

Interviewing with Confidence

Much has been written and speculated about the job interview process; it still remains as the basic communication link between the job seeker and the employer. Most decisions to hire an applicant rest upon an interview, even if it is only by phone.

In today's job market, securing a job is highly competitive. Employers seek the best-qualified candidates for their limited number of openings. But being well qualified is not enough. One must also have the skill to communicate that fact effectively to the employer. Unfortunately, these two qualities do not automatically go hand in hand.

The job interview is the means by which you, the job applicant, and the employer come together to discuss mutual concerns. It is usually the first time you have come into direct contact with each other. Hence, it is a most critical time and should be the focal point of your job search; there is "no tomorrow." Either you will convince the employer that you have all the qualifications required of the job and are the best selection he can make, or you do not. All your efforts in resume writing, research, and job search strategy are directed towards obtaining an interview in an organization.

Think of the interview as a two-sided, mutual exploration, to determine if a good match is possible. The interviewer will use the interview to gather job-related information about you, evaluate your skills and qualifications in line with a particular position or training program, and observe the way you conduct yourself in a business situation. You need to use the interview to evaluate the company, its management philosophy, work environment, growth opportunities, etc.

If you are like most people you will be nervous during the interview. You may assume the interviewer, under pressure to find the right person, will be a bit nervous as well. Channel your nervous energy in a positive way. Use it to be energetic, enthusiastic, and alert.

Preparing for a Job Interview

1. The key to a successful job interview is a sound presentation. Think of a political or marketing campaign that you remember and how the person or product was able to stick to their message while addressing the platform issues. Begin with yourself by completing a self-assessment.

Analyze your:

- Strengths
- Weaknesses
- Academic Performance
- Career Interests
- Personal Goals
- Work Experiences
- Special Skills

2. Be prepared to present your qualifications in an organized, logical and convincing manner. Know how your qualifications can be of benefit to the employer.

3. Keep in mind that interviewers (recruiters) have been trained to ask questions designed to reveal your strong and weak points. If you do a self-assessment, you will be prepared for the questions the interviewer will ask and better able to direct him toward your strengths rather than your weaknesses.

4. Be prepared to tell an employer why he should hire you. With many applicants for the same job, the pressure is on you to convince the interviewer that of all those interviewed you are one of the best candidates. If you are not prepared to tell the employer why he should hire you, then do not expect to be hired.

5. The two cardinal rules dealing with interview preparation are to **be prepared** and **be positive about yourself**.

6. To meet these two basic rules, you should know what you want to accomplish, know all that you can know about the employer, and know job interview procedures. Later sections of this document address these criteria in detail.

7. An aspect of preparation for the interview, which is often overlooked, is the psychological. It is important to go into an interview with a positive, confident attitude. A negative, defeatist, self-conscious approach will tell an employer more about you than the questions and answers of the interview themselves. An employer will wonder what you have to offer to an organization if you do not state boldly what you have to offer. The following are some points to consider in developing a positive approach to the interview:

- Be concerned with what is happening in the interview rather than with how nervous you feel. Interviewers expect you to be a little nervous, but they also expect you to relax as the interview progresses.
- Assume that you probably look more confident and composed to the interviewer than you feel.
- Consider the interview as an employer's attempt to find the best person for the job rather than an attempt to eliminate you.
- Emphasize positive information and accomplishments in the interview. Answer questions honestly and openly, but do not volunteer negative information about yourself.
- Try to anticipate the questions an interviewer might ask. Put yourself in the interviewer's position and ask yourself what you would want to know about a potential employee for the particular position for which you are being interviewed.

Do your Homework!

Preparation for a job interview should involve finding out **as much as possible** about the employer. Researching a company and particular career field is essential for an effective interview. You do not have to know everything about the firm, but you should have enough information to carry on an intelligent conversation. Otherwise, it may cause the interviewer to wonder about your initiative or sincerity in considering the firm for employment. Know services, types of jobs available, training programs, and business locations. Read the employer brochures, annual reports, and evaluations of the firm. Investigate job trends and business forecasts for the firm and its industry.

Not knowing about the organization you want to work for is a common mistake. It is to your advantage to know as much as possible about the organization before your interview. You should know the employer's:

- History
- Products or services
- Business methods
- Philosophy
- Reputation
- Locations
- Standing in the industry or field
- Competitors
- Organizational structure

Knowledgeable answers to questions about the organization will show an employer that you are interested in the organization rather than giving the impression that you are 'shopping around' or that your attitude is "well, here I am; what can you do for me?" You will stand out by being better informed.

During the Interview

The purpose of the interview is to exchange information, between you and the interviewer, so that a preliminary decision can be made as to whether you are among the persons best qualified for the job. This decision probably hinges on what you say and how you act within the relatively short timeframe of the interview. With this in mind, some good advice to remember is:

1. First impressions are important; arrive on time. Bring a copy of your resume just in case the interviewer did not receive one. Be certain that you know the interviewer's name and pronunciation. Be alert, friendly and courteous, but not casual. It pays to look and act confident. Upon meeting the interviewer, be a smiling person and show an interest in what he or she is saying. Smile periodically. At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer, for considering your candidacy; repeat his/her name as you shake hands. Leave your interview as gracefully as you entered.
2. Act natural and be yourself; do not try to "role play." Do not enter an interview using a fabricated personality. Unless you have had formal training, you probably cannot role-play well enough to fool an interviewer. If you portray yourself as someone other than who you are, you may find yourself in a job situation that is wrong for you.
3. Attitude is a major factor; be pleasant and easy to talk to. Do not be afraid to tell an interviewer about yourself. Show enthusiasm and interest. If all applicants' qualifications are equal, the applicant who seems interested and enthusiastic about the job is the one who will be selected for the job. A "Yes" or "No" is normally an inadequate answer to a question. Take the opportunity to tell the interviewer about your goals and strong points. Perhaps an important attribute will come out that you had not previously considered.
4. Be completely honest. Misrepresentations are usually attempts to hide some problem that might get in the way later. It is better to deal with a potential problem immediately, in a straightforward manner, than to have it become a major issue later in the interview and perhaps result in making your entire interview suspect. If you are unable to answer a question, say so: do not bluff.

5. Give attention to your personal grooming; there is no substitute for neatness. Conservative dress is your best guide. Dress in a professional manner; both men and women should wear a suit. If you have a question about appropriate attire, please contact Career Services
6. Be aware of the importance of your external behavior and appearance. Such factors as eye contact, posture, composure, ability to listen, high level of confidence, friendliness, and genuineness have significant impact on the interviewer.
7. Your objective is to get a job offer. During the entire job interview, always keep this primary objective in your mind. If you are qualified for the job and you feel you can handle it, say so. Modest self-confidence is rewarded initially by added employer confidence in you

Top 20 Skills/Qualities Employers Seek

According to yearly NACE Research these are the top qualities employers are looking for in new hires:

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Communication Skills | 11. Detail-Oriented |
| 2. Strong Work Ethic | 12. Organizational Skills |
| 3. Teamwork Skills (works well with others) | 13. Leadership Skills |
| 4. Initiative | 14. Self-Confidence |
| 5. Interpersonal Skills | 15. Friendly/Outgoing Personality |
| 6. Problem Solving Skills | 16. Tactfulness |
| 7. Analytical Skills | 17. Creativity |
| 8. Flexibility/Adaptability | 18. Strategic Planning Skills |
| 9. Computer Skills | 19. Entrepreneurial Skills/Risk Taker |
| 10. Technical Skills | 20. Sense of Humor |

Take the time to reflect on this list. Which of these Skills/Qualities do you possess? How will you present these strengths to potential employers? Think of actual situations where you have demonstrated these skills in an internship, summer job, class project, leadership role, etc. and be prepared to give specific examples.

Parts of the Interview

To some extent, the format of an interview is the creation of the interviewer. No two interviews are the same. Individual personalities are bound to influence the conduct of an interview. Also, since there is a great deal of mutuality in an interview, you may directly (or indirectly) influence the course of an interview.

In spite of these influences, the basic structure of a job interview is quite standard. A typical interview has five parts:

Introduction - Establish rapport

Background - All about you

Discussion - Matching needs -- Yours and the employer's

Your Questions – Demonstrating your knowledge and genuine interest in the company

Close - Final questions and instructions

Introduction

Here the interviewer notes his/her first impression of you and makes initial judgments on your:

- Appearance
- Manner
- Energy
- Enthusiasm and responsiveness

Background

Here the interviewer determines your basic qualifications for the job. He/she will be trying to determine whether you meet or exceed the company's requirements. While you are listening and responding to questions by the interviewer, he/she will be noting how you handle yourself, evaluating your qualifications and suitability for employment, and revising (or confirming) the initial judgment made of you during the introduction.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What is your greatest strength?
- What is your biggest weakness?
- Who or what has had the greatest influence on the development of your career interests?
- What factors did you consider in choosing your major?
- Why are you interested in our organization?

- What goals have you set for yourself? How are you planning to achieve them?
- What two or three things are most important to you in a position?
- What kind of work do you want to do?
- Tell me about a project you initiated.
- What are your expectations of your future employer?
- What is your GPA? How do you feel about it? Does it reflect your ability?
- How do you solve conflicts?
- Tell me what you perceive your strengths to be. Your weaknesses? How do you evaluate yourself?
- What work experience has been the most valuable to you and why?
- What was the most useful criticism you ever received, and who was it from?
- Give an example of a problem you have solved and the process you used.
- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrated your analytical skills.
- What has been your greatest challenge?
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it.
- What were the biggest challenges you have encountered in college? How have you handled them?
- Describe your leadership style.
- What interests or concerns do you have about the position or company?
- What was your greatest challenge in a particular leadership role that you had?
- What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
- What characteristics do you think are important for this position?
- How have your educational and work experiences prepared you for this position?
- Take me through a project where you demonstrated _____ skills.
- How do you think you have changed personally since you started college?
- Tell me about a team project of which you are particularly proud and your contribution to it.
- How do you motivate people?
- Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you did? What did you gain? What did you contribute?
- What types of situations put you under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- Tell me about a difficult decision you have made.
- Give an example of a situation in which you failed, and how you handled it.
- Tell me about a situation when you had to persuade another person to your point of view.
- What frustrates you the most?
- Knowing what you know now about your college experience, would you make the same decisions?
- What can you contribute to the company?
- How would you react to having your credibility questioned?
- What characteristics are most important in a good manager? How have you displayed any of these characteristics?
- What challenges are you looking for in a position?
- Are you willing to relocate or travel as part of your career?
- What two or three of your accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- Describe a leadership role of yours and tell why you committed your time to it.
- How are you conducting your job search, and how will you make your decision?
- What is the most important lesson you have learned in or out of school?
- Describe a situation where you had to work with someone who was difficult. How was the person difficult, and how did you handle it?
- We are looking at a lot of good candidates; why are you the best person for this position?
- How would your friends describe you?
- What else should I know about you?

Discussion

The discussion is a critical part of any interview. In it the interviewer tries to match your qualifications and career interests with the job opportunities available in the company.

Having read the company literature and performed other research on the company and the type of jobs you qualify for and are interested in, you should now be able to enter into a constructive dialogue as to how you can fit into (and be profitable to) the employer's needs. Sell your product -- yourself. It is here that you have the opportunity to ask questions covering new and previously discussed information.

Finally, if comments on salary are to be included in the interview, it will generally be mentioned during the discussion phase. Let the interviewer mention salary first. For more information about salary negotiations and for salary information,

go to the following web site: www.salary.com. This discussion period also gives you a chance to point out important qualifications that the employer may have left out or passed over lightly. Do not be afraid to point mention them. You may not get another chance.

Your Questions

Be prepared to ask questions at the end of your interview. Being unprepared to ask questions shows a lack of interest and enthusiasm for the job and company you are applying to. This is also your opportunity to interview the interviewers to determine your own fit for the position. Your questions can be related to the job, the company or the industry, but make sure you have done your homework. Researching the company ahead of time can help you develop questions and avoid asking questions to which the answers are easily accessible on the company website or other company literature. Here are a few sample questions you may wish to ask your interviewer

- How would you describe the corporate culture?
- What do you like best about the company/organization environment?
- What types of people seem to do well in this department/organization?
- Why is this position available?
- How many people have held this position in the last three years? (If it seems like there has been high turnover, ask for an explanation)
- Does this organization encourage personal and professional growth? How?
- What are the opportunities you see for this department/organization in the next year?
- What new tasks or responsibilities do you see someone in this position taking on?
- What type of supervision would I receive in this position?
- How did you start with the company/organization?
- What do you like about working for this organization? How would you compare it to others you have worked for?
- What are the greatest strengths of this company?
- What would you change about this organization if you could?
- How well do departments interact with each other?
- Will the company continue to be competitive? How?
- Is your organization quick or slow to adopt new technology?
- What type of growth do you foresee in the next five years? Why?
- Where in the company do you hope to be in five years? (A good way to sense potential growth.)

Close

This is the interview wrap-up. If the interviewer is excited about you, you might get a last minute "selling job" on the company. Also, any final questions you might have will be answered. Most likely you will be given instructions (or be told) about what will happen next, such as:

- When you will receive a decision
- Being requested to fill out a job application form
- Being invited for a company visit
- Suggesting another meeting
- Expressing no further interest
- Providing other information dictated by company policy

After the Interview

Be sure to obtain the correct spelling of the interviewer's name and address before you leave the office. ***Your interview is not complete until you follow-up with a personal thank-you note in which you also reaffirm your interest in the position sought.*** You should mention the interviewer's name, the time and date of the original interview, plus any important points discussed.

The employer should let you know the next step in the employment process and when you can expect to hear from him/her. If the end of the initial interview does not provide this information, you should assume the responsibility of asking when you can expect an answer as to your employment status.

If you have not heard from the employer when he/she said you would, it is your responsibility to follow up, either by phone or mail, asking for your status in regard to the job selection process. You should be polite and factual; avoid being pushy or accusing.

10 Biggest Interview Killers

By Joe Turner

Here are 10 of the most common "advantage killers" and how you can steer clear of them during your next job interview.

- 1. Not knowing your aim.** Too often candidates think their purpose in an interview is simply to ask for a job. Your goals are to demonstrate how you are a good fit for the organization, and to assess whether the job is really right for you.
- 2. Being too needy.** Neediness is probably the No. 1 advantage-killer in an interview. Remind yourself before walking in the door: you do not need this job. You do need food, you do need air, and you do need water. Keep things in perspective.
- 3. Lousy nonverbal communication.** This is about demonstrating confidence. Your first impression makes the difference. When you enter the interview room, stand up straight, make eye contact, and offer a strong handshake with your interviewer. If necessary, jot their name on your notepad as soon as you seat yourself. Do the same for any other individual you are meeting with.
- 4. Compromising your position.** You should always participate in the interview as an equal, not a subordinate, of the person conducting the interview. Often this is a subtle matter of self-perception, so remind yourself before the interview.
- 5. Falling into the answers-only rut.** An interview is a conversation. Don't just answer their questions. That's why you've prepared stories to highlight your accomplishments, which will be your moments to shine. When you do answer any questions, make sure that you answer immediately and follow up with a question of your own, if at all possible.
- 6. Rambling.** Telling your interviewer more than they need to know could be fatal. Your stories should be 60 to 90 seconds long and they should have a relevant point. Focus, focus, focus. Stick with your rehearsed stories, your research, and the questions you need to ask. Don't fill up the silence with unnecessary talk.
- 7. Being overly familiar.** A good interviewer will be skilled enough to put you at ease within the first 10 minutes of the interview. That doesn't mean that they have become your best friend. Don't let your guard down. You're there to interview them and get answers to your questions. Treat this from start to finish as the professional business meeting that it is.
- 8. Making incorrect assumptions.** Points are not deducted at the interview for asking questions when you don't understand something. Don't guess at what your interviewer means. Effective interviewing is all about collecting information in real time, taking good notes, and responding only to the actual facts you've collected. If you find yourself making assumptions or guessing about something that was said, stop and ask for clarification before you answer.
- 9. Getting emotional.** At times the interviewer may hit a nerve or consciously try to provoke you into an "outburst." Don't fall for it. Clear your mind of any fears or expectations, so you can maintain a calm, open-minded perspective at all times. When emotions enter into an interview, failure follows.
- 10. Not asking good questions.** You want to find out more about what this job is really about and whether you want it. Arrive with a list of several prepared questions about the company, the position, and the people who work there. Ask questions that begin with "what," "how," and "why." Avoid simple yes/no questions. Get your interviewer talking as much as possible, then take notes. Most interviewers are unimpressed by someone who has no questions.

As a recruiter, Joe Turner has spent the past 15 years finding and placing top candidates in some of the best jobs of their careers. Discover more of his job-search insights by visiting www.jobchangesecrets.com.