

PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

In any job market, many well-qualified candidates are competing for a single position. Your goal is to stand out among the rest as the best person for the position. While your resume will help you obtain the interview, the interview itself will determine whether you receive an offer of employment. Those who are well prepared for an interview will achieve their goals. Investing the time and energy necessary to prepare will make the difference in your interview success. The following tips will help you in preparing for your next interview.

⇒ Show up prepared

Review the job description and check out the company's web site.

If you can...try to arrive a bit early—no more than 10 to 15 minutes.

The company may have you fill out an application. Some companies do. If they do...try to fill it out completely. Leave "expected salary" as negotiable.

Always bring several copies of your resume to the interview. Even though you may have emailed or sent in a copy of your resume prior to obtaining an interview, you should always be prepared with copies to provide to the interviewer. Make certain that your contact information is easily identifiable on your resume! You may have the opportunity to meet with the hiring manager or other team members and should offer a resume to each person interviewing you. Bring a portfolio with a notepad so you can take notes during the interview. You should also bring a list of references should they be requested.

⇒ Chemistry

The first few minutes of the interview can be the most important. It sets the tone for the rest of the conversation. Try to set a positive tone right from the start.

The success of any job interview will depend on your ability to discern the employer's needs and empathize with the interviewer. Ask questions that verify your understanding of what the interviewer says to you, without expressing an opinion.

Besides empathy, there are four other requirements for a successful interview:

- **Enthusiasm** - Leave no doubt as to your interest in the job. Given a two-way tie, employers often choose the more enthusiastic candidate.
- **Technical Interest** - Since employers look for people who love what they do, show your excitement for the nitty-gritty of the job.
- **Confidence** - Nobody likes a braggart, but the candidate who's sure of his or her abilities will certainly be more favorably received.
- **Intensity** - The last thing you want to do is come across "flat" in your interview. There's nothing wrong with being inherently laid back, but sleepwalkers rarely get employers excited. On the other hand, don't talk too much.

Since interviewing involves the exchange of information, present your background in a thorough and accurate manner. Practice your delivery. If you can, early in the interview, try to maneuver yourself into learning what the company and the interviewer are looking for: What kind of person are they seeking? What are the most important personal qualities and characteristics? What are the major responsibilities? What are the major problems and challenges of the job? Which challenges are immediate? Your conversation with the interviewer should naturally spawn a number of these questions. Make sure however, that you touch on the following areas, gathering data, then linking your abilities with what you believe are the company's needs:

- **Company** - the organization, direction, stability, growth, market share, new products or

services.

- **Industry** - the health, growth, change, technological advancement and personnel of the industry as a whole.
- **Position** - the scope, responsibilities, travel and reporting structure.
- **Opportunity** - your potential for growth or advancement within the company and its divisions, and the likely timetable for promotion. Your goal should be to build a strong case for why the company should hire you, based on the discoveries you make from building a rapport with the interviewer and asking the right questions.

⇒ The Essentials

Gather as much information about the company as you can. Make sure you know something about each of the following company categories:

- o **Personnel** - who are the major players, who was recently hired or let go (use LinkedIn to source this information).
- o **Structure** - what products or services, what are the various divisions, public or private.
- o **Vital signs** - how the company is doing financially, takeover or merger candidate, how the stock is faring.

⇒ The Questions

Review these questions before your interview and be prepared to answer them:

- What has been the single most important event of your career?
- Describe two major accomplishments.
- What types of individuals are difficult for you to get along with?
- Tell me about your last company.
- Tell me about yourself.
- What makes you think you are ready for more responsibility?
- What is the most important aspect about your current job?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- Where do you see yourself five years from now?
- Give me an example of how you make decisions.
- What jobs have you liked the most? The least?
- What do you know about this job or company?
- What interests you most about this job?
- What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
- Have you ever fired anyone? Why?
- How have you contributed to your company's bottom line?
- Why do you want to work for our company?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What are you doing to overcome or compensate for your weaknesses?

⇒ The Real Questions

Interviewers ask a lot of questions and can phrase them in many ways. But they all boil down to these basic five:

- o "Why are you here?" They are wondering why you picked their company to seek employment.
- o "What can you do for us?" They are asking if you can do the job. Do you have the skill and knowledge? Can you handle the pressure?
- o "What kind of person are you?" They are wondering if you will complement or disrupt the department. Are you manageable?
- o Assuming you can do the job, "what distinguishes you from the other twenty-five people who can also do the job?"

- o "Can we afford you?"

⇒ Compensation and Benefits

Salary discussions can be tricky. Simplify the process by letting the interviewer do most of the talking. DO NOT bring up the topic of salary or benefits. When asked, tell the interviewer your current or last salary. Simply state it and be quiet. Add nothing. When asked, tell the interviewer "If you feel like I'm a good fit for your company, I'm sure you will extend me a fair offer." Should the interviewer continue to ask for your desired compensation level, tell the interviewer you are interested in the total package and future opportunity, of which salary is only a part.

I would have to understand all the possibilities for rewards in your company: Are there bonuses or incentives? Is there opportunity for growth and promotion? What are the benefits? Is there a matching program for 401(K) plan? I look for a lot in addition to salary. What is the salary range for this position and what about any other types of compensation?

⇒ Fatal Mistakes

- Attempting to interview without preparation.
- Not preparing 8 - 10 solid questions on the position and company that cannot be answered on their web site or other print materials.
- Failing to listen to a question.
- Answering a question that was not asked.
- Providing superfluous information.
- Answering a question, when you don't know the answer.
- Bad-mouthing any employer.

⇒ The Finish and Follow Up

Thank the interviewer for his time and the opportunity to learn more about the company and the position. Tell the interviewer you are very interested in the career opportunity and are ready for the next step. Ask for the next interview. Send a follow-up email as soon as possible (within 24 hours).

⇒ Always Remember

- Make certain you understand whom you are meeting with ahead of time.
- Ask the interviewer if you can take notes during the interview.
- The more conservative dress and appearance, the better.
- Firm handshake. One shake is enough.
- Sit when offered a seat. Do not slouch, of course, but a slight lean forward will show interest and friendliness.
- Do not discuss politics, religion or sex.
- Walk tall and with confidence. Don't look back.
- Keep your answers concise and to the point.
- Maintain eye contact no less than 90% of the time.
- Remember names. Use first names occasionally during the interview if it fits the situation and your style.
- As long as your questions are relevant and important, and cannot reasonably be answered elsewhere, do not be afraid that you are taking up too much time. The interviewer will most likely appreciate your thoroughness.
- Never smoke even if offered.
- Do not drink unless absolutely necessary.