

# THE INTERVIEW

## Objective of the Interview

An interviewer has just one objective: to decide whether or not to make you a job offer. While the interviewer will examine your work history and educational background, your strengths and accomplishments will also be important criterion. He or she is also interested in evaluating your level of motivation, values, attitude and personality. In other words, to find out if you're the right person for the job, what your potential is for promotion and whether or not you will fit into the company environment.

While it's true that an interview is an important screening tool for companies, it also allows you to learn those things you need to know about the position and the company so that you can make an intelligent decision about the job. Always approach an interview focused on your objective: getting a job offer.

As with many situations, preparation is the key to success. The job market is very competitive and you probably will not be the only qualified candidate for a position. The deciding factor may simply be the way you present your skills and qualifications relevant to the position and how well you conduct yourself during the interview.

This information has been made available for your use by your executive recruiter. It will help you prepare for and succeed at the interview. Take the time to review the material. The tips and techniques outlined herein have been tested, and they work! They will improve your chances of receiving a job offer. Should you have any questions about your upcoming interview, the company, the opportunity, or the suggestions, consult your Executive Recruiter.

## Overview: Preparation

### I. Know Yourself

- Can you *honestly* visualize resigning from your current position?  
(See *Dealing With Counteroffers*)
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What are your short and long-term goals?
- Evaluate yourself in terms of the position you seek.
- Formulate responses by asking the question: "Why should they hire me?"
- Remember that you're there to sell yourself and secure a job offer.

## **II. Research the Company**

- Utilize the library to review annual reports, trade magazines and newspaper articles.
- The Internet offers a wealth of company information and industry statistics.
- Know the company's products and services.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is attractive to you.

## **III. Items to Bring to the Interview**

### **References**

- Use three former supervisors who are familiar with your work.
- Include their name and company as well as home and work phone numbers.
- Always consult with references for their approval and to ensure that their remarks are positive.

### **Resume**

- Review your resume thoroughly and be prepared to discuss all points.
- Always bring a resume copy identical to the one supplied to the interviewer.
- Bring along samples of your work, if possible. Never discuss or show proprietary information.

### **Other Items**

- Bring a folder and pen to the interview to jot down notes.
- Prepare and review your questions as well as specific responses.
- Bring directions to the interview location as well as the interviewer's phone number in case you're running late.
- Bring along your recruiter's phone number to give immediate feedback after the interview.

## **IV. Arrival at the Interview**

- Arrive no earlier than fifteen minutes before the interview (but no later than five minutes prior to the interview).
- Allow adequate time for traffic, parking and a last minute appearance check. If possible, scout out the location the day before the interview to avoid last minute problems.
- Review your notes and go in with confidence.
- If asked, complete an application. Complete the application in full and leave no blanks. Do not write "see resume" as a response to any application question. Respond to "expected salary" questions as "open" and "current salary" questions truthfully. List references if requested. Your recruiter's name should be your response to any "referred by" questions.

## **Appearance: Men**

### **Male Candidates**

- Fingernails should be short and clean; manicured if possible.
- Hair should be clean, well groomed and freshly trimmed. Use a dandruff shampoo, if necessary, and always comb hair with your jacket off.
- A navy blue or dark gray suit is appropriate for most positions. Be sure it's cleaned and pressed. Men with stout builds should avoid three-piece suits.
- Shirts should be white, freshly laundered and well pressed.
- A quiet tie with a subtle design and a hint of red is suitable for a first interview. Avoid loud colors and busy designs.
- Jewelry should be kept minimal. A watch and wedding or class ring are acceptable. Don't wear jewelry or pins that indicate membership in religious or service organizations. Use deodorant and avoid colognes or fragrances completely.
- Shoes that are black and freshly polished (including the heels) are a safe choice for an interview. Socks should be black or blue and worn over the calf.
- For good posture cross legs at the ankles, not at the knees.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Do not take portable phones or beepers into an interview.

## **Appearance: Women**

### **Female Candidates**

- Fingernails should be clean; manicured if possible. Choose subtle low-key colors over bright fashion colors for nail polishes.
- Wear a suit or tailored dress in basic navy or gray. Blouses should also be tailored and color coordinated. Don't wear big bows or ties.
- Avoid exotic hairstyles and excessive makeup. Hair should be neat, clean and brushed with your jacket off. Makeup should be light and natural looking.
- Use deodorant and avoid colognes or fragrances.
- Jewelry should be limited and subtle. Don't wear jewelry or pins that indicate membership in religious or service organizations.
- A closed toe pump that is color coordinated with your outfit is appropriate for an interview. Avoid open-toed shoes or sling-backs.
- For good posture cross legs at the ankles, not at the knees.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- Do not take portable phones or beepers into an interview.

## **The Interview Itself**

A typical sequence of events are:

- Interview with personnel (general questions, review of the company and their benefits.)
- Interview with the immediate supervisor and peers.
- Interview with the hiring authority (manager, etc.).
- Shake hands firmly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Maintain a high energy level. Sit up with back straight. No coffee (to spill) and no smoking.
- It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises, but do not fake your knowledge. Be yourself. Poise, confidence, and self-respect are of great importance.

If there is interest on both parties:

- Testing (physical drug test, written test, and proof of employment eligibility).
- Offer.

Personnel will usually provide company information and available benefits. Thorough review and questions concerning benefits should be addressed after the interview. Remember, the interviewers are trying to see how you can contribute to the company.

Conduct yourself with confidence and determination to get the job. You have other options, of course, and your interviewer knows this, but wants to think that you want a job with this company. Don't play coy. Sell yourself. This is your first meeting and the position, as well as future promotions, may depend on your presentation. Are you going to sell them on the idea of hiring you, or will they sell you on the idea that this job is not for you? You must present a positive attitude to the prospective employer. You must NOT seem disinterested or appear to be job shopping.

## **Interview Questions**

The interview should be a two-way conversation. Ask questions of the interviewers. This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision afterwards. The questions you have prepared can be asked to the different people you see.

Remember, the objective of the interview is to obtain an offer. During the interview, you must gather enough information concerning the position to make a decision.

## **Typical Interview Questions and Responses**

You should give complete but brief and relaxed answers to questions. When possible use questions as a basis for developing information that you want to make sure is presented. Continue to sell yourself in a positive way.

- Describe jobs in terms of duties and give indicators of good performance such as raises, sales volume, and promotions.
- Include short stories involving problems or challenges and how you were able to solve or overcome them. Describe the results you achieved.

### **A. Exploring your Background Questions**

#### **Tell me about yourself.**

- Answer these questions in terms of the qualifications required of the position.
- Keep responses concise and brief and avoid being derogatory or negative about previous jobs and bosses.
- "Tell-me-about-yourself" means, "Tell me about your qualifications." Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications. Start with education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.)

#### **What are your greatest strengths?**

Interviewers like to hear abstract qualities. Loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, fast-learner, technical skills, politeness, and promptness, expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid the simple generalization "I like people." It's not a good answer.

#### **What are your greatest weaknesses?**

Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state "not being able to go to work on Mondays", or "coming in late", etc.). Present your weaknesses as professional strengths, (i.e., "Sometimes work too hard to make sure things are done accurately").

### **B. Personality Questions**

#### **What do you do in your spare time?**

Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Your answer gives you dimension. Name some hobbies.

### **C. Motive Questions**

Answer motive questions enthusiastically. Show the interviewer that you are interested in the position and that you really want the job. Remember to maintain eye contact and be sincere.

**How can you contribute to this company?**

Be positive and sell! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

**Why should I hire you for this position?**

Explain your qualifications and how they "fit" the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it's work that you enjoy. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

**Why do you want to work for our firm?**

Make a compliment about what the company does, its location, or its people. Other positive remarks might be about the company's product or service, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement. Research about the company is important here.

**Where do you hope to be in five years?**

Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years, and that their investment in you will pay. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you'll be more successful than they are. But do show a strong desire for promotions.

**What interests you most about this position?**

Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one or two-word answer such as, "the challenge" or "the opportunity", will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

**How long do you plan to be with this company?**

As with marriage, most employers expect a til-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field", is a reasonable response.

**What are your career goals?**

Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:

- Short term – "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
- Long term – "After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

**What are you doing to achieve your goals?**

"I look at continued learning as the key to success. I continue my education, as you see from my resume, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organizations in my field."

## **D. Job Satisfaction Questions**

### **Why did you leave your previous employer?**

NEVER speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

### **What did you like *most* about your previous job?**

### **What did you like *least* about your previous job?**

An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

### **Why are you looking for another job?**

Again, be positive. I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at \_\_\_\_\_ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth and recognition. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions and advance my career.

### **What do you think your employer's obligations are to you?**

- Interviewers listen for employees who want a positive, enthusiastic, company atmosphere with the opportunity to advance. Such a person, they surmise, has motivation and staying power. Are you applying for any other jobs?
- In your answer, show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective. Make it known that your talents are applicable to other businesses and that you have explored ways to maximize your potential and are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don't give an indication that you are just shopping.

## **E. Past Performance Questions**

(To determine behavior based on past examples.)

### **What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?**

Again, be truthful and admit not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit so as not to instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

### **What causes you to lose your temper?**

Everybody has a low boiling point on some particular issue. Pick one of yours; something safe and reasonable. People who are late to meetings, blame shifting, broken appointments and office "backstabbing" are suitable responses. Don't say that you never fly off the handle. You won't be believed.

**What are your greatest accomplishments?**

Be ready to recant one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

**How do you feel about a younger, male/female boss?**

A question like this usually means that your boss will either be younger or of the opposite sex or both. Be certain that if you register any concern, you will probably not be hired. Explain that their age or sex is of no importance to you. You are only interested in their capability and what you can learn from them.

**What kind of worker are you?**

Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

**F. Salary Questions**

Salary discussions should be avoided, if possible.

**What type of salary do you have in mind?**

Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer."

**What is your current salary?**

Answer truthfully. Remember that "salary" includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits, and vacations as well as sick days and personal days. Also, if you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

**G. Other questions you should be prepared to answer truthfully:**

- Are you willing to relocate?
- May we check your references?
- May we verify your income?

Answer a question to the best of your ability and then relax. If there is a period of silence before the interviewer asks the next question, stay calm. Interviewers often use silence to see if you can handle stress and maintain poise.



## Questions for You to Ask

Your interviews, however, should be a two-way conversation. You must ask questions and take an active role in the interview. This demonstrates the importance you place on your work and career. Asking questions gives you a chance to demonstrate your depth of knowledge in the field as well as to establish an easy flow of conversation and relaxed atmosphere between you and the interviewer. Building this kind of rapport is always a plus in a interview. Remember, you are not just there for the interviewer to determine if you are right for the position but your questions can help you determine if this job is right for you. Some of your questions should evolve from research you've done on the company in preparing for the interview. Following are some guidelines for your questions as well as some examples.

- Don't cross-examine the employer.
- Ask questions requiring an explanation. Questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.
- Don't interrupt when the employer is answering YOUR question.
- Ask job-relevant questions. Focus on the job – the company, products, services, people.
- Prior to the interview, write your list of Interest Questions and take them with you.
- Ask about your potential peers, subordinates, and superiors. Take notes.
- Ask the employer how he/she got where they are today.

### A. Interest Questions

#### **Why do you want someone for this job?**

Force the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by one of his current employees. The answer may give you a valuable job description.

### B. Job Satisfaction Questions

Ask questions that relate to the responsibilities, importance, and authority of the position as well as those investigating the rewards for a job well done and the long-range career opportunities.

### C. Past Performance Questions

#### **Why isn't this position being filled from within the company?**

You may discover that nobody in this organization would accept it or that your future fellow employees are a weak lot.

#### **How many people have held this job in the last five years?**

Were they promoted or did they leave the company?

If the turnover has been high, you have a right to suspect that the job may leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you can expect to be promoted quickly.

### **How did you get started in the company?**

A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

### **What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?**

Here you may discover you are overqualified or in a position to ask for considerably more money.

## **D. Additional Questions**

- What would my responsibilities and duties be?
- What are the most difficult aspects of the position?
- Describe a typical day on the job.
- Describe the department's/company's growth in the next 2 years.
- What is the philosophy on training and development here?
- Has there been downsizing within the company? How is it handled?
- How do you think I'd fit into the job and into your organization?
- What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?
- Who would I be working for and with?
- What is the person doing who used to hold this position?
- When would you need me to start?
- May I see my work area?
- May I meet some of my future co-workers?

## **Interview Conclusion**

If you are sincerely interested in the position and are satisfied with the answers given, you should ask the interviewer if he/she feels that you are qualified for the position. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully. Ask for the job. Make a positive statement about the position. Emphasize that this is exactly the type of opportunity you've been looking for and would like to be offered the position. Ask when you should expect an answer. A typical conclusion might be: "Thank you for this meeting, \_\_\_\_\_. I like what I've heard today and I'd like to join your team. I know I'd be an asset to you/your department because you need someone who can \_\_\_\_\_, \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_. As you know, I have (match your qualifications with the employer's "hot buttons"). Before I leave, do you have any more questions about my background or qualifications or can I supply you with any more information? On a scale of 1 to 5, how do I compare to the other candidates you've interviewed? I can start as soon as you need me." The farewell should also include a smile, direct eye contact, a firm but gentle handshake.

## **Thank You Letter**

Immediately following the interview, call your employment recruiter. It is very important to convey your impressions of the position and the company. Let the recruiter know whether you are interested in the position or not and, if there were questions you forgot to ask at the interview, express them at this time. Only after we get your feedback about the interview and the company do we contact the employer for theirs. And finally, we follow-up with you regarding the employer's thoughts.

## **Pre-employment Physical**

The use of drug testing as part of a pre-employment physical examination is becoming more prevalent. It is predicted, that within five years, drug testing will become one more standard for getting a job. Some firms are testing for drug use as part of a pre-employment physical without telling the applicant that he/she is being tested for drugs, *Personnel Journal* reports. Some over-the-counter products can produce positive drug-test results. Among them: Alka-Seltzer Plus, Allerest, Bronkaid, Contact, Donnagel, Nyquil, Primatene, Promlamine capsules, Sinutab, Sudafed and Triaminic. Poppy seeds in your food can also produce a positive drug-test result. You should not take any medication 48 hours before your pre-employment physicals, but if you must, be sure to list all drugs taken and advise the examiner.

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*Careers* by Joyce Lain Kennedy

## **Eleven Reasons for Rejection**

1. Poor attitude. Many candidates come across as arrogant. While employers can afford to be self-centered, candidates cannot.
2. Appearance. Many candidates do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are quickly made in the first three to five minutes. Review the appearance checklist.
3. Lack of research. It's obvious when candidates haven't learned about the job, company or industry prior to the interview. Visit the library or use the Internet to research the company, then talk with friends, peers and other professionals about the opportunity before each meeting.
4. Not having questions to ask. Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position. Prepare a list of intelligent questions in advance.
5. Not readily knowing the answers to interviewers' questions. Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as a recent termination or an employment gap. Practicing with your spouse or a friend before the interview will help you to frame intelligent responses.

6. Relying too much on resumes. Employers hire people, not paper. Although a resume can list qualifications and skills, it's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsive team player.
7. Too much humility. Being conditioned not to brag, candidates are sometimes reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them.
8. Not relating skills to employers' needs. A list of sterling accomplishments means little if you can't relate them to a company's requirements. Reiterate your skills and convince the employer that you can "do the same for them."
9. Handling salary issues ineptly. Candidates often ask about salary and benefit packages too early. If they believe an employer is interested, they may demand inappropriate amounts and price themselves out of the jobs. Candidates who ask for too little undervalue themselves or appear desperate.
10. Lack of career direction. Job hunters who aren't clear about their career goals often can't spot or commit to appropriate opportunities. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.
11. Job shopping. Some applicants, particularly those in certain high tech, sales and marketing fields, will admit they're just "shopping" for opportunities and have little intention of changing jobs. This wastes time and leaves a bad impression with employers they may need to contact in the future.