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# INTERVIEWING

# JOB INTERVIEWS

Mastering the skill of interviewing can boost your income, raise your level of self-esteem, and prepare you for employment opportunities.

No matter how impressive your qualifications or superior your resume, your performance during an employment interview determines whether you win a job offer.

Are you contemplating a job interview role? Then realize interviewing for a job requires **solid preparation**. Your efforts to analyze your qualifications, write a resume, reply to job ads, and network among friends and acquaintances are pointless if you muff your lines during an interview.

Remember exactly what you are doing in a job interview, giving a performance to market yourself. You are in the spotlight with very attentive eyes studying your every move.

This booklet reveals the strategies you can use to captivate employers.

Excerpts are taken from **Job Interviews - How to Win the Offer**, by Joyce Lain Kennedy, Sun Features, Inc.).

## **UNDERSTAND THE INTERVIEW**

Many applicants get poor reviews in job interviews because they have a fundamental misunderstanding of the event. The dynamics of the interviewer's role is that of buyer. A misconception of reality leads some job seekers to bring up employee needs and concerns such as salary, company leave policies, and benefits before the employer has offered to hire them. Before you can deal with your personal agenda, you must receive a job offer.

After the offer is made, however, the dynamics change in your favor. Interviewing roles are switched; the employer is selling and you are buying. You are asking the questions, the company is answering them.

Giving a rave performance is not quite as tough as it may seem at first glance. You need to be aware of the structure of the organization and the types of interviews to be your best.

## INTERVIEW PHASES

Each job interview usually has four phases, although the last three often overlap.

- 1) **Establishing rapport** - the first few minutes of small talk that both sides use to establish contact, relax and decide if they are compatible.
- 2) **Information gathering** - the interviewer asks questions to determine the job seeker's qualifications and invites questions in return.
- 3) **Selling benefits** - the interviewee offers reasons why the company should make an offer, and the interviewer explains why the company is a great place to work.
- 4) **Asking for action** - the job seeker asks for an immediate offer, or knowledge of the next step in the hiring process, or another interview, or referral to another potential employer. The interviewer asks for time to make a decision, or the interviewee to take the job, or the job seeker to look elsewhere.

## SCREENING AND SELECTION INTERVIEWS

Do you know the difference between a screening and a selection interview?

In large organizations, interviewing is usually a two-stage process. A personnel specialist screens out all applicants except the best-qualified. Candidates are passed to a selector who has hiring authority, usually a line manager. (In most cases there will be no separate screening interview because the organization isn't large enough to operate a personnel or human relations department.)

Screeners are more experienced interviewers than selectors. They're experts at finding out what's wrong with you. Screeners cannot hire, but they can reject. The screener has one basic responsibility before putting you on the approved list and waiving you to the next interviewer: to be sure you qualify. This is done by validating your experience and education - by checking the facts of your record.

If you don't check out, you are supposed to be screened out; the selector assumes you are qualified or you wouldn't have been passed along.

Suppose you are hired but fail to live up to expectations. Is the screener in trouble? NO. The selector--the hiring manager--made the call. The screener merely identified you as matching the job's description. You were one among several candidates. Success in screening depends not so much on whom the screener includes in a pool of approved candidates, but who the screener leaves out.

*Never answer questions that are not asked.* If your credentials are good and you are sufficiently temperate, you'll probably be sent to the appropriate hiring manager.

Some good advice:

- Don't try to be funny.
- Don't lie.
- Don't blurt out the truth.

## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

American organizations, searching for excellence or survival, are trying to hire top-of-the-line employees, particularly in managerial and professional positions. Some organizations are deadly afraid of hiring even one wrong candidate. To make the *right hires*, many companies are stretching out and toughening up the interview process. Here are some formats:

- **One-On-One Interview.** Most familiar of all, this format is more commonly used in smaller, rather than larger businesses when recruiting managers, or in any size business when recruiting hourly or office workers. It usually is conducted by the hiring manager or the manager's designee. *Upside:* You can win the job with one great performance. *Downside:* A single negative judgment can sink your chances.
- **Serial Interview** You typically are passed from screener to line manager; the recommendation is to use your screening interview behavior on all you meet except those with whom you would work. By the time you get to the hiring manager, your technical ability to do the job is presumably verified and the decision maker is more interested in the chemistry of how you'll fit in. Being passed through the system is favorable for your chances of getting an offer.
- **Collective Interview.** You meet with several members of an interview team. The interview may be structured with each member of the team given a specific area to cover, or restructured with members free to probe any areas of the candidate's background they wish.

The team may conduct a group interview, firing a barrage of questions. An undisciplined team's concurrent questioning can turn chaotic and make it difficult to remember who asked what. Carry a notebook and when two questions fly at once, write them down as you explain that you don't want to omit responding to anyone's important concern.

When the collective interview takes the serial form in which you are interviewed by one person after another, be consistent in your answers. You must not tell a rainbow of

stories about the same black-and-white topics. When interview team members later compare notes, they should be discussing the same person.

- **Lunch Interview.** Unless you are a teetotaler, order a spritzer (wine and soda), a good middle-of-the-road drink. If you don't drink alcohol, a casual refusal of "not today" will suffice. Avoid ordering a dish more expensive than the interviewer's. If you're maneuvered into ordering first, aim for a bit above the mid-range price, which conveys that you value yourself as being above average but practical. In any case, steer clear of messy food. The interviewer pays.
- **Telephone Interviews.** The telephone interview is used as a screening technique to save travel costs for out-of-town candidates, or to conserve the interviewer's time by quickly eliminating modestly-qualified people.

Telephone talks may last an hour. Have paper and pen ready for notes and comments, as well as questions of your own. If, after a week, you don't receive an invitation to drop by, call the interviewer and ask how the search is progressing.

Never treat telephone interviews as though they are inconsequential. Prime yourself for a telephone talk with the same attention to detail that you commit to a personal visit. (*Remember to put sunshine in your voice!*)

- **Flyback Interview.** When an employer spends the money to fly you in, the job is yours to lose. They're interested! On flybacks, fully understand the itinerary details: date, time, travel mechanics and how expenses will be handled. The employer should provide your airline ticket in advance and arrange to accept billing for your hotel stay. You should have virtually no expenditures connected with the trip.

If you don't receive a letter confirming arrangements, write one. Just because you're an out-of-towner doesn't mean you should answer yes or no to a job offer on the spot. Go home and think it over. Never change locales without a written offer letter describing pay, benefits, and relocation package.

- **Video Interview.** Some headhunters set up camcorders and tape you for employers who are out of town or who wish to see a group of talent. Treat this examination as though it were a one-on-one interview. When videophones become widespread, electronic meetings will grow along with technology.
- **On-Campus Interview.** Recruiters want you to possess good communication skills, initiative, leadership, maturity, flexibility and adaptability - plus a snappy appearance. As a rule, the corporate recruiters who travel from college to college are conducting screening interviews. Be ready with good answers to tough questions about your education.

- **Job-Fair Interview.** Focusing on specific labor markets such as technical workers, new graduates, women, or the unemployed, job fair interviews may be brief but significant encounters in which you basically hand over documents: either a summary sheet of your qualifications or a longer resume. Carry multiple copies of both types of documents.

Your appearance should be business-ready and you should be well prepared to succinctly summarize your benefits and answer questions pertaining to your interests, goals, experience and security clearance, if any.

It's wise to collect literature on companies the first day of the job fair; study it overnight. On the second day, offer your summary sheet to recruiters and ask if they have positions appropriate for your background. Take good notes.

Some job fair recruiters will ask you to step into an interviewing room if they think you're a hot candidate. Others will promise to contact you later. Follow up within ten days with any recruiter who is encouraging but vague.

- **Assessment Process.** This is part test, part interview. On the theory that interviews alone do not adequately predict success on the job, some companies ask candidates, often managerial, to perform mock work exercises. Ask the human resources department representative who invites you to be assessed for a detailed outline of how it will work.

## **INTERVIEWING STYLES**

- **Stress Interview.** Remain calm. Stress interviews occur as the interviewer fires statements and questions with every statement made by the interviewee. Don't get rattled. Don't fight back. Do think twice before investing your precious career years with an organization which resorts to stress interviews.
- **Directive Interview.** The interviewer maintains complete control and walks you through the talk to uncover what the interviewer wants to know.
- **Patterned Interview.** Similar to the directive interview, the patterned interview works from a written list of questions asked of all candidates and writes down your answers. If you are a "mainstream" job seeker (continuous upward record of relevant experience and under 50), you can comfortably allow yourself to be towed in directive and patterned interviews.

Where there are obstacles--age, employment gaps, experience that doesn't seem to fit the job--be ready to jump in with selling points that compensate for those obstacles.

- **Nondirective Interview.** Here, you lead the discussion. The best way to be ready for this approach is to always carry agenda cards with a list of your qualifications and a list of questions about the company.

## **CONCEPTS TO GET YOU HIRED**

- **Verify early in the interview what the hiring organization wants and how you can deliver it.**

Ask the interviewer to describe the scope of the position and the qualifications of the ideal person for it. Listen carefully. Take notes. Take every opportunity to remind the interviewer of the link-up between your qualifications and the stated ideal person.

- **Master a two-minute commercial response to "Tell me about yourself."**

Memorize a short description of your background and why you're right for the job.

Make yourself a checklist to include:

- Your name and geographic origins.
- The name of the person who referred you, if any.
- Your experience and areas of expertise.
- Your education and/or training.
- One or two major achievements.
- Your objective and how it fits the job.

Memorizing responses can be risky if you sound preprogrammed. The need to smoothly articulate who you are is important here.

- **Win the hiring manager's regard and you're likely to get the offer even if you're shy a few technical qualifications.**

The interview is not the sole determinant for winning the job offer. You must be able to do the job plus you must have evidence of relevant experience, as well as out-class the other candidates. Most experts believe that more people lose job offers for personality factors than for lack of capability. How do you gain the interviewer's regard? Personality factors include image, speech mannerisms, non-verbal communications, life values, chemistry, and interpersonal vibrations.

- **Make a favorable impression during the nonforgiving first minutes.**

Given the interviewer's tendency to make an early decision, spend the first five minutes selling yourself with an air of certainty that the position is right for you. Your decision comes after the offer. There's a good chance the hiring decision will be made in as few as four or five minutes. At the outside, most interviewers make up their minds in the first 15 minutes, research shows.

- **Never verbally wrestle the employer for control of the interview.**

Think balance. Think give and take. Be alert to conversational openings in which you can move in and sell your strengths, but never make the mistake of trying to lead an interviewer around by the nose. The interviewer won't be like you. Satisfy the interviewer's needs, then satisfy yours.

- **Hiring managers dislike interviewing.**

From supervisors to top executives, hiring managers tend to see interviews as encroachments on their already busy schedules. Few are trained to extract private information and, not feeling confident about the task, don't rush to it with enthusiasm.

- **Don't talk money until you've been offered a job.**

When the salary question comes up at the beginning of an interview, say money isn't your most important consideration--it shouldn't be at this stage--and you don't anticipate a problem with fitting into the interviewer's salary structure. Reveal NO figures, past or desired. Keep turning the conversation back to what you can do for an interviewer. Only when you know the scope of the position and they want you, are you in position to bargain in your best interest.

- **Anticipate interview pitfalls.**

Anticipate how you will handle sticky obstacles--such as you've been fired or you have a hunch your boss will condemn your work record.

Lies are counterproductive--even if you aren't found out, you worry you will be. Sell your strong points and deflect weak ones. Interviewees sometimes lie when caught off guard. As long as you clearly understand what you have done well, and why you've done it well, you're less likely to discover problems.

Avoid false modesty. One of a candidate's most perplexing tasks is overcoming natural modesty and learning to boast of relevant achievements without appearing to be a braggart. First, recognize you must tell the interviewer how suited you are for the position. In doing so, a certain amount of self promotion is unavoidable.

Silence. When silence occurs, sit and smile pleasantly or raise another issue dramatizing your strengths and the benefit you can offer the company. (Bear in mind that the silence technique is used by some interviewers to extract information that can't be asked directly.)

## **RESEARCH BEFORE THE INTERVIEW**

Research the hiring organization. Research is the tool you'll use to show the good fit between your qualifications and the job's requirements.

The job hunt research is a lot of work. Many, perhaps, won't be bothering to do it. It's your choice. But the harder you are to place--or the more responsible the job--the greater amount of research you must do.

On initial contact with a company representative, ask about the qualifications being sought and which ones are key. Explain that you want to be sure you have the skill package to make it worth the employer's time to speak further with you. Ask about major responsibilities, technical problems to be solved and objectives for the position.

Know the current industry problems, the company's competitors, and priorities. At minimum, ask among your friends until you find someone who knows the company. If an employment agency, consultant, executive recruiter, or friend arranged the interview, start there.

When you can't find anyone who knows about the company in question, try contacting the appropriate trade association or professional society. If it's a large company, contact the communications office and ask for annual reports, recruiting brochures, and newspaper stories about the company.

Other places to look for annual reports and collateral materials are business libraries, stock brokerages, and college career services offices.

If you don't set yourself up as a know-it-all, the research will organize your mind and help you make a good impression.

Research the industry, research the going rate of salary for the position and research other employees, especially your prospective boss.

Winning the job interview doesn't happen overnight. What you do in advance is so important--maybe more important-- as what happens during your interview.

## **POLISH YOUR APPEARANCE DRESS FOR SUCCESS**

Companies are made of people working as a group to accomplish common organizational goals. If your clothing or grooming sends a message that you are apart from them, you can create an immediate, negative, non-team player image.

- Dress to fit the job. Before tackling the job interview, watch people at the company coming and going to work. Dress a bit better for the interview.
- Most people do best by projecting a conservative, businesslike image. Others-- artists and writers, for example-- may fit in better with potential associates when dressed in casual garb.
- The basics have not changed. For women: NO make-up on the collar line, NO chipped polish, and NO hosiery runs.
- For men: a fresh shave, NO sagging coat lining, NO bulge in pockets and wear over-the-calf dark socks.
- For both men and women: clean, under control hair; deodorant; limited, tailored jewelry; light cologne, if any; absolutely NO gum chewing; NO smoking.

Dress for the role you want to play. A good image sets the stage--the interviewer likes you right away, assuming that if you excel in the image area, you excel in others.

## **QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED DURING THE EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW**

This information was condensed from a list compiled by *Frank S. Endicott, Director of Placement, Northwestern University.*

1. What are your future vocational plans? (You are expected to know what you want to do for at least the next three years. Don't try to wing this one!)
2. Why do you think you might like to work for this company?
3. What courses did you like best? Least? Why?
4. Why did you choose your particular field of work?
5. Do you feel that you have received a good general training?
6. What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you will be successful in your field?
7. Do you prefer any specific geographical location? Why?

8. Why did you decide to go to this particular college?
9. What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your chosen field?
10. Are you looking for a permanent or temporary job?
11. Have you ever had any difficulty getting along with fellow students and faculty?
12. What have you learned from some of the jobs you have held?
13. Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
14. Have you changed your major field of interest while in college? Why?
15. Do you feel you have done the best scholastic work in which you are capable?
16. What is your major weakness?
17. Do you like routine work?
18. Are you willing or able to relocate?
19. Do you have plans for further education?
20. What are your special abilities?
21. What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?

## **SELL YOURSELF--ASK QUESTIONS**

**Before the offer** - Sell yourself by asking questions that are work-focused, task-focused, function-focused. Ask about the position's duties and challenges. Ask how the position fits into the department and the department into the company. Here are some examples:

- Can you describe a typical day? Job description?
- Was the last person in this job promoted? What is the potential for promotion?
- Would you describe the atmosphere here as formal, traditional, or informal?
- Where is the company headed? Merger?
- What type of training would I receive?
- What resources should I have to do the job?
- How much travel, if any, is required? Relocation if promoted?
- To whom would I report?

**After the offer** - Now find out about compensation, health benefits, leave time, overtime, frequency of performance reviews and other personal items.

Before you sign off on the questions, you should know about the tasks you would do in the job, its career path, how your work will be evaluated and paid, about the organizational personality and whether the company is financially sound.

## **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

Always send a thank you letter. The best ones, more advanced than plain vanilla thank-you-for-the-time notes, communicate a sale point.

After each interview ask yourself what you can do to improve your performance. What areas do you need to work on?

Common reason why qualified candidates don't get job offers:

- Poor personal appearance.
- Little knowledge about job, company.
- Can't expand on resume data.
- Failure to ask good questions.
- Failure to sell accomplishments.
- Overbearing, boasting, know-it-all.

Always follow up with a phone call within two weeks of your interview. Never keep yourself, or the interviewer hanging - waiting for a decision. Always follow up.

## **WHAT DO COMPANIES EXPECT FROM YOUNG GRADUATES?**

What do managers and supervisors look for in prospective candidates? Ideal or successful graduates are practical and realistic. They readily align their personal attitudes and goals with those of the organization. They not only consider the immediate impact of the problems they tackle, but they assess their long-range implications for department operations and company fortunes. One study shows that managers and supervisors consider it important for employees to:

- Learn the organizational systems and policies quickly.
- Grasp what is to be done on the job and how it is to be done without having to be told.
- Find out what management's expectations are and what problems the company faces.
- Make the accomplishment of the company's purpose an overriding concern.
- Maintain a positive attitude toward the company's policies and operations.
- Be intent on demonstrating ability and usefulness to the company.
- Put aside undue concerns about promotions, salary increases, or changes in the system to suit personal preferences.

A study conducted by *Princeton Creative Research* yielded the following attributes considered most desirable for career success:

- Good grasp of fundamentals in the area of specialization.
- Up-to-date knowledge of related fields.
- Ability to solve complex problems.
- Good judgment and objectivity in approaching problems.

- Ability to think systematically in abstract concepts.
- Capability to choose the most efficient methods and the latest developments in the solution of problems.
- Ability to plan and organize work so that exact requirements and project are known before work is begun.
- Sufficient flexibility to anticipate and make provisions for meeting unforeseen difficulties and for checking the accuracy of data and methods used.
- Willingness to work under pressure and to produce outstanding results under adverse circumstances.
- Promptness in completing assignments.

## **WHAT DO PEOPLE WANT FROM THEIR JOBS?**

This scale has been given to thousands of workers around the country. In comparing related rankings of both employees and supervisors, the typical supervisory group is ranked in this order:

- High wages
- Job security
- Promotion in the company
- Good working conditions
- Interesting work
- Personal loyalty of supervisor
- Tactful discipline
- Full appreciation of work done
- Help on personal problems
- Job Fulfillment

However, when employees are given the same exercise and asked what affects their morale the most, their answers tend to follow this pattern:

- Full appreciation
- Feeling of being in on things
- Help on personal problems
- Job security
- High wages
- Interesting work
- Promotion in the company
- Personal loyalty of supervisor
- Good working conditions
- Tactful discipline

## **KEEP ON KEEPIN' ON**

Remember, there are NO absolutes in the job search because we humans are alike, yet different in our perceptions. Don't allow rejection to hang over your head like a black cloud wrecking your self-esteem.

- Prepare for rejection by realizing it happens to every human being at some time.
- Think positive thoughts.
- Stay energized, informed, and optimistic.

## **MOCK INTERVIEWS**

Make an appointment with a career counselor to schedule a "Mock Interview". Practicing your interviewing skills can make you feel more comfortable when you're involved in the real thing.

