might be forward to... people whom you have not met. One indicator they can get of your ability to do the job is what is contained in the email, where you have cited how you can satisfy the top demands of the job.

Have someone proofread your letter before you send it. The following is an example of such a letter:

Date

Mr. John Smith
AAA Products
1234 South Street
Cincinnati, OH 452000-0000

Dear Mr. Smith:
I appreciate the time spent with you discussing AAA Products and the Accounting Manager Position. Thank you for the opportunity. I feel my qualifications, technical and personal, reflect those necessary to be successful in such a position.
At XYZ Corporation and with Jones and Associates, I successfully xxxxxx a state of the art accounting system on time and under budget, as well as managed a staff of accounting professionals and clerks. I am confident that I have the experience and drive to successfully manage your Accounting Department.

I am interested in the position of Accounting Manager of AAA Products. I look forward toward our next meeting to discuss this opportunity in more detail.

Sincerely,

**HOW TO HANDLE THE MONEY ISSUE**

The question of compensation can be very sensitive and often requires negotiations to reach a figure that is fair and acceptable to both the company and the individual. Some points to remember:

- Most companies want to make a fair offer. They want to bring new employees on board at a salary level that provides incentive to change jobs that also is consistent with the company’s existing salary structure for that position.

- All corporations are more conscious of maintaining consistency in existing salary structures, the economic growth in many industries has leveled off and the competition for better positions has increased. So be realistic in your expectations.

- The position and opportunity is the single most important element of your decision. No amount of money will make a bad job good. A quality position, working with quality people in a dynamic work environment offers rewards that money cannot buy.

- Be flexible. Compensation packages are a combination of salary, reviews, titles and perks. These elements can be arranged and rearranged - sometimes very creatively - to satisfy both the individual and the company.

- If you are asked what salary you are looking for, try to avoid quoting a specific figure. Try something like this: “I am very interested in working with you, and I feel I can make a meaningful contribution. I would hope that you would make me your very best offer.” It is best not to name a figure if at all possible.

- If you are asked again later in the process, you want to restate what you are earning and ask what the position will pay.