

Manning Search Group LLC

Interviewing Basics

1. Preparing Yourself for the Interview

Before you walk into any interview, you should know everything you can about both the company and the interviewer/employer. Your recruiter will be able to brief you on the company, but you may want to search the web or the library for additional information. Even if you do not have a computer there is no excuse for not searching the internet through the public library. Print off pages from the company's website, from financial services or news sites. Be sure to highlight key points on each of the printed pages. Circle interesting points. Make notes on separate paper. After you've studied the company, write down a list of questions to ask the employer. For example:

- Why is this position available?
- What training programs will be offered to the person in this position?
- What are your goals for this position?
- What obstacles must be overcome for the person in this position to succeed?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What opportunities are there for growth over the next 12 months? In the next five years?
- What growth do you anticipate for your firm over the next 12 months?

2. Questions to Expect During the Interview

No one can predict the exact questions that an interviewer will ask, but your recruiter should be able to give you a good idea of the hiring authority's personality, his or her typical interview demeanor, and a few important questions that the employer is likely to ask. Some employers/interviewers ask open-ended questions design to see where you will go with your answer. If you are not organized in your thoughts, these questions can trip you up. To prepare, think about how you would answer the following questions:

- **"Tell me about yourself."** Keep your answer in the professional realm only. Review your past positions, your education and any other strengths that pertain to the job. Perhaps clarifying the specific interest of the interviewer would be appropriate. "Where would you like me to begin?"
- **"What do you know about our organization?"** If you've done your research correctly, you should have no problem answering this one. Be positive. Point out the exciting news releases, the growth statistics, the product launches etc. However, don't be afraid to point out that you did find some information that caused concern and you would like to hear the employer's explanation.
- **"Why are you interested in this position?"** Relate how you feel your qualifications really match the requirements of the job. Also, express your desire to work for that company. If you were contacted by a recruiter, be sure to point out that the recruiter really caught my attention as to this opportunity's (challenges, career path possibilities, etc.).
- **"What have been your most significant career accomplishments to date?"** Select some recent accomplishments that relate to this position and its requirements. Be sure to be visual in your presentation by showing an "atta-boy" or "atta-girl" file that supports your statements. A well organized portfolio enhances your professionalism. Word of caution though...practice using it before the interview so you are comfortable with the numbers or location of the data.
- **"Describe a situation in which your work was criticized."** Focus on how you solved the situation, and let the interviewer know how you became a better person

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because of it.

The following questions are more examples of open-ended questions that require your answers to be thought out before you ever go to the interview....

- **"How would you describe your personality?"**
- **"How do you perform under pressure?"**
- **"What have you done to improve yourself over the past year?"**
- **"What did you like least about your last position?"**
- **"Why are you leaving your present company?"**
- **"What is your ideal working environment?"**
- **"How would your co-workers describe you?"**
- **"What do you think of your boss?"**
- **"Have you ever fired anyone? What was the situation, and how did you handle it?"**
- **"Are you creative?"**
- **"What are your goals in your career?"**
- **"Where do you see yourself in two years?"**
- **"Why should we hire you?"**
- **"What kind of salary are you looking for?"**
- **"What other types of jobs/companies are you considering?"**

You may encounter the employer that uses an interviewing technique utilizing "behavioral questions". This may throw you at first if you primarily use to the types of questions that we just illustrated. Behavioral questions force you to give a specific example of a real life situation were you did or did not perform. Employers are looking to "close the loop" so to speak. (1) Do you have the experience? (2) Did you manage the situation properly? (3) If mismanaged, did you grow professionally? (4) Did you improve performance through the outcome?

Behavioral questions take on this kind of look:

- **"Will you describe a time in your professional life where you had to handle an irate customer?" "Tell me about the situation , how did you handle it and what was the outcome?"**
- **"Give me a time in your prior employment where you felt un-appreciated. What were the circumstances and how did you handle the situation?"**
- **"Please give me an example where you and your boss don't agree?" "How do you communicate your disagreement?"**
- **"Tell me the story behind your most successful sale? Who was it, how did you get the lead, how did you close the deal?"**

3. Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing

Do...

- Arrive 15 minutes early. Late attendance is never excusable. Let the employer know that you are early but don't expect them to necessarily see you at that moment.
- When answering questions, pause a moment to think it through. If necessary, clarify the question. Be sure you answered the questions the employer really asked.
- Get the interviewer to describe the position and responsibilities early in the conversation so you can relate your skills and your background to the position throughout the interview.
- Discuss your qualifications. Stress the accomplishments that are most pertinent to the job. Be sure to "paint a mental picture" as to how you achieved the

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accomplishments with your prior/current employer. Not all employers ask questions in a way to get a good mental picture of your accomplishments and abilities to achieve. You want the interview visualizing you achieving with his/her organization.

- Conduct yourself professionally. Be aware of what your body language is saying. Smile, make eye contact, don't slouch, and maintain your composure.
- Anticipate difficult questions, and prepare in advance so you can turn apparent weaknesses into strengths.
- Dress appropriately. Stay away from loud colors. Stay away from dull colors. Conservative is never a mistake. A splash of color in your tie, scarf or accessories is very good. Be sure to dress professionally unless you were told otherwise. If you were told to dress casual, never wear dress-down casual (shorts, blue jeans, Jimmy Buffet island shirts, sandals, etc.) Make your first impression a professional one.
- Ask questions throughout the interview. An interview should be a mutual exchange of information, not a one-sided conversation. However, do not interrupt or attempt to control the interview. Do let the employer see that you have a list of questions in your portfolio or sitting on your lap. This is a good sign that you prepared and had enough interest to put thought into this pending interview.
- Listen. This is probably the most important skill of all. By concentrating not only on the employer's words, but also on the tone of his or her voice and body language, you will be able to pick up on the employer's style. Once you understand how a hiring authority thinks, pattern your answers accordingly. You will be able to relate better to him or to her.

Don't...

- Answer vague questions. Rather than answering questions you think you hear, get the employer to be more specific and *then* respond.
- Interrupt the employer. If you don't have time to listen, then neither does the employer.
- Smoke, chew gum, or place anything on the employer's desk.
- Be overly familiar, even if the employer is.
- Wear heavy perfume or cologne.
- Ramble. Long answers can make you sound apologetic or indecisive. On the other hand, don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain yourself in detail whenever possible.
- Lie. Answer questions as truthfully as possible. Don't make up stories or situations to fit a behavioral question. If you don't have the experience, state it so. Be sure to speak though and point out how you would handle the situation if given the opportunity.
- Make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies.
- Get involved discussing current or prior employer's difficult situations like investigations, lawsuits, employer's personal dirty laundry or situations like downsizing or politics. State the facts as you were told and keep the employer focused on answering questions about you, your performance and not your employer. Re-direct and illustrate how the interviewer's company is going to benefit from your skills, knowledge and abilities. It is very difficult to keep your emotions out of an interview especially if you have just been downsized with some questionable reasons or suspected political agendas. There is no need to get into this discussion because it will only take away from you and your interview.

4. Closing the Interview

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Too many people second-guess themselves after an interview. By closing strongly and asking the right questions, you can eliminate the post-interview doubts that tend to plague most interviewees.

If you feel that the interview went well and you would like to take the next step, express your interest to the hiring authority and turn the tables a bit. Try something like the following:

"After hearing more about your company, the position and the responsibilities at hand, I am certain that I possess the qualities that you are looking for in the (title) position. Based on our conversation and my qualifications, are there any issues or concerns that you have that would lead you to believe otherwise?"

You have a right to be assertive. This is a great closing question because it opens the door for the hiring authority to be honest with you about his or her feelings. If concerns do exist, this is a great opportunity to overcome them. You have one final chance to dispel the concerns, sell your strengths and end the interview on a positive note.

Another similar close could be stated in this way:

" I am truly excited about this opportunity especially after meeting you today. I think that we have communicated very well with each other and I can see myself fitting right in and making a great contribution to your organization. I am prepared to pursue this position. Is there any reason why we cannot continue discussions? When can we meet again?"

A few things to remember during the closing process:

- Don't be discouraged if no definite offer is made or specific salary discussed. The interviewer will probably want to communicate with the office first, or interview other applicants, before making a decision.
- Make sure you answer the following two questions: "Why are you interested in the company?" and "What can you offer?" Employers hire individuals for two main reasons: (1) Growth & more growth to the top & bottom lines (2) reduction of expense/costs to maintain or grow their business. Make sure they can see that in you!
- Express thanks for the interviewer's time and consideration.
- Ask for the interviewer's business card so you can write a thank-you letter as soon as possible.

5. Following Up

When you get in your car, ***immediately*** write down key issues uncovered in the interview. Think of the qualifications the employer is seeking, and match your strengths to them. Then, call your recruiter! Follow-up at this stage is critical. Finally, write a thank-you letter no later than 24 hours after the interview has ended.
