

## INTERVIEWING

### THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE ON INTERVIEWING

Recently, *The Wall Street Journal* ranked the characteristics desired by recruiters who hire students from business schools:

1. Communication, interpersonal, and social skills—collegial and friendly
2. Analytical and problem-solving skills
3. Creative and visionary thinking
4. Leadership potential and an ethical sensibility
5. Ability to drive results
6. Collaborative, dependable, and loyal team player
7. Theoretical and hands-on strengths
8. Resourceful, entrepreneurial skills, with both a street-smart and worldly attitude
9. General management skills, with a multi-disciplinary perspective
10. Knowledge and preparation for the new economy
11. Realistic expectation for the value of the degree
12. Solid work ethic.

Employers in this survey listed other important variables necessary for a return on their investment:

- ♦ Productivity of hiring numbers from program
- ♦ Retention of candidates/employees with the company, as well as progress on the corporate ladder
- ♦ Students' willingness to relocate
- ♦ Competition between companies for the same graduates
- ♦ Expected salaries and bonuses
- ♦ Candidates fit with the corporate culture
- ♦ Alumni relationships.

Employers look for candidates who can adapt to the constant changes in the marketplace:

- ♦ Show comfort with a variety of skills.
- ♦ Maintain knowledge and expertise in their chosen fields and functional areas.
- ♦ Show commitment to learning, openness to new ideas, and the ability to think critically.
- ♦ Prove a sense of responsibility and professionalism, as well as a drive to excellence.
- ♦ Work comfortably in teams and cross cultures.

Employers evaluate and rate candidates on a variety of factors:

- ♦ Education, grades, honors, training, technical competencies, and extracurricular choices
- ♦ Career-related experience, personal characteristics, abilities, expertise, stability, interests, and achievements
- ♦ Focused career direction
- ♦ Knowledge of the industry, the company, including its history, growth, products/services, philosophy, and problems, and the job, including personality fit

- ♦ Personality, interpersonal skills and self-expression, and persuasiveness in written and oral communication
- ♦ Original, visionary, entrepreneurial, and strategic thinking
- ♦ Logic, reasoning, and analytical and problem-solving skills
- ♦ Adaptability and the ability to deal with ambiguity
- ♦ Evidence of effective leadership and excellent teamwork qualities in planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, and inspiring confidence
- ♦ Honesty, confidence, enthusiasm, and assertiveness
- ♦ Motivation, goals, drive, initiative, and sense of responsibility
- ♦ Maturity, judgment, poise, tact, and professionalism
- ♦ Appearance, dress, attitude, posture, and manner.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

In the overall interview process, employers see if you fit the requirements of the targeted position and into the corporate culture:

- ♦ Do you have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies?
- ♦ Do you understand the responsibilities, the complexity, and the scope of the job?
- ♦ Will you be comfortable with the level of interaction and structure of supervision within the organization?

Interviews fall into several categories:

- ♦ A **standard screening interview** can be an unstructured, conversational, straightforward information exchange called a **trait interview**, focused on the total person.

Most likely, however, the interview will be a directed, **behavioral interview**. This format is designed to find the most promising candidates for the specific job by asking open-ended questions about past behavior and events under the theory that the past predicts the future. Questions generally focus on actual experiences in order to determine your problem-solving approaches. Employers pass on candidates who are unfocused, unspecific, or uninteresting. Your goal is to be memorable in a positive light.

- ♦ A **telephone interview** is common before an employer plans a face-to-face interview. If you get an unexpected call, you may politely ask if the employer could schedule another time. You need to prepare and practice in advance what you will say and how your voice will sound. You want to be natural, enthusiastic, conversational, and grammatical. Have a summary of your key marketing points, your resume, and company information in front of you. If necessary to make yourself feel the seriousness of this interview, put on a suit.

However, the employer might want to conduct the interview immediately, so while you are in the job search, be prepared always to respond professionally.

- ♦ A **case method interview** is originally a tool of consulting organizations but is now frequently given by other business organizations. This interview simulates work performed on the job and requires an informal or formal presentation around a hypothetical or real-world business case, a brainteaser, or quantitative problem.

Designed to challenge you and to see your thought processes in solving problems and handling difficult confrontations from clients, your goal is to remain cool under the pressure and to think quickly on your feet.

The interviewer will assess your logic and reasoning, your curiosity and creativity, your ability to synthesize new information, your numerical agility, and your intuitive business sense. You are measured on your comfort with ambiguity and on your credible communication skills.

Success with this interview demands intense preparation with practice cases.

- ♦ A **stress interview** confronts, challenges, and puts you under pressure to simulate intense client-centered work situations. Interviewers want to intimidate and throw you off balance, to test your inner resiliency and maturity, and to evaluate your poise and judgment.

Interviewers may demean and interrupt your answers, focus on negatives only, belittle your credentials and criticize your experience, or be silent. Interviewers put you on the defensive and try to make you angry and frustrated to see your response to aggressive behavior.

You should be assertive, determined, and confident. Stay focused on your giving factual, well-thought-out answers.

Preparation will help you remain calm.

- ♦ A **group interview** puts you with a group of other job candidates to solve a problem posed by the interviewer. A successful strategy is to neither want to be the most aggressive or the most passive in the group; you want to be a team player as well as to show your ability to listen and to lead.
- ♦ A **panel interview**, a time-saving device for employers, puts several interviewers together asking you questions. Your goal is to communicate effectively and calmly. Make eye contact with the questioner approximately 25% of the time and with the rest of the group 75% of the time.
- ♦ An **audition or simulation interview** requires your handling real problems or projects.
- ♦ A **follow-up, on-site interview** is, in general, a day-long hiring interview inside the organization, in which you meet and talk with a series of managers and colleagues in a variety of formal and informal settings, including social activities.

Business suits and related attire are standard dress for all employment interviews, on and off-campus. While some companies are informal, for an interview, dress conservatively. Appearance does play a part in firms' hiring decisions, especially those that are client-centered.

Normally, the organization will make airline and hotel accommodations for you or ask you to keep an expense voucher to cover reasonable costs. Have your own money and credit cards with you to pay for incidental expenses. Most likely, someone will meet you when you arrive.

Since the interview may stretch from breakfast through dinner, be rested and fresh on arrival, and be prompt. You might meet with a dozen co-workers and supervisors individually or in small groups. Consider yourself always under scrutiny.

Expect that similar topics from your preliminary interviews will arise and that you might be asked the same questions over and over by different interviewers; continue to respond with detail, thoughtfulness, and enthusiasm. You will talk with employees from many layers of the organization, many who are not trained interviewers. Everyone whom you meet that day—including administrative staff-- will have a voice in your evaluation.

During the day you may have to take paper-and-pencil tests, drug tests, or psychological inventories and participate in on-the-job simulation exercises.

This visit is also the opportunity for you to assess whether this company, the culture, the working environment, and the job are right for you. The appraisal is on both sides.

Although unlikely, an offer might be forthcoming at the end of the day; thus research salary and benefit possibilities ahead of time, so you can respond with a range and begin negotiations.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW**

A successful interview is a mutual get-acquainted process of candid and open give-and-take questions and answers.

Your personal goals for any interview are to market yourself successfully, to determine whether you will enjoy and do well in the company and the job, and to take in enough information to make a sound career decision.

The employer's goals for the interview are to evaluate your fit with the job, to decide which candidates will receive further interviews, and to sell the company to you if you seem to be a potentially strong candidate.

The employer will begin the interview with a brief period of casual conversation to relax both of you. The employer will follow with a company description, explain the interview process and note-taking, find out how familiar you are with the job position and responsibilities, and let you know that time is included for you to ask questions at the end of the interview.

The core of the interview covers the job and your qualifications. Series of questions will probe deeper and deeper into explications of your experiences, skills, interests, and personal characteristics. Interviewers will explore what motivates you, how you deal with ambiguity, pressure, and adversity, and how you work on teams, with peers, with supervisors, and with subordinates, all the while assessing your personal style, communication and problem-solving skills, and persuasiveness.

When the employer turns to you for questions, the quality of your questions can differentiate you from other candidates. What information do you need about the industry, company, or job to help you evaluate the position and make a sound decision?

Thoughtful questions can prove your true interest in the company and can distinguish you by showcasing your ability to think creatively and responsibly.

You may get results from your interview right-away, in days, in weeks, in months, or never; however, always ask the recruiter what the decision-making process and timetable will be, so you can follow up if you have not heard when the suggested date has passed.

### **THE CONTENT OF AN INTERVIEW**

Interviews are laboratories for the real world, and your goal is to make the best impression possible.

Interview preparation means knowing the employer's job requirements, the company history, organization and management, products and services, customers, and particular competitive challenges, as well as the industry.

While preparation is time-consuming, if you spend the energy to anticipate probable questions, to prepare complete and clear answers, and to practice professional style and demeanor, you will stand out from other candidates.

Interviewers will press you for real, concrete examples rather than for philosophical abstractions or hypothetical responses. To assess your problem-solving, knowledge-management, and strategic-planning skills, employers want to know what you actually did, both individually and in teamwork.

The employer's objective is to collect a lot of data about you on a range of variables in order to compare you with other candidates.

You can help manage the interview by having an outstanding, complete, and detailed resume from which the employer can ask you questions. Know every detail on your resume thoroughly.

Because, you can take a leadership role and control the content of the interview by your chosen responses, have a mental agenda of topics and examples you want to cover with the employer, including your career goals. Prepare concise "sound bites" that will become the essence of your answers.

You want the interviewer to know not only that you have the requisite skills for the job but also that you will be a likable, competent professional. Practice responding to questions naturally and authentically; memorizing complete answers will make you sound stilted and insincere.

Employers want to know what you did, why you made certain decisions, how you reacted, and what were the results of your actions.

Their questions explore the situations and circumstances of your experiences, as well as specific tasks and responsibilities and resulting achievements; all of your responses demand precise, relevant examples. Be prepared for the interviewer to ask for examples of negative experiences and how you responded.

Interviewers generally design the interview to go deeper and deeper into your experiences in order to extract the essence of your talent, skills, and personal characteristics. In these moments, keep to your interview agenda, making certain the key points you want to emphasize to this company are woven through your answers. Be able to illustrate any point with a series of explanatory and relevant examples.

Before you respond, you want to understand exactly what question the interviewer poses and why; don't be afraid to ask for clarification if necessary. Think out your response: reflecting for a short time can leave a positive impression. Your answer should give enough information to satisfy the employer, without rambling or over-explaining; two minutes or less for your response is adequate and appropriate.

The first question of the interview will probably be, "Tell me about yourself," and the final question might be, "Why should I hire you?" The basic strategy of a profitable interview is to prove exactly that you fit the job, that you can do the job, and that you will add value to the organization.

Show your pride in your strengths and accomplishments and demonstrate your usefulness to the employer. Be yourself at your best!

Your goal for each interview is to reach the next step in the process until you have an offer.

## **INTERVIEWING SUGGESTIONS**

Communication is a learned skill, a talent garnered through work and practice. Your body language, your voice, and your words deliver your message, so pay attention to your posture and movements of your head, your arms and hands, and your legs and feet.

Practicing your listening and speaking skills, as well as relaxation techniques, will be of great benefit in giving you self-confidence, reducing anxiety, and focusing your thoughts.

Develop an interviewing partnership with a fellow student or colleague, so you can correct destructive behaviors and in praising strengths.

First impressions are important:

- ♦ Dress appropriately for the culture you are entering. Be professional and tasteful in your dress and jewelry; err on the conservative side.
- ♦ Be meticulous in personal grooming, leaving off perfume or after-shave lotion.
- ♦ Be early, relax enough to appear calm, and mentally walk through a successful interview.
- ♦ Turn off your cell phone.
- ♦ Know the interviewer's name and pronunciation.

- ♦ Step forward, make and maintain eye contact, smile, offer a firm, full-handed, “web-to-web” handshake, and identify yourself enthusiastically.
- ♦ Be courteous, tactful, polite, and persuasive.
- ♦ Expect the recruiter to orient you to the interview format and to make rapport-building small talk.
- ♦ Be attentive and give the interviewer a chance to tell you about the ideal candidate so you can tailor your responses.
- ♦ Reflect, in your facial expressions and body language, an active listening style, the most important business communication skill.
- ♦ Convey energy in your voice and let your words emerge in a natural, conversational style.
- ♦ Pay attention to your nervous habits: eliminate hair-tugging, knuckle-cracking, knee-bouncing, fidgeting, and looking at your watch.
- ♦ Answer questions honestly, thoroughly, and succinctly, in a well-organized and grammatical framework.
- ♦ Show an easy sense of humor.
- ♦ Maintain a steady level of energy, whether during a half-hour-screening interview or a full-day schedule.
- ♦ Try to ascertain where you stand before you finish.
- ♦ State your interest in the company and job enthusiastically and sincerely at interview’s end.

Although the interviewer cannot ask questions about certain subjects, you can volunteer this information:

- ♦ Marital status and children under 18
- ♦ National origin
- ♦ General military service other than US
- ♦ Lowest salary you will accept
- ♦ Religious affiliation
- ♦ Arrest record

Make sure you have questions ready when the interviewer asks if you have any questions. Employers use this part of the interview to assess your intelligence and competence and to distinguish between candidates on the quality of their questions.

Be strategic. Watch the clock and the interviewer’s body language to gauge what questions to ask.

Your questions should prove that you already have knowledge of the industry, as well as an understanding of the company culture, philosophy, goals, problems, and needs. Formulate questions to ask the interviewers as you conduct your initial pre-interview research.

What do you need to know to assess whether the job is the right one for you? Show your interest in the big picture and the future of the organization, rather than asking for information you could have gathered elsewhere.

At the close of any interview if you are interested in the job, say so, and always be friendly and courteous. Use this opportunity to sell yourself!

Thank the interviewer for the session with a smile, eye contact, and a firm handshake. Ask about the timeframe and process of decision-making.

Get business cards of anyone you spoke with at length to use immediately for thank-you letters; you will need to write every principal interviewer a fresh, individual letter.

As soon as you can, for inclusion in your letters, jot down your interview impressions, questions to which you want to improve your responses, and any information which can add up to a good case for hiring you! Then write and mail your thank-you letter within 24-48 hours.

### **INTERVIEWING TABOOS**

You should be aware of negative interviewing behaviors which can get you into trouble, and you should know that the interviewing world is small and that employers often compare notes:

- ♦ Forgetting to research the industry, company, or job
- ♦ Being conceited or overaggressive
- ♦ Being evasive or dishonest with questions
- ♦ Speaking negatively about past employers or professors
- ♦ Showing a dislike for your school or your location
- ♦ Bragging about your connections
- ♦ Trying to control the interview
- ♦ Suggesting an unwillingness to start at the bottom
- ♦ Questioning salary and benefits too soon
- ♦ “Interviewing for practice”
- ♦ “Solving” a company’s problems in an overbearing manner
- ♦ Arriving too late, which includes the exact time of the interview
- ♦ Canceling an interview.

### **INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND FOLLOW-UP**

Spending a few minutes evaluating your personal performance and dissecting the company’s approach to the interview will be helpful to improving each succeeding interaction with employers.

- ♦ What areas of your background, education, and experience seemed to interest the interviewer?
- ♦ What do you think were your strengths and weaknesses from the interviewer’s perspective?
- ♦ What questions were easiest for you or caused you the most difficulty?
- ♦ On which specific skills, personality characteristics, and experience did the employer focus?
- ♦ What would you do differently if you could begin this interview over?

- ♦ What specific changes will you make before the next interview?
- ♦ Do you need to provide the employer with additional paperwork like transcripts and references?
- ♦ What is the next step in the process? When will the employer contact you next?

Have your thank-you letter in the mail within 24-48 hours to everyone with whom you interviewed who is a key decision-maker. Make sure you correct any misconceptions and reinforce your selling points.

If the employer-stated, next-step time-period passes without company contact, you may then call. Ask the status of the search process and of your candidacy. Make sure the employer has received all the requested information and ask if further material is necessary.

When an employer calls you with an offer, acknowledge your understanding of the details even if you are not ready to make a decision. Find out the date by which you must give your answer. Do not accept the job until the offer is in writing and you are certain of your choice and of the compensation packet.

If you have other companies in which you are still interested, tell the employer making the offer that you are in the midst of your search and you would like an extension of your response time. Most employers will try to work with you but often have their own deadlines with which to contend, so be ready to hear a final offer and to make your decision. If you do get some leeway, try to negotiate with the other companies about their decision-making timelines, so you can reach an intelligent, satisfactory conclusion

A job offer is official only when put in writing. Whether you accept or decline, your response must also be written. Immediately, upon acceptance of a position, you should notify all other companies with which you are actively interviewing that you have taken a job; your letter should be cordial and not burn any bridges. Failure to stop the interviewing process at this point is unprofessional and unethical.

## **DEALING WITH REJECTION**

No matter what your qualifications, especially in the current economy, most likely you will not receive a job offer for every interview. Rejections happen to everyone.

The job search is difficult, complicated, and personal; however, becoming depressed or angry will hurt only you. Preparing for this inevitability will make your job search more realistic and soften the blow to your ego.

Write to the company expressing your appreciation for being considered in the candidate pool. Not only are you showing professional courtesy, but also, by proving your interest and your good manners, you might get a call back at another time.

Since you qualified for the interview, the employer saw potential in you. You may ask the interviewer for suggestions to strengthen your interviewing skills, but for legal reasons, the employer might not be able to respond.

Also, you may ask for referrals to individuals or companies who may be interested in your combination of experience and education.

In any case, your maintaining a positive attitude and senses of humor and perspective will pay off, allowing you to improve, to go forward, and, ultimately, to find a job with which you are compatible and satisfied.

## COM PS GENERAL INTERVIEWING 2002

### THE EMPLOYERS' PERSPECTIVE ON INTERVIEWING

Recently, *The Wall Street Journal* ranked the characteristics desired by recruiters who hire students from business schools:

13. Communication, interpersonal, and social skills—collegial and friendly
14. Analytical and problem-solving skills
15. Creative and visionary thinking
16. Leadership potential and an ethical sensibility
17. Ability to drive results
18. Collaborative, dependable, and loyal team player
19. Theoretical and hands-on strengths
20. Resourceful, entrepreneurial skills, with both a street-smart and worldly attitude
21. General management skills, with a multi-disciplinary perspective
22. Knowledge and preparation for the new economy
23. Realistic expectation for the value of the degree
24. Solid work ethic.

Employers in this survey listed other important variables necessary for a return on their investment:

- ♦ Productivity of hiring numbers from program
- ♦ Retention of candidates/employees with the company, as well as progress on the corporate ladder
- ♦ Students' willingness to relocate
- ♦ Competition between companies for the same graduates
- ♦ Expected salaries and bonuses
- ♦ Candidates fit with the corporate culture
- ♦ Alumni relationships.

Employers look for candidates who can adapt to the constant changes in the marketplace:

- ♦ Show comfort with a variety of skills.
- ♦ Maintain knowledge and expertise in their chosen fields and functional areas.
- ♦ Show commitment to learning, openness to new ideas, and the ability to think critically.
- ♦ Prove a sense of responsibility and professionalism, as well as a drive to excellence.
- ♦ Work comfortably in teams and cross cultures.

Employers evaluate and rate candidates on a variety of factors:

- ♦ Education, grades, honors, training, technical competencies, and extracurricular choices
- ♦ Career-related experience, personal characteristics, abilities, expertise, stability, interests, and achievements
- ♦ Focused career direction
- ♦ Knowledge of the industry, the company, including its history, growth, products/services, philosophy, and problems, and the job, including personality fit

- ♦ Personality, interpersonal skills and self-expression, and persuasiveness in written and oral communication
- ♦ Original, visionary, entrepreneurial, and strategic thinking
- ♦ Logic, reasoning, and analytical and problem-solving skills
- ♦ Adaptability and the ability to deal with ambiguity
- ♦ Evidence of effective leadership and excellent teamwork qualities in planning, organizing, coordinating, directing, and inspiring confidence
- ♦ Honesty, confidence, enthusiasm, and assertiveness
- ♦ Motivation, goals, drive, initiative, and sense of responsibility
- ♦ Maturity, judgment, poise, tact, and professionalism
- ♦ Appearance, dress, attitude, posture, and manner.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

In the overall interview process, employers see if you fit the requirements of the targeted position and into the corporate culture:

- ♦ Do you have the necessary knowledge, skills, abilities, and competencies?
- ♦ Do you understand the responsibilities, the complexity, and the scope of the job?
- ♦ Will you be comfortable with the level of interaction and structure of supervision within the organization?

Interviews fall into several categories:

- ♦ A **standard screening interview** can be an unstructured, conversational, straightforward information exchange called a **trait interview**, focused on the total person.

Most likely, however, the interview will be a directed, **behavioral interview**. This format is designed to find the most promising candidates for the specific job by asking open-ended questions about past behavior and events under the theory that the past predicts the future. Questions generally focus on actual experiences in order to determine your problem-solving approaches. Employers pass on candidates who are unfocused, unspecific, or uninteresting. Your goal is to be memorable in a positive light.

- ♦ A **telephone interview** is common before an employer plans a face-to-face interview. If you get an unexpected call, you may politely ask if the employer could schedule another time. You need to prepare and practice in advance what you will say and how your voice will sound. You want to be natural, enthusiastic, conversational, and grammatical. Have a summary of your key marketing points, your resume, and company information in front of you. If necessary to make yourself feel the seriousness of this interview, put on a suit.

However, the employer might want to conduct the interview immediately, so while you are in the job search, be prepared always to respond professionally.

- ♦ A **case method interview** is originally a tool of consulting organizations but is now frequently given by other business organizations. This interview simulates work performed on the job and requires an informal or formal presentation around a hypothetical or real-world business case, a brainteaser, or quantitative problem.

Designed to challenge you and to see your thought processes in solving problems and handling difficult confrontations from clients, your goal is to remain cool under the pressure and to think quickly on your feet.

The interviewer will assess your logic and reasoning, your curiosity and creativity, your ability to synthesize new information, your numerical agility, and your intuitive business sense. You are measured on your comfort with ambiguity and on your credible communication skills.

Success with this interview demands intense preparation with practice cases.

- ♦ A **stress interview** confronts, challenges, and puts you under pressure to simulate intense client-centered work situations. Interviewers want to intimidate and throw you off balance, to test your inner resiliency and maturity, and to evaluate your poise and judgment.

Interviewers may demean and interrupt your answers, focus on negatives only, belittle your credentials and criticize your experience, or be silent. Interviewers put you on the defensive and try to make you angry and frustrated to see your response to aggressive behavior.

You should be assertive, determined, and confident. Stay focused on your giving factual, well-thought-out answers.

Preparation will help you remain calm.

- ♦ A **group interview** puts you with a group of other job candidates to solve a problem posed by the interviewer. A successful strategy is to neither want to be the most aggressive or the most passive in the group; you want to be a team player as well as to show your ability to listen and to lead.
- ♦ A **panel interview**, a time-saving device for employers, puts several interviewers together asking you questions. Your goal is to communicate effectively and calmly. Make eye contact with the questioner approximately 25% of the time and with the rest of the group 75% of the time.
- ♦ An **audition or simulation interview** requires your handling real problems or projects.
- ♦ A **follow-up, on-site interview** is, in general, a day-long hiring interview inside the organization, in which you meet and talk with a series of managers and colleagues in a variety of formal and informal settings, including social activities.

Business suits and related attire are standard dress for all employment interviews, on and off-campus. While some companies are informal, for an interview, dress conservatively. Appearance does play a part in firms' hiring decisions, especially those that are client-centered.

Normally, the organization will make airline and hotel accommodations for you or ask you to keep an expense voucher to cover reasonable costs. Have your own money and credit cards with you to pay for incidental expenses. Most likely, someone will meet you when you arrive.

Since the interview may stretch from breakfast through dinner, be rested and fresh on arrival, and be prompt. You might meet with a dozen co-workers and supervisors individually or in small groups. Consider yourself always under scrutiny.

Expect that similar topics from your preliminary interviews will arise and that you might be asked the same questions over and over by different interviewers; continue to respond with detail, thoughtfulness, and enthusiasm. You will talk with employees from many layers of the organization, many who are not trained interviewers. Everyone whom you meet that day—including administrative staff-- will have a voice in your evaluation.

During the day you may have to take paper-and-pencil tests, drug tests, or psychological inventories and participate in on-the-job simulation exercises.

This visit is also the opportunity for you to assess whether this company, the culture, the working environment, and the job are right for you. The appraisal is on both sides.

Although unlikely, an offer might be forthcoming at the end of the day; thus research salary and benefit possibilities ahead of time, so you can respond with a range and begin negotiations.

### **THE STRUCTURE OF AN INTERVIEW**

A successful interview is a mutual get-acquainted process of candid and open give-and-take questions and answers.

Your personal goals for any interview are to market yourself successfully, to determine whether you will enjoy and do well in the company and the job, and to take in enough information to make a sound career decision.

The employer's goals for the interview are to evaluate your fit with the job, to decide which candidates will receive further interviews, and to sell the company to you if you seem to be a potentially strong candidate.

The employer will begin the interview with a brief period of casual conversation to relax both of you. The employer will follow with a company description, explain the interview process and note-taking, find out how familiar you are with the job position and responsibilities, and let you know that time is included for you to ask questions at the end of the interview.

The core of the interview covers the job and your qualifications. Series of questions will probe deeper and deeper into explications of your experiences, skills, interests, and personal characteristics. Interviewers will explore what motivates you, how you deal with ambiguity, pressure, and adversity, and how you work on teams, with peers, with supervisors, and with subordinates, all the while assessing your personal style, communication and problem-solving skills, and persuasiveness.

When the employer turns to you for questions, the quality of your questions can differentiate you from other candidates. What information do you need about the industry, company, or job to help you evaluate the position and make a sound decision?

Thoughtful questions can prove your true interest in the company and can distinguish you by showcasing your ability to think creatively and responsibly.

You may get results from your interview right-away, in days, in weeks, in months, or never; however, always ask the recruiter what the decision-making process and timetable will be, so you can follow up if you have not heard when the suggested date has passed.

### **THE CONTENT OF AN INTERVIEW**

Interviews are laboratories for the real world, and your goal is to make the best impression possible.

Interview preparation means knowing the employer's job requirements, the company history, organization and management, products and services, customers, and particular competitive challenges, as well as the industry.

While preparation is time-consuming, if you spend the energy to anticipate probable questions, to prepare complete and clear answers, and to practice professional style and demeanor, you will stand out from other candidates.

Interviewers will press you for real, concrete examples rather than for philosophical abstractions or hypothetical responses. To assess your problem-solving, knowledge-management, and strategic-planning skills, employers want to know what you actually did, both individually and in teamwork.

The employer's objective is to collect a lot of data about you on a range of variables in order to compare you with other candidates.

You can help manage the interview by having an outstanding, complete, and detailed resume from which the employer can ask you questions. Know every detail on your resume thoroughly.

Because, you can take a leadership role and control the content of the interview by your chosen responses, have a mental agenda of topics and examples you want to cover with the employer, including your career goals. Prepare concise "sound bites" that will become the essence of your answers.

You want the interviewer to know not only that you have the requisite skills for the job but also that you will be a likable, competent professional. Practice responding to questions naturally and authentically; memorizing complete answers will make you sound stilted and insincere.

Employers want to know what you did, why you made certain decisions, how you reacted, and what were the results of your actions.

Their questions explore the situations and circumstances of your experiences, as well as specific tasks and responsibilities and resulting achievements; all of your responses demand precise, relevant examples. Be prepared for the interviewer to ask for examples of negative experiences and how you responded.

Interviewers generally design the interview to go deeper and deeper into your experiences in order to extract the essence of your talent, skills, and personal characteristics. In these moments, keep to your interview agenda, making certain the key points you want to emphasize to this company are woven through your answers. Be able to illustrate any point with a series of explanatory and relevant examples.

Before you respond, you want to understand exactly what question the interviewer poses and why; don't be afraid to ask for clarification if necessary. Think out your response: reflecting for a short time can leave a positive impression. Your answer should give enough information to satisfy the employer, without rambling or over-explaining; two minutes or less for your response is adequate and appropriate.

The first question of the interview will probably be, "Tell me about yourself," and the final question might be, "Why should I hire you?" The basic strategy of a profitable interview is to prove exactly that you fit the job, that you can do the job, and that you will add value to the organization.

Show your pride in your strengths and accomplishments and demonstrate your usefulness to the employer. Be yourself at your best!

Your goal for each interview is to reach the next step in the process until you have an offer.

### **INTERVIEWING SUGGESTIONS**

Communication is a learned skill, a talent garnered through work and practice. Your body language, your voice, and your words deliver your message, so pay attention to your posture and movements of your head, your arms and hands, and your legs and feet.

Practicing your listening and speaking skills, as well as relaxation techniques, will be of great benefit in giving you self-confidence, reducing anxiety, and focusing your thoughts.

Develop an interviewing partnership with a fellow student or colleague, so you can correct destructive behaviors and in praising strengths.

First impressions are important:

- ♦ Dress appropriately for the culture you are entering. Be professional and tasteful in your dress and jewelry; err on the conservative side.
- ♦ Be meticulous in personal grooming, leaving off perfume or after-shave lotion.
- ♦ Be early, relax enough to appear calm, and mentally walk through a successful interview.
- ♦ Turn off your cell phone.
- ♦ Know the interviewer's name and pronunciation.

- ♦ Step forward, make and maintain eye contact, smile, offer a firm, full-handed, “web-to-web” handshake, and identify yourself enthusiastically.
- ♦ Be courteous, tactful, polite, and persuasive.
- ♦ Expect the recruiter to orient you to the interview format and to make rapport-building small talk.
- ♦ Be attentive and give the interviewer a chance to tell you about the ideal candidate so you can tailor your responses.
- ♦ Reflect, in your facial expressions and body language, an active listening style, the most important business communication skill.
- ♦ Convey energy in your voice and let your words emerge in a natural, conversational style.
- ♦ Pay attention to your nervous habits: eliminate hair-tugging, knuckle-cracking, knee-bouncing, fidgeting, and looking at your watch.
- ♦ Answer questions honestly, thoroughly, and succinctly, in a well-organized and grammatical framework.
- ♦ Show an easy sense of humor.
- ♦ Maintain a steady level of energy, whether during a half-hour-screening interview or a full-day schedule.
- ♦ Try to ascertain where you stand before you finish.
- ♦ State your interest in the company and job enthusiastically and sincerely at interview’s end.

Although the interviewer cannot ask questions about certain subjects, you can volunteer this information:

- ♦ Marital status and children under 18
- ♦ National origin
- ♦ General military service other than US
- ♦ Lowest salary you will accept
- ♦ Religious affiliation
- ♦ Arrest record

Make sure you have questions ready when the interviewer asks if you have any questions. Employers use this part of the interview to assess your intelligence and competence and to distinguish between candidates on the quality of their questions.

Be strategic. Watch the clock and the interviewer’s body language to gauge what questions to ask.

Your questions should prove that you already have knowledge of the industry, as well as an understanding of the company culture, philosophy, goals, problems, and needs. Formulate questions to ask the interviewers as you conduct your initial pre-interview research.

What do you need to know to assess whether the job is the right one for you? Show your interest in the big picture and the future of the organization, rather than asking for information you could have gathered elsewhere.

At the close of any interview if you are interested in the job, say so, and always be friendly and courteous. Use this opportunity to sell yourself!

Thank the interviewer for the session with a smile, eye contact, and a firm handshake. Ask about the timeframe and process of decision-making.

Get business cards of anyone you spoke with at length to use immediately for thank-you letters; you will need to write every principal interviewer a fresh, individual letter.

As soon as you can, for inclusion in your letters, jot down your interview impressions, questions to which you want to improve your responses, and any information which can add up to a good case for hiring you! Then write and mail your thank-you letter within 24-48 hours.

### **INTERVIEWING TABOOS**

You should be aware of negative interviewing behaviors which can get you into trouble, and you should know that the interviewing world is small and that employers often compare notes:

- ♦ Forgetting to research the industry, company, or job
- ♦ Being conceited or overaggressive
- ♦ Being evasive or dishonest with questions
- ♦ Speaking negatively about past employers or professors
- ♦ Showing a dislike for your school or your location
- ♦ Bragging about your connections
- ♦ Trying to control the interview
- ♦ Suggesting an unwillingness to start at the bottom
- ♦ Questioning salary and benefits too soon
- ♦ “Interviewing for practice”
- ♦ “Solving” a company’s problems in an overbearing manner
- ♦ Arriving too late, which includes the exact time of the interview
- ♦ Canceling an interview.

### **INTERVIEW ANALYSIS AND FOLLOW-UP**

Spending a few minutes evaluating your personal performance and dissecting the company’s approach to the interview will be helpful to improving each succeeding interaction with employers.

- ♦ What areas of your background, education, and experience seemed to interest the interviewer?
- ♦ What do you think were your strengths and weaknesses from the interviewer’s perspective?
- ♦ What questions were easiest for you or caused you the most difficulty?
- ♦ On which specific skills, personality characteristics, and experience did the employer focus?
- ♦ What would you do differently if you could begin this interview over?

- ♦ What specific changes will you make before the next interview?
- ♦ Do you need to provide the employer with additional paperwork like transcripts and references?
- ♦ What is the next step in the process? When will the employer contact you next?

Have your thank-you letter in the mail within 24-48 hours to everyone with whom you interviewed who is a key decision-maker. Make sure you correct any misconceptions and reinforce your selling points.

If the employer-stated, next-step time-period passes without company contact, you may then call. Ask the status of the search process and of your candidacy. Make sure the employer has received all the requested information and ask if further material is necessary.

When an employer calls you with an offer, acknowledge your understanding of the details even if you are not ready to make a decision. Find out the date by which you must give your answer. Do not accept the job until the offer is in writing and you are certain of your choice and of the compensation packet.

If you have other companies in which you are still interested, tell the employer making the offer that you are in the midst of your search and you would like an extension of your response time. Most employers will try to work with you but often have their own deadlines with which to contend, so be ready to hear a final offer and to make your decision. If you do get some leeway, try to negotiate with the other companies about their decision-making timelines, so you can reach an intelligent, satisfactory conclusion

A job offer is official only when put in writing. Whether you accept or decline, your response must also be written. Immediately, upon acceptance of a position, you should notify all other companies with which you are actively interviewing that you have taken a job; your letter should be cordial and not burn any bridges. Failure to stop the interviewing process at this point is unprofessional and unethical.

## **DEALING WITH REJECTION**

No matter what your qualifications, especially in the current economy, most likely you will not receive a job offer for every interview. Rejections happen to everyone.

The job search is difficult, complicated, and personal; however, becoming depressed or angry will hurt only you. Preparing for this inevitability will make your job search more realistic and soften the blow to your ego.

Write to the company expressing your appreciation for being considered in the candidate pool. Not only are you showing professional courtesy, but also, by proving your interest and your good manners, you might get a call back at another time.

Since you qualified for the interview, the employer saw potential in you. You may ask the interviewer for suggestions to strengthen your interviewing skills, but for legal reasons, the employer might not be able to respond.

Also, you may ask for referrals to individuals or companies who may be interested in your combination of experience and education.

In any case, your maintaining a positive attitude and senses of humor and perspective will pay off, allowing you to improve, to go forward, and, ultimately, to find a job with which you are compatible and satisfied.