Successful Interviewing

The person who gets hired is not necessarily the best one for the job, but the one who knows how to get hired. Finding a job is an art that takes time, commitment, and a lot of practice. The interview is a very significant part of the process. It's a short period of time that demands much preparation. **This guide will help you prepare for and master the art of the interview.**

**BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

**KNOW YOURSELF**
Develop a good understanding of your education, experience, skills, interests, values, abilities, strengths and weaknesses. Be able to translate your goals and abilities and show how they would be an asset to the company with which you are interviewing. Go through the attached questions and be able to answer each one concisely and clearly. Think of stories and examples that relate to each question.

**KNOW THE ORGANIZATION AND THE POSITION**
Employers want to know what you can do for them. They have needs and it is your job to figure out and explain how you can meet those needs. This can be accomplished by knowing everything you can about the organization before the interview. Know the company mission statement, products, training programs, history, current status, future direction, goals, and finances. You can learn this information in a variety of ways.

1. *Talk to people in the field or company.* Use your network of contacts and/or the career center to help identify people in your field of interest. Then, review our handout on informational interviewing to assist you in setting up and conducting informational interviews.

2. *Research the company.* Make sure you thoroughly read through the company’s website, recruiting brochures, annual reports and recent articles about the company and its industry. Refer to the CDC website for helpful tips on industry and company research.

**PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**
Often, people get nervous and anxious about interviews. The best way to relieve some of that anxiety is to practice the interviewing process. Get a friend to help or contact the CDC to set up a mock interview. Practice answering common interview questions (attached) as well as asking the interviewer questions. Remember, employers want to know who you are and what you can do for them. Attach short, relevant stories to your answers to convey your value and make yourself memorable.

**KNOW THE TIME AND PLACE**
Be VERY sure of your appointment time and place. Do not hesitate to call and double-check. Also, feel free to call for directions and instructions about parking. Allow enough time for bad traffic - that is not considered a legitimate excuse for lateness. Know the name of the person you will be talking to and be able to spell and pronounce it correctly.

**DRESS APPROPRIATELY**
You never get a second chance to make a first impression! Therefore, always make sure you are dressed appropriately for the field you are entering. Many industries have moved to “business casual,” but that still means “business.” Always err on the side of being over-dressed, wear a suit if you’re in doubt. You should always look polished and professional!

**WHAT TO BRING**
Bring copies of your resume, a list of references (name, title, company, address, phone, email and the reference’s relationship to you) and any other documents requested by the employer (transcripts, applications). Think about bringing a portfolio to your interview. Portfolios are an excellent way to show samples of your work and other relevant information during an interview. (See our handout out on developing and using portfolios) Organize papers and notes in a nice folder or briefcase. Include a pad of paper and pen to take notes.
THE INTERVIEW

SHOWTIME
The moment you walk through the company door your behavior and manners are noticed. Make sure you are friendly and courteous to EVERYONE. Make eye contact, smile, and give a firm handshake to those you meet. When introducing yourself, say your first and last name. Watch for the interviewer’s cues for things like where you should sit, the pace of the conversation, etc. Show them your personality. Hiring is extremely subjective and influenced by how well the employer believes you will fit with the team. Therefore, let the sparkling parts of your personality shine.

LISTEN ATTENTIVELY
Maintain good eye contact and nod your head appropriately. Sit slightly leaning forward with your arms unfolded. Avoid distracting hand movements and squirming in your chair. Don’t interrupt or contradict the interviewer. Always be friendly, confident, enthusiastic and positive.

ANSWER THE QUESTIONS
When answering questions be concise and to the point. Make sure you answer the question that was asked. Demonstrate knowledge of yourself, the employer, and the position. Use examples or stories when appropriate. A good formula to follow is state the skill you have, an example of a time you used the skill successfully, and finally how the skill might benefit the employer.

ASK QUESTIONS
Prepare a list of questions to ask the employer at the end of the interview to show you have done your homework and are truly interested in the job. Don’t ask any questions you could have answered through a little research. This is a great time to ask about “next steps.” Find out what the company does after this interview and a possible time frame.

GRACEFULLY CLOSE
Leaving a good impression is just as important as the first impression. Stand up and initiate a handshake. Again, maintain eye contact and thank the interviewer for his/her time. Explain that you look forward to hearing from them and reiterate your interest in the position.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

EVALUATE
Make each interview a learning experience. After the interview evaluate what you did well and what you need to improve.

SEND A THANK YOU NOTE
Within 24-48 hours of the interview, write a typed thank you note on stationery that matches your resume and cover letter. Keep it brief and sincere (see sample in the CDC).

INQUIRE
If you have not heard back in a few weeks, or you have an alternative decision to make, it is perfectly correct to call and inquire.

SECOND INTERVIEW
Generally after a brief first interview, those screened will have a second interview that is a half or full day. You will usually meet with a variety of people with whom you could be working. They usually do not have the power to hire you, but their input is considered. The time tends to be less formal, more relaxed, but remain on your toes! Only 60% of those invited to a second interview are hired. Arrangements can be more complex so be sure you understand exactly what you need to know. If questions arise, call the person who invited you for the interview.
WHAT THE INTERVIEWER IS LOOKING FOR

The interviewer is evaluating you against criteria that have been established for the position you have applied for. These are not usually as concrete as it might appear. Personal qualities can be more important than specific skills. The College Placement Council found these are the traits employers frequently seek in candidates:

1. **Ability to Communicate** Do you have the ability to organize your thoughts and ideas effectively? Can you express them clearly when speaking or writing? Can you present your ideas to others in a persuasive way?

2. **Intelligence** Do you have the ability to understand the job assignment? Learn the details of operation? Contribute original ideas to your work?

3. **Self-Confidence** Do you demonstrate a sense of maturity that enables you to deal positively and effectively with situations and people?

4. **Willingness to Accept Responsibility** Are you someone who recognizes what needs to be done and is willing to do it?

5. **Initiative** Do you have the ability to identify the purpose for work and take action?

6. **Leadership** Can you guide and direct others to obtain the recognized objectives?

7. **Energy Level** Do you demonstrate a forcefulness and capacity to make things move ahead? Can you maintain your work effort at an above-average rate?

8. **Imagination** Can you confront and deal with problems that may not have standard solutions?

9. **Interpersonal Skills** Can you bring out the best efforts of individuals so they become effective, enthusiastic members of a team?

10. **Flexibility** Are you capable of changing and being receptive to new situations and ideas?

11. **Self-Knowledge** Can you realistically assess your own capabilities? See yourself as others see you? Clearly recognize your strengths and weaknesses?

12. **Ability to Handle Conflict** Can you successfully contend with stress situations?

13. **Competitiveness** Do you have the capacity to complete with others and the willingness to be measured by your performance in relation to that of others?

14. **Goal Achievement** Do you have the ability to identify and work toward specific goals? Do such goals challenge your abilities?

15. **Vocational Skills** Do you possess the positive combination of education and skills required for the position you are seeking?

16. **Direction** Have you defined your basic personal needs? Have you determined what type of position will satisfy your knowledge, skills, and goals?

MORE TIPS (From *Getting Hired* by Edward J Rogers)

Remain calm. A relaxed manner will produce a comfortable interview. Exceptionally restrained or controlled behavior can negatively influence the interviewer's manner of interviewing.

Memorize your resume. Be prepared to talk about any inconsistency in your resume.
Remember the importance of body language. How you sit communicates interest. Sit-up straight in your chair, don't slouch or appear bored. Maintain good eye contact.

Speak clearly. Follow the interviewer's lead, answering each question fully and completely. If the question isn't clear, ask for clarification.

When practical, elaborate on your responses. Give the interviewer some indication of what you know and how you think. Remember, this is your opportunity to sell yourself.

Don't hesitate to be the initiator. Introduce information you think is important. Without boasting, try to sound confident and capable of doing the work.

Focus consistently on positive, strong points. If necessary, explain negative points, but don't make excuses and don't bluff. Be honest.

Be prepared with a few pertinent questions relating to the position and organization. Example: type of training, growth plans, relocation policies, and opportunity for advancement.

**SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

1. Discuss a major conflict and how you handled it?
2. Why are you interested in this organization?
3. How did you choose your major and university?
4. Tell me about yourself? How would you describe yourself?
5. What are your greatest strengths? What are your chief weaknesses?
6. In what school activities have you participated? Which did you enjoy the most?
7. What qualifications do you have that you feel will lead to your success?
8. What have you learned from jobs in the past?
9. Are you willing to travel? Are you willing to work overtime? Are you willing to relocate?
10. What have you done that shows initiative and willingness to work?
11. What kinds of books have you read?
12. Do you have plans for graduate study?
13. Discuss a special project you completed?
14. What can you contribute to this job if you were hired?
15. Tell me about your last job – What did you do? What was your boss like?
16. What do you do in your spare time?
17. What are your long-range objectives and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
18. What non work-related goal have you established for yourself for the next five years?
19. What major problems have you encountered and how did you deal with them?
20. What qualities would you like in a supervisor? Are there qualities you don’t like?
21. How do you work under pressure?
22. How do others describe you?
23. What three factors are most important to you in your job?
24. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable working?
25. When you have been the most productive, what were your motivations?
26. Why should I hire you?
27. What leadership roles have you been involved in?
28. Discuss a situation in which you influenced someone or a group.
29. If you ran this company, what would you do differently?
30. Cite an example where you faced open opposition from a group and won.
31. Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?
32. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
33. How did previous employers treat you?