

# Interview Preparation

Being given a job offer depends on the mistakes you avoid as much as the things that you do well. Interview nerves are normal and to be expected; the key is to put them in your favor by harnessing that nervous energy and putting it towards your mental and physical preparation. The potential new employer wants an assertive and dynamic employee, but someone who is not as assertive and dynamic as he or she is, so take your cue from the interviewer. Apart from your answers, the most significant details are in your body language, confidence and preparation. Know your resume and your accomplishments and have your statistical information well at hand. **Be prepared.**

**Confidence, creativity, and a positive attitude** are more often than not exactly what employers are on the lookout for. Companies are looking for quick thinkers who possess the skills needed to solve problems at the drop of a hat. **Answer quickly and confidently**, and you'll be sure to make a great impression.

## Preparation

- + **Directions to the interview location.** Decide on method of transportation and your time of departure, leave plenty of time to accommodate for any delays.
- + **Get to the interview location early.** This will allow time for you to visit the restroom and make adjustments to your appearance, review your notes, and put on your "game face." Don't make excuses, be there early.
- + **Your appearance.** Should be conservative and clean-cut. Keep your best outfit at the ready. Make sure that it is cleaned, your shirt or blouse is wrinkle-free, and your shoes polished.
- + **Prepare your answers.** Write out short and concise answers to questions you may be asked. Practice mock interviews with friends or family. Be comfortable with your answers and yourself.
- + **Learn about the position, inside and out.** Look over the job posting **in detail**. Do you match every single requirement? If not, think about how your specific experience and education make up for the shortfall? Make sure you have something to say for every single sentence of the job posting.
- + **Learn about the company's history and recent activities.** What does the company do? What is their biggest product? How does their site look? Spend some time going through their website to get a general sense of what they do.
- + **Learn about what the company is up to now.** What has the company done this past month? This past week? Depending on the company, you may also want to look at **recent acquisitions, product lines, and stock price.**
- + **Prepare your list of experiences.** One of the most important things you need to demonstrate is your experience. Write up a list of experiences that highlight your skills and competencies.
- + **Prepare to tie your experiences to interview questions.** You need to prepare for what the interviewer might ask you. If the question is a knowledge-based question ("Do you know what our company has been doing lately?") or an experience-based question ("When was the last time you faced an angry

customer? How did you react?”), you need to have an answer primed and ready to go.

- ✚ **Prepare for the unexpected.** No matter how well you prepare, there will often be a question or two that you didn't see coming. If this happens, quickly go through all the different experiences you've planned out to see if any of them might be applicable to the question. Listing all **your strengths** and **experiences** will build your **confidence** and ultimately make you a more attractive candidate.

## The first impression

The thing about a first impression is that you only get one chance to make it – and you don't get long to do it either. In fact, it's debated that a first impression can take less than 30 seconds to be formed. That's not a great deal of time to work with, I'm sure you'll agree.

- ✚ **Acquaint yourself via the receptionist.** They are the eyes and ears of any organization and the first person to greet you as you walk into the office. If you were even slightly rude or brash to the receptionist, the hiring manager might find about it.
- ✚ **Look your very best.** Nothing sets the image, tone and perception of someone quite like the **way** they look and dress. You could have the communication skills of a blubbering toddler but as long as your attire is smart, neat and appropriate, you'd be surprised at how far it can take you.
- ✚ **For goodness sake – smile!** A smile says you're pleased to be there and you're happy to have met the person in question which is always a good signal to the recipient.
- ✚ **Maintain eye contact.** In order to demonstrate that you are indeed listening – and captivated with what they're talking about – you need to maintain good eye contact. Similarly, when directing your responses back to an interviewer, keeping eye contact will convey a sense of confidence and assurance in what you're saying.
- ✚ **Address them by their name.** It can be argued that addressing someone by their name is a very small detail, but remember, you only have 30 seconds to play with – this is all about small details! Using someone's name shows that (1) you know who they are (always a good sign), and (2) you identify them as a significant individual.
- ✚ **Have confidence in your ability.** Emit confidence in what you have to say and ensure that your handshake is firm and meaningful. As long as **you're** confident in your ability, that will only serve to transmit back to the person in front of you.
- ✚ **Show interest in what they have to say.** Holding eye contact is one thing, but having a genuine interest in what someone has to say (or at least pretending to) is another. Don't be afraid to add your own comments or thoughts on what the employer-come-interviewer has to say. Just don't interrupt them. That's a no-no.

## During the interview

- ✚ **Take a pad of paper and writing utensil:** These demonstrate your preparedness, as well as give you something productive to do with your hands while you are being interviewed.
- ✚ **Don't Look Down.** When it comes to body language, there are many small details that will tell them if you are a good candidate. If you are referring to your resume and need to glance down to read a point, that is perfectly fine, the problem occurs when you bow your head looking to the floor for no apparent reason. Always ensure you hold your head high to show your confidence.
- ✚ **Don't Lean Back.** You want to show how enthusiastic you are about the role, and leaning back in your chair does not send off that message. When you lean back you are telling the hiring manager that you are carefree, when you want to tell them that you're eager.
- ✚ **Avoid Umm's.** You're nervous, and that's okay, but you don't want your nerves to overshadow your skills and experience. When answering a question in the interview, don't break up your thoughts with "umm's" or "uh's" or "like's". This will tell the hiring manager that you were not prepared for the question, and therefore not confident in your answer. When answering questions, ensure your answer is in one fluid sentence.
- ✚ **Lack of Documents – Portfolio.** If you've entered an interview without a printed version of your resume, cover letter, references, and samples of work – you may have already lost the job. You want to show the hiring manager that you've taken the time to prepare documents to show your skills and what you have to contribute to the team. The interview is the best time to convince the hiring manager that you are the right person for the job, and bringing these documents will offer proof of that.
- ✚ **Glancing at the Time.** Whether you are glancing at your own watch or at the clock on the wall, looking at the time will always send the hiring manager the wrong message. That message is saying that you have other places to be. You don't want to be the candidate that has to rush out of a lengthy interview because they had somewhere else to be. You will definitely sell yourself out of the job with that attitude.

# Interview Talking Points

## 1. Tell me about yourself?

OK, you should ace this question because it's the most basic and expected question out of every job interview. They want to see how you carry yourself and how articulate you are. They also want to know what you think are the highlights of yourself and your career and what's special about you. Prepare to talk 20 sec. on education, 20 sec. on hard skills and 20 sec. on yourself.

## 2. What are your Strengths?

Show them what you got! This is an opportunity to match up what you do well with what they are looking for. Be confident, but don't say something that isn't true. Don't present yourself as a master of Excel, but can't formulate information into a pie chart.

## 3. What are your Weaknesses?

You know this question is coming, let's see how honest and thoughtful you can be. Not to mention how prepared you are. Please don't give clichés like, "My weakness is I work too hard." They can see right through that. This question can reveal how self-aware you are and how proactive you are when a problem arises. Be prepared to explain how you are overcoming your weakness.

## 4. What do you know about our organization?

They want to make sure you really want to work for them and that you did your research. They don't want to hire people who just want this job because it's a job. Don't be lazy, at least know approximately how big the company is and what they do.

## 5. Why did you leave your last job?

Was there drama in your last company? They're actually curious to see if you left your company on good or bad terms. Obviously, most of you will catch on to this question, but your answer can also give them an insight into your relationship with your former company and how you work. If you badmouth your previous employer, no matter what the circumstance, they'll probably take it as a red flag. They also want to make sure that you're not going to leave this company for the same reason.

## 6. Do you have any questions for me?

This is their opportunity to see if you have been paying attention and how passionate you are about this position and company. It's also a test to see how much homework you've done on the company and the position. This can be your chance to wow them, and it can be one of the most memorable things about the interview.

If you don't know what to ask and why, you will not only miss out on the opportunity to make a good impression, but also fail to get the insights you need to determine if this employer is right for you. The secret to asking great questions in an interview is to use the following 4Cs as your guidelines:

- Connect
- Corporate Culture
- Company Challenges
- Closing Conversation

When you use these correctly, you can craft questions that will make you look friendly, collaborative, well-researched, and professional – all great qualities to display to a hiring manager on an interview!

- How did you come to work here? (CONNECT)
- What do you love most about working here? (CONNECT)
- Who's the most successful person hired here in the last year and how have they succeeded? (CORPORATE CULTURE)
- Who's been least successful person hired and what did they do wrong? (CORPORATE CULTURE)
- What's the biggest challenge the company will face this year and how will it be overcome? (COMPANY CHALLENGES)
- As an employee, what can I do to make a difference and have an impact on the company this year? (COMPANY CHALLENGES)
- Is there anything about my candidacy that you would change to make me a better fit for this job? (CLOSE CONVERSATION)
- What are the next steps in the hiring process? (CLOSE CONVERSATION)

### **Other Questions to ask**

“What skills and behaviors are most essential to success on the job?”

“What are the most immediate challenges of the job?”

“What is a typical day like in this position?”

“Why do some people succeed and others fail doing this work?”

“What is the dress code for this office?”

“What do you expect of me in the first six months?”

“What can I help to clarify that would make hiring me an easy decision?”

“How would you describe the ideal candidate for this role?”

This is not the time to ask questions about what the pay and benefits are, or where the job could lead you. It won't do you any good to know what the job pays if it is not going to be offered to you. At this stage in the game, ask the questions that lead to the extension of a job offer, then you can ask the questions that will allow you to evaluate the offer.

And so now you all stand, shake hands, exchange contact information, and you are free to go. **But before you go**, this is your moment to grab the brass ring. This is the time where you can look them in the eye and say "Based on what we have talked about, I believe I would be a good fit for this company". Let them know you want to be part of the company and you are excited at the possibility of getting the chance. You can look them in the eye and tell them you are the person they are looking for.

## After the interview

Few people walk out of an interview completely confident that they nailed it. Most people are humble and modest, and often unsure if they answered all of the questions appropriately. This is a common feeling. However, there are also instances when a candidate walks out of an interview completely aware of the fact that they bombed the interview.

This is unfortunate – but it's not the end of the world. It may seem hard to believe, but you can recover from a bad interview. Hiring managers are completely aware of how nervous you might be, and they can often be very understanding.

You may have been their favorite candidate prior to the interview, and if that's the case, they will be more open to your attempt to implement some post-interview damage control.

Let's break down what you need to do to get yourself back on the shortlist.

- ✚ **Don't Over Analyze.** Review the interview and determine what your biggest mistake was. It usually comes down to one answer that was either wrong or not strong enough. Make this one answer your focal point, and **outline** a better response with the details you should've mentioned in the interview.
- ✚ **Thank You Note.** Whether you gave a great interview or a terrible one, you should be sending a thank you note to the interviewer. In the case of a bad interview, the thank you note is a great time to attempt to redeem yourself. Keep the tone of the thank you note calm but professional, and jokingly mention that you were nervous. This is also the perfect time to include details or information that you did not mention in the interview that you wish you did. You will also show the hiring manager that you are interested enough in the position to continue pondering the questions afterwards, to ensure you gave the best possible answers.
- ✚ **Learn From It!** The worst outcome of a terrible interview is a streak of terrible interviews. Don't let one bad interview knock you off your game. You must keep your nerves calm and erase the bad experience from your memory. If you constantly dwell on what you did wrong, you are bound to repeat the mistakes as

they will be on your mind. Instead, learn from your past mistakes and create a action plan to ensure these mistakes do not occur again.

✚ **Don't Give Up.** If you walk out of a bad interview and never attempt to contact the hiring manager about the position ever again – you have admitted defeat. You and the hiring manager both know that you didn't give a great interview performance, but if you never attempt to redeem yourself, the hiring manager will assume that you have given up and will move on to the next opportunity.

By maintaining contact with the hiring manager and providing additional details and responses to rectify the initial mistakes you made in the first interview, you will prove to the hiring manager just how much you want the position. Your persistence and ability to transition a negative situation into a positive one will also translate into preferred qualities for a successful candidate. All it takes from you is the ability to suck up your pride and realize that you need to provide a better impression than what you gave in the interview. Admitting you gave a bad interview is the first step – then you can follow the others we've mentioned to do your best to clean up after yourself. Will this work every time? Definitely not, but if you really want that position, then why wouldn't you **try**?