

Interview Techniques

Introduction

If skills and knowledge were all that counted in getting a job there would be no interviews. Companies would simply look at your CV, verify its accuracy and make a decision there and then.

This is obviously not the case as companies want to meet the person they will employ. Partly to assess your skills, but also to get a general measure of you as a person and simply to see if you are someone they could work with.

On the following pages we will give you a general guide which will help gain the right approach to a professional interview. In this guide we will give you useful tips, how to prepare, do's and don'ts, questions and answers and general idea of what to expect.

Be Prepared

Know the location. Be clear on where the company is located and plan on how you will get there. Do not leave this to the last minute as a panicked rush could not only make you late but also make you arrive in the wrong state of mind.

Learn as much as you can about the vacancy and the company. One of the first questions you may be asked is "how much do you know about our company". Having knowledge of what the company do as well as the vacancy will show you as prepared and organised. Typical information may include the service or product they provide, the size of the company, turnover and client base. Much of this information is usually readily available from the companies own web site and the internet at large.

Job matching yourself to the vacancy. If you are clear in your mind as to why you would be a good choice for the job it will come over in an interview. So assess which of your skills you think would be the greatest asset to both the job and the company prior to attending. If you do not fully match the requirement, think how you could adapt to the role through basic training or learning on the job. In addition think of what skills you have that could benefit the company in general.

Be relaxed. It may be easier said than done, but it may help to remember two points. They are already interested in you or you would not be attending interview in the first place, and in addition it is also about you liking them. Many job offers are actually turned down, which means the selection is two-way.

First Impressions

Arriving for Interview

First impressions count as it has been shown that most of a persons opinion is formed in the first 5 minutes of an interview. So always try and make a good start.

When to arrive. As a general guide it is best to arrive 10 or 15 minutes early for interview. If you arrive very early it may be best to wait before going in. Arriving late is to be avoided at all costs, as this would suggest future time keeping could be a problem

Mobile Phones. Always turn your mobile phone off during an interview.

Dress Code. Always be smartly dressed for interview, if possible ask about the format of the interview before hand to give you an idea of how formal it will be. If you are going for an office based position, a suit or formal attire is generally recommended. If you are going for more of a manual position a more casual dress code may be acceptable, but it is still important to be tidy and clean. Keep jewellery to a minimum.

If you are a coffee drinker, smoker or have a meal prior to an interview be aware of your breath. If necessary, have a mint or brush your teeth prior going in but never chew gum during the interview.

The initial introduction. A positive introduction will start the interview in the right direction. Know whom you are seeing, introduce yourself, make eye contact, give a polite greeting and a firm handshake. Also don't forget to smile.

The Interview

The Format of the Interview. It is always best if you can find out before hand the format it will take by simply asking the company or agency. Some interviews may be multi stage, having an initial skills based assessment with successful applicants going on to a second interview delving more in to your character. If you know there will be a test, then swat up before you go. Other interviews may be very informal and able to give you a decision at the end of the interview.

The Balance in the Interview. Interviews can take many formats, dependent on the job, the company and the interviewer. In general the interview will be lead by the interviewer with 30% of the conversation coming from them and 70% from you.

The Interview relationship. It is always best to place yourself on the same level as the person interviewing you. If you take a subservient approach they will take the more dominant position, which could affect their confidence in you. Similarly if you take a more dominant approach the interviewer may be concerned about you taking direction from them in the future.

Their Questions – Your Answers

Their questions to you.

To get you to speak the interviewer will ask more open than closed questions. Some designed to simply find out more about you and some may be test you. Below is a sample of typical questions you may be asked:

Can you tell me about yourself?

Avoid a long rambling reply and make your response as relative as possible to the job you are going for.

What did you do in your previous jobs?

Start with the main responsibilities and only go in to great detail if they seem particularly interested in something.

What did you excel at?

Don't be modest; everybody is good at something, so show confidence in what you know without being arrogant.

Why did you leave your previous companies?

Always give a positive reason. I.e. Leaving because of what you were looking to gain from a new job is better than being negative about your old job or company.

What were your achievements in your last positions?

Again, don't be modest, show off a little.

What made you apply for this position?

An ideal opportunity to show enthusiasm in both the job and the company.

What do you think you could offer our company?

This answer should be based around both your skills and you as a person. Characteristics like enthusiasm, loyalty, attitude and professionalism play just as big a part as your skills.

What did you enjoy most in your previous jobs?

Think why they are asking the question and how the answers would relate to the job you are applying for.

Why do you want to work with us?

If you can't answer this one they will wonder why you are there. Think of the positive things about both the company and the job and you will have your answer.

What did you not enjoy in your previous jobs?

Be careful, if you mention a task which could be part of the job you are applying for you could shoot yourself in the foot. The best approach would be to try and turn this in to a positive. E.g. "I found my previous job limited me in that I felt I was able to take on more responsibilities."

What are your strengths?

As before, don't be modest.

What are your weaknesses?

You can either go for the typical positive response of "I get bored if I am not kept busy", although this can be a little transparent and cliché. It would be better to pick on something you feel would not be an interview breaker. I.e. more of a minor weakness than a major character flaw.

Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

It is always best to show a little ambition but don't overdo it. Your answer should be relevant to the company and the job. If you are applying for a pressured sales role you would need to show more drive. In a more steady background role you may need to show that doing the job you will be taken on for would suit you fine. And be honest, as an experienced interviewer will see through you.

Why do you think I should offer you the job?

Again, use both your skills and character traits in this answer. Even a little flattery can go a long way. Saying how well you could fit in would both compliment them personally and also suggest you would be good to work with.

Scenario Questions

You may also be given scenario questions such as “If a client asks you to deliver the product and it will not be ready in time, how would you respond?” These questions are not usually asked in the hope of getting an exact response, but more aimed at seeing how you think. They may also be trying to assess your behavioural patterns. You may even be asked how you have handled these situations in the past

There are no perfect answers, so the best way to respond is to be honest, present your answers in a positive light, be clear and concise and avoid being vague. Also try and give your answers in a positive light.

Your questions to them.

Asking questions of the person interviewing you serves two purposes. Firstly it will tell you what you need to know about the company and the job. Secondly it will show your enthusiasm and interest in the job. Many of your questions should be in response to what they are saying as it will show you are listening. Having no questions or response would suggest that you either do not understand or not paying attention. For example, a response to “You will be dealing direct with clients” may be “will that be over the phone or in person?”

In general typical questions may include:

Can you tell me more about the day-to-day duties?

How has this position become vacant?

Can you give me more detail on the company?

What would be my main responsibilities?

What are the prospects for promotion?

What training will I be given?

What are the future plans for the company?

Who will I report to?

Would it be possible to see more of the company?

Things to avoid.

Do not be over chatty. *If you talk too much in an interview they will be concerned about you be over chatty in the workplace.*

Do not heavily criticise previous employers. *No matter how justified, you will just come over as a malcontent.*

Do not make your first question about holiday or sick pay.

Never show aggression or frustration and never argue with the person interviewing you.

Do not argue or criticize the way the company works.

Don't show lack of interest through your body language. *Look at the person speaking to you, react to what they say and don't fidget.*

How to finish the interview.

When the interview is winding up it is good psychology to finish on a positive note. If you feel an interview has gone well, there is nothing to be lost by asking “do you feel I could be of interest to your company?”. If the answer is “no”, it would probably always have been a “no” regardless. If they feel you could be suited they will likely answer “yes” and if this is the last thing they say to you it will be the last thing they remember. You could also ask the question “when could you expect to hear” as this could avoid them delaying a response. In general, the more someone delays making a decision the more likely it will be a “no”.

The follow up.

Another way of showing your enthusiasm is with a follow up call to the interviewer. The interviewer will usually give an indication of when you should hear feedback, if not it would be usual to call a few days later. The sensible approach would be one of an enthusiastic candidate, keen on the job rather than an impatient candidate demanding to know what is happening.

FOOT NOTE

When all is said and done, your general personality will play a large part in the selection process. In most cases the person interviewing you will be your future boss. If they like you as a person they are more likely to want to work with you.

Good luck, now it's up to you.