

Interviewing tips

So you've just been offered an interview – well done!!

The first thing to remember is that if you have secured a 1st interview they obviously think that you have got the skills required. The main goal of an interview is for the interviewer to validate those skills and assess whether you are the right person for the job (personality, fit, attributes, experience, skill level) and for you to then gain a second interview.

The secondary goal is for you to assess whether you like the job and the employer. You will get more chance to assess them in the second interview but you need to get there first!

Preparation

Preparation is a good way to beat the nerves. NEVER go into an interview without having researched the company and thought about the role and your fit with it. Here are some tips to be prepared:

- Make sure you know where you are going for the interview, drive by prior or do a dummy run and remember to leave yourself plenty of time to get there and park as well as time to settle before the interview starts.
- Know the company: Jump online and check what it does, what it is looking for in its people, values, culture, vision and what it cares about.
- Know the job: ask for a copy of the job description or see if it is on the website
- Match up your skills with those needed in the job. Read the job ad and job description again very carefully before you go into the interview and think about your skills and experience as they relate to what is being asked for.
- Re-read your CV and think back over your work history. Remind yourself of tasks you have done, responsibilities you have taken on, your achievements, what you are most proud of.
- Think about the type of questions you would ask if you were the hiring manager – list them down and plan some answers

Eg:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What do you want this role?
- What do you know about our company?
- What are your skills?
- What have you achieved above and beyond in your work?
- Why do you think you are the person for the job?
- Write a list of achievement statements using the framework - Context, Action, Result (CAR)
- Have some notes with you in the interview if they may help (but keep them very brief).

What will the interviewer be looking for?

- Will you fit in with the people already there?
- Do you have the skills?
- Do you seem keen - on both the job and company?
- Are you well spoken, an articulate person?
- Are you a well presented and groomed person - haircut , dressed for the occasion, shoes clean?

How to engage with the interviewer/s

The first thing to remember is that you are being assessed from the minute you walk into the building, from the way you interact with reception to how you thank the interviewer on the way out.

Even if it's suggested that it's just a "coffee chat", it never is. Be prepared and professional and never assume you've got this in the bag!

Most interviewers want you to be comfortable so usually enter into a little light chat at the beginning if they start that off. Remember to always provide information that adds value to the role/company. You may mention something interesting about the company that you have noticed in the waiting room, on the external building or from the website.

Maintain eye contact and look interested.

Take notice of the interviewer's style and try to do the same: relaxed, formal etc.

Beware of letting down your guard though and slipping into too casual a style.

Keep answers brief but try to throw in enough interesting bits for them to follow up on if they wish.

General questions that may be asked:

It is important to think about the difficult questions you will be asked and how will you answer with them. Below are some typical questions. Think about your answers to these, and practice your reply.

Tell me a bit about you? or I have your CV but give me a brief run down on your background?

This should follow on from your personal summary on your CV

Keep your answer to one or two minutes; don't ramble.

Cover five core segments, i.e. a tiny bit about your family or life outside work early years, education (if relevant), work experience, recent work (with an accent on the latter) Eg experience, skills and the value you will bring to the role

What do you know about our company?

Know as much as you can about their products, size, reputation, key people, history.

Why do you want to work for us?

Example answers:

You love the product / service they offer and want to be involved.

You feel like your skills and background are a very good match with them.

You wish to be part of a company project.

You would like to be involved and helping a company that is on a growth path.

You would like to be part of them being the best in their field.

You can make a definite contribution to specific company goals.

What do you believe your strengths are? or Tell me what people who work with you would tell me your strengths are?

Stick to two or three at most.

Think about what you have already told them your strengths are in your application letter or CV and reinforce those.

Think about what they are looking for (in the ad) and give examples about how you have those as strengths.

Think about ways you behave or perform, feedback you have received, things that you know make you a better employee than some of your previous colleagues (you don't need to brag them, just make sure the interviewer feels confident that you have some great qualities).

And your weaknesses?

Remember we all have weaknesses or aspects we could develop further so don't try to be perfect. Stick to one or two and think about something you do that could be also turned into a strength. Eg I can be too much of a perfectionist and I'm never happy with the final product.

Or, explain how you are working to turn a weakness around: I think my computer skills could be better so I am looking for a course to increase my skills.

What would you do for us? What can you do for us that someone else can't?

Talk about your strengths (if you haven't already done so) or relate past successful experiences that may be helpful to the prospective employer.

Why should we hire you?

Explain how your experience and abilities would add value and make a contribution.

What is it about our position you find the most attractive? Least attractive?

List three or more attractive factors.

List only one minor unattractive factor, and only if there is one.

Why are you leaving your present job / not working at present?

Explain the circumstances around why you are leaving if you can. Interviewers will understand why a candidate is on the job search where a previous employer is closing or downsizing. Eg after a long tenure at my present company my role was disestablished which means I now have the opportunities to look for a new role in an area that I'm passionate about.

If it is an awkward situation why you are looking to leave, try to put a positive spin on it. NEVER blame or speak negatively about the previous employer if it is possible to avoid it.

What are you looking for in a job?

Talk about the opportunity to learn or to settle into a long term prospect.

Talk about the opportunity to perform and be recognised.

Behavioural questions

Behavioural questions are looking for information on how you have actually behaved in a situation in the past. The idea is that you would likely behave the same way in a similar situation in the future. Here are some examples:

What kinds of problems do you routinely solve in the workplace? Can you give me some specific examples and how you solved them?

We have all made mistakes on occasion. Can you think of a time when you made a mistake and what you did in that situation?

Tell me about a time when you took a leadership role within your group?

Tell me about a time when you were under a tight deadline and an issue unexpectedly arose. How did you deal with it?

Tell me about a time when you had a conflict with one of your colleagues, bosses or staff member? What did you do and what was the outcome?

You cannot really plan for every question like this because each answer will require you to think of a real situation you have dealt with in your past. However, you can think

ahead about what some of these questions might be by looking carefully at the job ad and / or job description or by working out what skills and attributes might be required in the job.

For example, if a job ad asks for a team worker then you are likely to get a question about your role in a team and how you work with other team members.

If an ad asks for a can do attitude you are likely to get a question about what you have done when you have been asked to do something outside your normal job description or skills and they will be looking for someone with an example that shows they are willing to act in any situation.

Remember to use the CAR framework

What happens when you get stuck?

There will always be times in an interview when your mind goes blank, when you can't think of an example, when you don't understand a question or when you go off track. Be aware of what is happening and slow down. Take your time to think. There is no problem with a brief silence. It is best to admit what is happening and ask to come back to that than it is to sit in silence or to keep telling a story that is totally off the point.

Explain that your mind is temporarily blank, could you come back to that later.

Explain that you can't think of an example and could you come back to that question.

Say that you are sorry, you went off track, and end a long story mid way, rather than continuing.

Ask clarifying questions to help understand the question. For example, So are you asking if I ? or Can I just check that you mean ? or Do you mean ?

Tips

BE YOURSELF. Try to relax and do not try to give a false image.

(action the personal brand activity to gain clarity of your authenticity and what's important to you)

- Dress appropriately for the interview - dress conservatively, never under dress.
- Take a copy of your CV with you. A folder with clear pockets can be a good way to carry this.
- Be prompt never turn up late. Make sure you know where you are going, where the parking is, what floor they are on etc.
- Use a firm handshake.
- Give the interviewer your full attention. Use appropriate eye contact.
- Sit straight, slightly forward, but comfortable. Keep your head up. Do not fidget.
- Show interest and ask relevant questions.
- Have a list of questions prepared as they will ask if you have any questions
- Avoid giving yes/ no answers as it tells the interviewer very little about you. On the other hand, don't go on about yourself. Think for a moment or two about the questions before answering.
- Do not oversell yourself. You are really looking for a job which matches your abilities and interest.
- Let the interviewer bring up the question of pay. If it has not been discussed towards the end of the interview, it's recommended to raise this at the second interview/over the telephone when offered
- Do not criticise any former employers/ colleagues
- DO NOT SWEAR ever!
- Always close the interview positively - thank the interviewer for the time they have spent with you.
- Ask when you can expect to hear about their decision or the next stage of the recruitment process.

After the interview

Consider sending a thank you email to keep you in the mind of the employer.

If offered a second interview, use it to think about whether you want the job:

- Would you get on with the interviewer/employer?
- Would you get on with your future colleagues in the company?
- Does the job suit you, your skills?
- What sort of image does the company have? Is it the sort of company you would be proud to work for?
- What sort of scope is there to improve your skills or move up in the company?
- Is the pay adequate?

If offered a role, avoid making an instant decision either way. Allow yourself some time to consider the offer before making a final decision.

- Be realistic:
- How many other suitable jobs are you likely to get an offer for in the current market?
- Is this job a good match for your skills, challenge is good or will it be too demanding?
- When negotiating consider your value, expectations of the role, market value for the role and what is your non-negotiable limit. Consider all factors eg what are the benefits? Is the role offering flexible work hours
- Remember if you are unrealistic or negotiate too hard you may risk the opportunity