

Interviewing for Success

Hopefully, your great resume and polite follow-up have resulted in an invitation for an interview for that job you really want. Actually, even if it isn't your dream job, you may want to go through an interview to brush up your skills and get into practice. Interviewing is an art and if you haven't been job searching for awhile, you will feel, and look, rusty.

Here are a few preliminary tips:

- Make sure you have verified the time and location, and know how to get to the spot. If you have to do a trial run to see how long it takes to get there, do it. **You cannot be late for an interview!**
- Dress appropriately. These days almost anything goes but a few basic ideas- clean clothes, clean hair and nails, brush your teeth, shine your shoes. Keep jewelry to a minimum, don't flash cleavage, keep the cologne to the bare minimum, wear clothes that are appropriate for an office.
- Bring copies of your resume with you. Have references available in case you are asked for them. Have a pad and paper for your own notes. If you have identified some questions of your own beforehand, bring those- it shows you have prepared.
- Greet everyone in a friendly way, shake hands, make eye contact. Accept coffee or water if offered, don't be too familiar with people but don't be too cold either.
- Don't worry if you are nervous- most people recognize interviews are stressful events and will give you the benefit of the doubt, but try to relax, be yourself and promote yourself.
- Exhibit a positive attitude, enthusiasm and motivation. Sit up straight in chairs, keep nervous mannerisms to the minimum, look engaged.

Understand what employers are, and are not, looking for

In general, employers use interviews to determine potential weaknesses as well as potential strengths.

Some worrisome potential weaknesses include:

- You are incompetent, will not learn the job easily, you will not become productive
- You won't take your work responsibilities seriously and others will have to carry your weight
- You will only give the minimum effort and do that only when nudged
- You'll abuse sick leave and have general attendance and tardiness problems
- You will complain all the time, be a negative influence, be rude, not be a team player

- You will potentially be an embarrassment to the employer/company
- You will steal, embezzle or lie

To counteract these fears, you must demonstrate the strengths the employer is looking for:

- That you will be able to perform the job at top level- that is, you have the skills and experience necessary to do the job.
- That you will be a positive influence, team player and enthusiastic
- That you work hard, show up regularly and on time and go above and beyond the call of duty when necessary
- That you can conduct yourself in an appropriate manner
- That you know how to look appropriate for the job
- That you are honest and trustworthy

Selling Yourself

Most of us are not really good at promoting ourselves, because it can be viewed as being conceited, bragging etc. But in a job interview, you have to sell yourself in a low-key but positive and memorable way.

- Be prepared to list your attributes, for example “I’m really good at getting people to work together”, “I always complete assignments on time”, “I usually come up with creative ways to solve problems” AND HAVE EXAMPLES READY if asked.
- Know what’s in your resume and be prepared to expand upon it; know what your response will be to questions about gaps in your job record, why you moved from job to job so much, what about working for unions, why you are looking for a job now etc
- Know enough about the job and company so that you can identify ways you can contribute. “I know you are looking to increase member participation in program x and here’s how I could help with that”, “Your company has a great reputation with community involvement and I would bring xyz abilities to add to this effort”
- While promoting yourself, also promote the “we” you were part of that accomplished goals in past jobs. Giving credit to others is a positive trait.
- Practice stating these sorts of positive things so that you can tick them off in 30 seconds to 2 minutes. DON’T OVERTALK.
- Try to turn possible negative questions into positive answers- for example, if asked “What are your weaknesses?” you could state that you are a workaholic and can’t go home till you are sure all your work is complete, rather than actually identifying a weakness like “I hate paperwork”
- If you don’t know the answer to a question, state that you don’t really know rather than try to make up an answer that will not sound good
- Be prepared for employers to give you scenarios and ask how you would handle a given situation

- NEVER BADMOUTH PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS!! The interviewer will think that is what you will do him/her if hired, and it reflects badly on you.
- Indicate that you are very interested in the position, that you feel you have the skills and abilities to do the job well and you are hopeful you will hear from them soon.
- Be prepared to ask some questions of your own- it shows the employer you are thoughtful and serious about your employment- but don't overdo it- they may have other interviewees scheduled and be time-limited. After they seem to be finished with you, tell them you have a few questions of your own and is there time?
 1. Is this a new position or would I be filling a vacancy?
 2. What particular duties do you feel are the most important in this job?
 3. What does initial orientation look like?
 4. How soon are you looking to fill the position? What is the process for doing so?
 5. Who would I be reporting to?
 6. How many other people would I be working with and what sorts of jobs are they doing?
 7. What are the chances for advancement in this company?

Don't ask about salary and benefits at this point.

Ending the Interview

Thank everyone. Indicate once again you are very excited about the possibility of winning the job and making a positive contribution to the company. Shake hands with all and be cordial despite how the interview may have gone. Ask how long before you can expect to hear their decision.

When to Talk About Salary

Some employers may raise this subject themselves in the initial interview, but if not, you should not talk about salary until you have been offered a position. You want the employer to think you are more interested in the job, the company and all the wonderful work you would be doing for them than in the pay and benefits.

For some positions, the employer may be interested in what salary you are looking for. This is generally for higher level positions, and in firms where salary amounts may not be set the way they are in shops with union contracts. Try never to give a figure first yourself, but if pressed, give a salary range, perhaps a few thousand above and below your current salary. Don't undersell yourself and don't be afraid to indicate what you need and what you feel your skills and abilities are worth.

Post Interview Activities

- Send a thank you note to the main interviewer, answer any questions that may have arisen during the interview, re-iterate your interest in the job and highlight again one or two of your qualifications based on what seemed important to them during the interview. Again, NO TYPOS OR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS!
- Consider following up with a phone call to the main interviewer a few days after that. Don't hound but you do want to remind the interviewer of your interest in the position.
- Immediately after the interview, do a review and evaluation of your performance- how could you have answered that question better? What skills or experience did I forget to mention? Did I make good eye contact and feel I was effective? The way to improve is to practice, identify areas for improvement and keep going

Getting your foot in the door for an interview is a real opportunity- learn how to make the most of it and land the job you really want.

Things employers shouldn't ask

In general, employers are prohibited by law from asking your age, your sexual orientation, your party affiliation, whether you think child care (particularly for women job seekers) will interfere with your work, or similar invasive, personal questions.

If asked these questions, try to deflect the situation by stating something like "well, I really don't believe that would be relevant to this position" or "those are personal questions which I feel don't impact my ability to do this job". Telling the employer he/she is asking an illegal question will probably mean you won't get the job!