

INTERVIEWING

Congratulations! You have a job interview, which means you have the skills to do the job. Now it is a question of fit and presentation. The secret to effective interviewing is a sound presentation. Successful sales people sell their products through skilled presentations that are the result of in-depth preparation. Each job interview is different. Be sure to answer the questions with the job in mind, tailoring your answers to the employer's needs.

PREPARATION

Preparation begins with knowing yourself. Defining your functional skills, personal attributes, work values, and future goals brings focus to your presentation. If you don't know the product (yourself) well, selling its assets is difficult. Gather information about the prospective employer. Employers consider company research a reflection of your interest and enthusiasm, intelligence and commitment. In addition, this information helps you determine whether or not a particular company will meet your needs. Annual reports, press and media kits, company booklets, websites, professional and trade magazines, and corporate directories are resources that describe work environments, organizational philosophies, and financial productivity.

PRESENTING YOURSELF

The presentation you make to an employer tells much about your effectiveness on the job. Employers need employees who can quickly contribute value to the organization. The question interviewers are most anxious to know is, "Why should I hire you?"

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Interviewing is a game of sorts. Success is determined by how well you know the rules and how effectively you plan your strategies. Interviewers utilize several types of interviews. Knowing which type the interviewer is using will help you develop and plan a good strategy.

Screening Interview: May be conducted by a human resources professional or the hiring manager. Its purpose is to screen out inappropriate candidates.

Telephone Interview: This type of interview is used primarily to screen job candidates. Be thoroughly prepared. It is an opportunity to win an in-person interview.

Tips for the telephone interview:

- ✓ Speak loudly enough to be heard easily – Be in a quiet place where you can focus
- ✓ Use correct grammar and complete sentences – Avoid long pauses – Sound energetic and enthusiastic
- ✓ To ensure a good connection, do not use a cell phone

Non-directive Interview: The interviewer gives you the freedom to sell yourself in any way you deem appropriate with broad and general questions that allow you to elaborate on your qualifications.

Directive Interview: With a particular agenda in mind, the interviewer drives the interview in order to learn specific information. Follow the interviewer's lead, but sell your skills by bringing up questions such as, "Would you like to hear about my webpage design experience?"

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Behavior-based Interview: Characterized by the emphasis on success stories—examples of what you’ve done that support your claims—this type of interview is based on the belief that past behavior predicts future work performance. Candidates are asked how they have handled specific situations. When a question begins with “Describe a time when...” or “Give me an example ...,” you should recognize it as a behavior-based question.

INTERVIEW TIPS

- ✓ Arrive early and prepared – Deliver a firm handshake – Smile – Maintain eye contact
- ✓ Have your resume and supporting materials ready
- ✓ Use concrete positive examples to reflect your best skills and attributes
- ✓ Listen – Show enthusiasm – Speak clearly and slowly
- ✓ Keep hand gestures and body movement to a minimum but use enough to be expressive and engaging
- ✓ Follow the interviewer’s lead, but make sure you highlight all the information you feel is important
- ✓ Ask questions
- ✓ Wrap up when it’s clear the interview is ending – Ascertain needed follow-up action
- ✓ Thank the interviewer for the interview – Get a business card from each interviewer
- ✓ Relax

THE “TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF” QUESTION

A common opener, this broad question can throw many interviewees. It is in fact a “sell me” invitation. Develop a brief summary of your background in relationship to the job; emphasize your desire to work for the organization, as well as your qualifications for the position.

THE “WEAKNESS” QUESTION

Interviewers often ask about strengths and weaknesses. While strengths seem easy to express, weaknesses present more of a challenge. An effective way to answer this question is to think of a weakness you have overcome and share the process with the interviewer. “I used to be very shy and afraid to speak to groups of people. I decided that I needed to overcome my fear in order to pursue a career in XXXX. So if there was a choice between a paper and a presentation in class, I always chose the presentation.” In addition to having an example of something that you have overcome, also have an example of something you are working on just in case the interviewer asks.

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS YOU MAY BE ASKED

- ✓ Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
- ✓ What is the last book you read?
- ✓ Describe your most rewarding college experience.
- ✓ What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- ✓ Tell me what you know about our company.
- ✓ Why did you decide to apply for this job?
- ✓ What is important to you in a job?
- ✓ Give me an example of a difficult decision you have made.
- ✓ What are your long-range career goals? What are you doing to achieve them?
- ✓ Explain a work situation where you were under a lot of pressure and how you handled it.
- ✓ What do you anticipate might be your greatest problem with this job?

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- ✓ What are your greatest strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- ✓ How will you be successful in...?
- ✓ What is your most memorable accomplishment?
- ✓ Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- ✓ How are you qualified for this job?
- ✓ Why should we hire you?

QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

- ✓ What are the challenging aspects of the position?
- ✓ How would you describe the atmosphere here?
- ✓ What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
- ✓ To whom would I report? What is his/her supervisory style?
- ✓ Can you describe typical first-year assignments on the job?
- ✓ How and when will my performance be evaluated on this job?

THE SALARY QUESTION

- ✓ Postpone salary discussions until you are offered a particular position, or until an offer seems likely.
- ✓ Research so you know your worth and the value of the job in the marketplace and geographic location.
- ✓ Rehearse selling your skills at the right price. When it comes time to discussing salary, you can't be sure that the company's first offer is the best offer unless you ask. Ask some questions on benefits, vacation, stock options, etc before zeroing in on salary. This will give you a better perspective on your entire package. Then, explain your knowledge of market value and reiterate your skills and contributions that add value to the employer. You might then ask, "Is there any flexibility in the salary portion of the offer?"

Tips:

- ✓ Use real life issues, rather than tactics that come across as simply "I want more."
- ✓ If you freelance or do temporary contracts, you should be able to articulate your rate.
- ✓ Look for a "win-win" situation. Remember that the offer negotiation may be one of the first steps in developing a relationship with a new employer.
- ✓ Be realistic. Most entry-level jobs do not have much room for negotiation.
- ✓ Know your needs. What do you realistically need in order to live comfortably?
- ✓ Relax and remember that you are having a conversation, not a battle.

FOLLOW-UP

By the end of the interview, you should know what happens next. For example, know the organization's timetable for hiring, and know whether you are expected to send further material, such as references, to the employer. If the interviewer doesn't communicate this information, ask directly. Close the interview by expressing interest in the job. Get a business card. Send a thank you note within 48 hours to everyone you interviewed with to strengthen the good impression you made in the interview. Take the opportunity to highlight your interest and qualifications, and expand briefly on any interesting topic that was discussed during the interview.