

Coping With Interviews

1 Introduction

After coming through all the hurdles of the SELECTION PROCESS, you will eventually arrive at an interview. This is of course, a major obstacle for many job applicants. Although they may have the qualifications, experience and a proven track record, they may lose out to a candidate who 'interviews better.'

So what does 'interviewing better' actually mean? It comes down to the candidate being well prepared and confident. A candidate who can answer questions in a way which is acceptable (but not necessarily right) to the interviewer; someone who knows something about their potential employers business and the post they hope to fill.

These are really the basic components of any candidate who 'interviews well'. There are undoubtedly other aspects employers may look for in relation to specific posts - having their own ideas, articulate, thinking on their feet, aspects which will be related to the job and to the company's preference in employees.

The employer will also be looking to fill a post, which has a particular job specification - in other words personal aspects besides the experience, and qualifications that can be put down on paper. The interviewer will set out to ascertain that the candidate has these personal qualities, skills and abilities the company requires.

2 Preparation and Confidence

These two essential ingredients are interlinked. Good preparation instils confidence.

So the basic approach to an interview is to be well prepared. This means two things - preparing yourself practically for the interview and gathering knowledge and information you can draw on during the interview.

- * Be sure you know the time, date and location of the interview and name of interviewee where appropriate.
- * What facilities will be available, what about the interview environment?
- * Check out how you will get to the location, and when you need to set off to be there in good time - do a dummy run if necessary. Plan to get there no earlier than half an hour before the interview time, anticipate delays.
- * What would it be like to live there? Cost of living etc.
- * Have what you are going to wear ready in advance - everything down to your underwear.
- * Do not go to the interview laden down with baggage - psychological as well as physical. Take the bare minimum of belongings necessary. Concentrate on the interview at the interview - nothing else.
- * If you are asked to bring certificates, references etc, get them ready before the day.
- * Take your interview letter; know the interviewer's name.
- * On arrival ensure the receptionist knows you are there; visit the toilets to tidy up etc.

If you are well organised and have planned for the day your confidence will increase.

3 Preparing To Meet the Employer

The interview is a chance for you and the employer to get to know one another. It is NOT the time to get to know about the post or the employer's business. Looking around the company, preferably beforehand can give terrific insight and suggest appropriate questions to ask.

Do gather information about your employer before you are interviewed - what do they do, what are their current projects, what other interests do they have? Ask staff - many companies will offer you the chance to talk about the vacancy with someone, use the opportunity to find out more about the company.

Bigger companies will have PR departments, smaller ones will provide you with some information - libraries can provide information on local business and keep directories of national business. Use the internet - many companies have a presence here now.

Make sure you know what the job entails - get a job description, ask someone in a similar post; ring the company to clarify if unsure.

4 Don't Forget You

Remember the employer is interested in you as a person, your experiences and your opinions (in most cases) Do take the time to sit down and think about you, who you are and what you've achieved. It can be highly embarrassing to know more about the employer than yourself. Think of some situations that have required some special thought or skill and be prepared to discuss these.

Sit down with your CV and make notes, about your work record, what you've achieved. Look at yourself as a person in employment - how do you see yourself, what have you done, what ambitions do you have. Make notes and prepare and rehearse sound bites about yourself. Remember that one of the most common of interview questions is 'Tell me about yourself' prepare a sound bite for this in particular, but not a life history. Usually interviewers want to know about personal qualities not achievements - though examples can be included to support your statement.

5 Answering Interview Questions

Interviews vary tremendously, from very informal to formal. However, some questions can be anticipated, as can the subject matter. If you are well prepared, then the majority of problem questions should not arise. You will know about the company, you will know about yourself and you will have a good idea of the demands of the job - these questions will not be a problem to the well-prepared interviewee.

A few general rules:

- * Speak up when answering questions.
- * Answer briefly but try to avoid yes or no answers.
- * Don't worry about pausing before you answer, it shows you can think and are not spitting out the sound bites you learned!
- * Don't worry about admitting you don't know - but keep this to a bare minimum, expressing a willingness to learn is helpful.
- * Don't embellish answers or lie! Be as honest as possible.
- * Be prepared for hypothetical situation questions; take your time on these.
- * Be prepared for the unexpected question, that's designed to see how you cope with the unexpected ... the why's, what's, discussed in the lecture.
- * If you ask questions keep them brief during the interview, remember you're the interviewee.

At the end of the interview ask your questions in an open manner, that is questions which cannot be answered yes or no e.g. tell me about...? what is...? why....?

Thank the interviewers for their time when you leave quietly and calmly, and smile, even if you now hate them.

6 Questions for the interviewer

There is always the opportunity to ask them questions at the end of the interview - remember the interview is a two-way process, you need to be sure you want to join them too!

Try to concentrate on issues which are both important to you and combine as apparent interest in the company, leave issues like terms and conditions until the very last, even they may feel the most important to you. Write your questions down prior to the interview and take them with you.

Good topics to touch on include:

- * the competitive environment in which the organisation operates
- * management styles and teamwork
- * what obstacles the organisation anticipates in meeting its goals
- * how the organisation's goals have changed over the past three to five years.

Generally, it is most unwise to ask about pay or benefits or other similar areas. The reason is that it tends to make you seem more interested in what the organisation can do for you. It is also not a good idea to simply have no questions at all. Doing so makes you appear passive rather than curious and interested.

Suggested Questions:

1. What are the main objectives and responsibilities of the position?
2. How does the company expect these objectives to be met?
3. What obstacles are commonly encountered in reaching these objectives?
4. What is the desired time frame for reaching the objectives?
5. What resources are available from the company, are some bought in from elsewhere for example?

7 Presentation and Body Language

Wear what is appropriate for the post and the company. It may vary from smart, formal wear in some instances to very formal dress in others. Try and get an insight into what the company would expect from employees or through observation. What would be appropriate for a building company is very different for a public relations agency.

Be well groomed and clean. Try to look calm and confident; simple things like deodorant can boost your confidence.

Once you are ushered into the interview room there will usually be a short exchange of pleasantries and ice breaking. Don't be fooled by this time - it really is designed to put you at ease in most circumstances, but these initial moments are the most formative - don't go over the top being exceptionally friendly or alternatively going rigid with fear feeling that your handshake was too limp! A pleasant natural smile, a firm handshake and a brief exchange of words in a natural manner of this greeting is sufficient. Some simple, but frequently broken rules! You are constantly presenting yourself so...

- * Sit comfortably with both feet on the floor, lean slightly towards the interviewer.
- * Don't play with your hair or your hands. Keep them out of pockets!
- * Try not to create defensive barriers between you and them, like a brief case on your knees, folded arms or crossed legs, even if you feel you need to. It's natural, but your interviewer will not physically attack!
- * Maintain natural eye contact with the interviewer - that is maintain eye contact, but don't stare like a snake!
- * If there's more than one interviewer, look at who's talking.
- * When you're talking, shift your glance from one to the other.
- * Don't over use your hands, if you are a natural gesticulator.
- * Don't squirm and fidget.
- * Do nod and Mmm, to show you're listening to them.
- * Above all try to be you, try to be natural, unless you're naturally offensive!

Obedying these rules, will allow the interviewers to concentrate on you, and not what you're doing in the interview. Body language conveys all sorts of messages, and the right body language will convey the message of a well-balanced and confident individual.....even if you're not!

8 After the event

Take stock of what has happened, what went well in your opinion / or didn't work as planned? Did anything catch you out / surprise you? You will naturally be going over the interview in your mind, so take advantage of this heightened focus and jot down your thoughts for future reference.

If you don't get the job then it is accepted practice that you can contact the employer and ask for feedback; what did you do well? What should you improve on?

If you do get the job; well done and welcome to the world of employment.