Interviewing

Congratulations, all of the hard work that you put into your resume paid off, you got an interview! Now you’ve got to nail it!!

An interview can be a nerve-racking experience for many people. Having a successful interview is a matter of preparation and a matter of knowing what is expected of you.

Here are some helpful steps that will allow you to do the best you can in your interview.

**PREPARE**

You went through the decision making process and applied for this job so you know that it is one that will be acceptable to you. The question is whether or not you will be acceptable to the employer.

A. **Learn all you can about the business or organization.** Check both online and offline to get information.

B. **Go over your qualifications for the job.** Do your best to match your education, experience and training to as many of the job requirements as you can. That will help prepare you for any unexpected questions and to convince the interviewer that you are the one for this job.

C. **Get your answers clearly in mind so that you will appear confident when asked about yourself.**

---

**The “2 Minute Advertisement”**

Begin to think of yourself as a product that you want to advertise and sell. What can be said in a 2-minute statement that would attract the interest of the prospective buyer/employer?

First, begin by listing five strengths you have that are pertinent to this job (experiences, traits, skills, etc.). What do you want the interviewer to know about you?

As an example: Five strengths might be—Strong communication skills, ability to connect with people, proven success in customer relations, reputation for following through and meeting deadlines.

Now prepare a 2-minute script that includes information you want to convey. Begin by talking about past experiences and proven success:

“I have been in the customer service industry for the past five years. My most recent experience has been handling incoming calls in the high tech industry. One reason I particularly enjoy this business, and the challenges that go along with it, is the opportunity to connect with people. In my last job, I formed some significant customer relationships resulting in a 30 percent increase in sales in one month.”

Next, mention your strengths and abilities:
“My real strength is my attention to detail. I pride myself on my reputation for following through and meeting deadlines. When I commit to doing something, I make sure it gets done, and on time.”

Conclude with a statement about your current situation:

“What I am looking for now is a company that values customer relations, where I can join a strong team and have a positive impact on customer retention and sales.”

Now, Practice:

Practice with your script until you feel confident about what you want to emphasize in your statement. Your script should help you stay on track, by you shouldn’t memorize it – you don’t want to sound stiff and rehearsed. It should sound natural and conversational.

You will find this very helpful when confronted with general questions such as “tell me about yourself” or “why should we hire you.” More on those a bit later.

D. Go back over your resume again. Be prepared to elaborate on anything it might contain.

E. Practice makes perfect so get a friend or relative to help you practice the interview.

PERSONAL APPEARANCE

“If I can do the job, who cares how I look?” The employer does, that’s who!! Grooming, your choice of hairstyle, clothing, accessories, even shoes are important in presenting yourself to the employer. One thing the employer thinks about is how you will represent his/her company to the customer. Therefore, appearance is very important!

THE INTERVIEW

A. You should bring your driver’s license, social security number and references with you to the interview. It’s a good idea to have a copy of your resume as well. Having a watch, a pen and a pad of paper is also a good idea.

B. Be friendly and polite. You should know the name of the interviewer; use it when you introduce yourselves. Shake hands.

C. Be cooperative and enthusiastic. An appropriate, positive comment about the business or organizations is a good idea at this point, but make sure you are accurate.

D. Be prepared to answer questions quickly and in a few words. You can elaborate when asked to do so. Don’t talk the interviewer’s ear off with long-winded stories about your life. Be careful to use proper English and do not use slang or street language.
2 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions

Tell Me About Yourself

Your response to this question will set the tone for the rest of the interview. For some, this is the most challenging question to answer, as they wonder what the interviewer really wants to know and what information they should include.

Many fumble their way through the question giving a vague answer, not focusing on what they could bring to the job.

“I’m happily married and originally from Denver,” someone might begin. “My wife was transferred here three months ago, and I’ve been getting settled in our new home. I’m now ready to go back to work.”

Most interviews go straight downhill after such responses. The secret to successfully responding to this free-form request is to focus, script and practice. You cannot afford to wing this answer, as it will affect the rest of the interview. Begin to think about what you want the interviewer to know about you. This is a great place to use the “2 minute advertisement” you have already created.

Why Should We Hire You?

Here is another, popular, broad question that can take you down the wrong road unless you’ve done some thinking ahead of time. This question is purely about selling yourself.

The Wrong Track

* “Because I need and want a job.” That’s nice, but the bottom line here is, “What can you do for us?”
* “I’m a hard worker and really want to work for this company.” The majority of people think of themselves as hard workers—and, why this company?

The Right Track

Develop a sales statement, the more detail you give, the better your answer will be. Start by looking at the job description or posting. What is the employer stressing as requirements of the job? What will it take to get the job done? Make a list of those requirements.

Next, do an inventory to determine what you have to offer as a fit for those requirements. Think of two or three key qualities you have to offer that match those the employer is seeking. Don’t underestimate personal traits that make you unique; your energy, personality type, working style and people skills are all very relevant to any job. Again, your 2-minute advertisement should be an excellent way to answer this question.

Example:

“From our conversations, it sounds as if you’re looking for someone to come in and take charge immediately. It also sounds like you are experiencing problems with some of your database systems.

With my seven years of experience working with financial databases, I have saved companies thousands of dollars by streamlining systems. My high energy and quick learning style enable me to hit the ground and size up problems rapidly. My colleagues would tell you I’m a team player who maintains a positive attitude and outlook. I have the ability to stay focused in stressful situations and can be counted on when the going gets tough. I’m confident I would be a great addition to your team.”

E. Ask some questions about the job or about the organization. You should have these prepared ahead of time. This is more to show your interest than to gain information.
Do You Have Any Questions?

This may be asked at the conclusion of a job interview, a common answer is, “No, I think you’ve covered everything very well.” This is the wrong answer. The interviewee has passed up an opportunity to ask some critical questions that could help him/her decide whether this is a company they would want to work for. Likewise, you can use this as an opportunity to show that you have done your homework on the company. So, what questions are appropriate?

Timing is the Key

The first round of interviews is about discovery, learning about the job and the company, not the benefits or raises. Good questions to ask in the first round are about the job content, and the company’s culture and future. The interview should be an exchange of information: What does the company want, and what do you have to offer? But it is also important to discuss what the company has to offer, and what you want.

It is essential to express an interest in the company and the work being done. By asking questions, you will demonstrate investigative skills, illustrate you are particular about the company you work for and that you are not going to take just any offer.

What About the Bennies?

But what about those other questions about benefits, stock options, and time off? As the interview process unfolds, there will be time to ask about the benefits and practical matters. Often the human resources department will provide you with a brochure or information packet. Obviously, you will need this information to assess an offer, but all in good time.

What You Should NOT Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing

* Don’t ask about salary, stock options, vacation, holiday schedule or benefits.
* Don’t ask questions that have already been answered in the interview, just for the sake of asking something.
* Don’t grill the interviewer. It’s OK to ask about the person’s background, but only as an interested party, not an interrogator.

Questions You Should Ask in the First Rounds of Interviewing

* Why has the job become available?
* When will you make your selection?
* I understand your company is launching a new product next year. I am very interested and experienced in new product marketing. Could I be involved in that launch in any way?”
* The job announcement indicates that this job involves training college faculty and staff on transfer. I believe it’s equally important to train high school counseling faculty, to ensure high school students understand the benefit of attending community college. Would that be an appropriate function of this position?”

Prepare five or six questions before the interview and take them with you. When the time comes for you to ask questions, take out your list. This will show good preparation on your part. This time is a valuable opportunity for you to get the information you need to help you make an informed decision.

F. At the close of the interview, be sure to thank the interviewer.
Helpful Information/Suggestions When Faced With A Panel Interview

There is an upside to the multiple interviewers process. You’d probably have to talk to each of these people individually at some point in the process. This way, you get it over all at once.

But how do you deal with so many interviewers in one setting? The best way is to take them one at a time. The board or panel is not one entity, but several individuals coming together with the common goal of hiring the best candidate for the job. At the same time, each person has his or her own agenda or department interest at heart.

The HR manager and the hiring manager could be on the same interview panel yet each has different agendas. The HR manager will be checking to make sure you are a good fit with the culture and people working at the company. The hiring manager will want to know about your technical skills or business know-how.

Board or panel interviews are usually rather formal and organized, using a standard set of questions for all applicants. This type of interview is typically used in academia, government or for high-level executives but can be used for any other type of position in any company.

Suggestions:
1. Prepare.
2. Look at each person as he or she asks you a question.
3. Continue to look at that individual for 30 seconds or so.
4. Shift your eye contact to each member of the interviewing team.
5. Make contact with each set of eyes while answering questions.

Another multiple-type interview is the team or “good cop/bad cop” interview. The team is usually made up of two interviewers, on who asks the questions and one who takes notes. The two typically trade roles, which can be confusing if they have different styles. In fact, one person may be kind and gentle the other more harsh or pushy.

Just remember, these inquisitors are working together toward the same end. Treat them equally, not favoring one over the other.

Lastly, a good tip to remember is to make sure you get each person’s business card, hopefully at the beginning of the interview, so you can address each person by name.

G. The Test (if one is given):

If the employer gives a test be sure to listen to the instructions given as well as reading the question very carefully. Write as clearly and legibly as you can. Don’t spend too much time on one question. It’s a good idea to go through the questions and answer the ones that come easily to you and then go back and work on the others.

Do you get nervous and jittery at the very thought of an interview? If so consider these practical suggestions to help you get over interview jitters.

1. Change your thinking
Overcome the fear by putting the interview into perspective. This is not an appointment with the dentist, who may inflict pain. It simply is a conversation with another person or group of persons. The worst thing that can happen is you won’t get the job, which may not have been the right job for you anyway.

2. **Use calming techniques**

One of the best techniques to handle stress is through breathing. Take deliberate shallow breaths. Take air in through the nostrils and exhale, quietly, through the mouth. This technique should be practiced to relax before the interview.

3. **Prepare before the interview**

Start thinking of yourself as a product and presenting what you have to offer the company. Can you imagine giving a performance without some practice and preparation? Winging the interview in today’s market is a big mistake.

4. **Fear of rejection? Get over it!**

Try not to take rejection personally. There are so many factors that could be affecting the offer that it is impossible to say what is happening. There may be internal candidates, relatives promised jobs, a competitor who is a perfect match for the position, a lack of chemistry or a mismatch in salary needs.

5. **Let it go.**

When you have done everything to prepare for the interview and are satisfied that you presented yourself in the best light possible, the next step is to let it go. There is something to be learned from each interview.

**THE BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW**

When asked a traditional question like, “what would you do if you had a customer who wasn’t interested in buying the product?” you can make up a story. But when you are asked behavioral questions, the interviewer is listening for specific examples of how you have handled situations or problems in the past.

Behavioral questions begin with phrases like, “tell me about a time when,” or “can you give me an example of.” The interviewer wants to hear your real-life examples. When an interviewer asks such questions, he or she is listening for examples of how you handled situations similar to the ones you may handle for this company.

This is an opportunity to talk about your accomplishments. If you can demonstrate, through examples, that you’ve succeeded in certain areas of interest, you will be considered a possible candidate for success in a future position.

Your success stories should include the situation, the action you took and the result. Here is an example if you were interviewing for a sales position:

**The Situation:** I had a customer who did not want to hear about the features of my merchandise because of a prior interaction with my company.
The Action: I listened to her story and made sure I heard her complaint. I then explained how I would have handled the situation differently and how I can offer her better service. I showed her some facts that changed her mind about dealing with the company again.

The result: She not only bought the merchandise, but complimented how I handled her account. She is now one of my best customers.

You can prepare for this type of interview by writing out your stories before the interview. Determine what stories you have that would be appropriate for the position based on its job description. If the job requires dependability, write your story about a time when your dependability was recognized or made a difference with a customer.

The Power of Using Examples

You should endeavor to provide at least one example in response to every single question, if it’s at all possible to do so. General answers tend to bore, but examples – stories – of past successes are always interesting. Think about it from the standpoint of a public speaker, a successful speaker is one who is able to paint a picture or tell a story, as opposed to one who simply relays facts or figures. Who do you personally enjoy listening to more? Most likely it is the speaker who gives examples, tells a story giving you something to relate to.

The interview process is much the same, the interviewer(s) is/are more inclined to be interested in what you have to say if you are able to paint a picture, giving the “mind’s eye” something to focus on. In fact, some psychologists think humans are “pre-wired” to be attentive and interested in stories, and that people instinctually react to hearing them, particularly the problem-action-resolution type story. So use examples.

REFERENCES

An employer usually requires three references. You must always get permission from people before using their names, and choose people that you are sure will give you a good reference. Don’t use relatives. Use former employers, professionals in your community, former teacher and friends.
# Interview Worksheet

(Use this worksheet to assist you in preparing for an interview)

## Company Information

Name: __________________ Industry: __________________ Position: ____________

Notes: ________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

## Position Qualifications

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Position Qualifications</th>
<th>My Matching Qualifications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>______________________</td>
<td>__________________________</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## Prepare a “2 Minute Statement” (Be sure to focus on selling yourself)

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

______________________________________________________________________

## Questions I Want To Ask:

1. ________________________________________________________________

2. ________________________________________________________________

3. ________________________________________________________________

4. ________________________________________________________________
Personal Experiences/Stories That Would Help Me Get This Job:

Situation #1: ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Action: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Result: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Situation #2: ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Action: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Result: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

Situation #3: ____________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Action: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
Result: _________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
References:

Name: _____________________________ Address: _______________________________________________
Phone #: ____________________________ Company Name & Title: _________________________________
Relationship: Personal / Business     (circle one)    Letter of reference? Yes / No    (circle one)

Name: _____________________________ Address: _______________________________________________
Phone #: ____________________________ Company Name & Title: _________________________________
Relationship: Personal / Business     (circle one)    Letter of reference? Yes / No    (circle one)

Name: _____________________________ Address: _______________________________________________
Phone #: ____________________________ Company Name & Title: _________________________________
Relationship: Personal / Business     (circle one)    Letter of reference? Yes / No    (circle one)

Name: _____________________________ Address: _______________________________________________
Phone #: ____________________________ Company Name & Title: _________________________________
Relationship: Personal / Business     (circle one)    Letter of reference? Yes / No    (circle one)

Comments: ___________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________
___________________________________________________________________________________________