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Worldwide Executive and Professional Search

The Interview: where hiring decisions are made.

One of the advantages of working with an experienced recruiter is that you need not go into the interview without training or significant experience in the process. We have spoken to thousands of candidates and employers before and after the interview. We know what goes right, and what goes wrong. Most importantly, we know what you need to do to win, and we are sharing it with you in the next pages. Since you are a professional, you want to put your best foot forward and maximize your chances of success! Read this guide, pay attention, and prepare, and you will find the interview to be a lot more fun and rewarding.

Did you know that all companies have a hidden agenda for the interview? They have three hidden questions that are so vital that you must satisfactorily answer all three, or the company will not make you an offer. Everything you say will be filtered through these criteria to determine your true answers. What are these obvious, but unspoken questions?

1. Is this person competent for the position?
2. Is this person like us - will he/she fit in here?
3. Will this person stay with us?

We will also tell you what mistakes candidates make. For instance, you should take no more than three sentences to answer a question--rambling on is the most frequent interviewee error. If the question cannot be answered in three sentences, you had better ask them to be more specific. Avoid this mistake by preparing well, controlling your emotions, and being aware of yourself in the interview.

If you are beginning to think that maybe you need to prepare a script of the questions you will ask, and another script of the questions you will be asked and your responses, **you are right!** By doing so, you will not only outdo your competition, you will feel a lot more professional throughout the experience.

In a nutshell, you want to favorably impress everyone you meet, and turn them into your **advocates**.

EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Don't forget the basics.

The objective of the job interview is simple and singular: to get the job offer! Pretty simple, right? But many job candidates either do not know this, or forget it during an interview. Don't lose sight of this goal.

Remember: You are not interviewing to decide if you would like to work for the company. There will be plenty of time for thinking this through after the interview or after you have actually received the offer. Do not let your opinion of the company distract you from your objective. If you do not get the job offer, then it will make little difference that you do or don't like the position offered or the company offering it.

You are not interviewing to broaden your knowledge of available opportunities. There are far more effective and efficient ways to do this. A "ho-hum" attitude has no place in a job interview. Do not make the fatal mistake of leaving the employer with the impression that you are just "shopping around."

You are not interviewing to learn what the particular company can do for you. Your singular purpose at this point is to get the job offer.

The "Winning Interview"

Interviewing with the objective of getting an offer is called the "winning interview." This technique is built on the premise that for every open position there will be more than one fully qualified candidate. There may be candidates that are better

qualified than you are. But believe it or not, qualifications--so long as they are adequate--will make very little difference as to who receives the job offer. Now that does not mean that qualifications are not important. The employer is looking for qualified candidates to interview and there will be more than one of these. Therefore, the position will actually be offered to a qualified candidate, but on the basis of something in addition to qualifications. The point is simply that qualifications--abilities, experience and knowledge--are not enough. *Qualifications may get you the interview but they do not get you the job offer.* Use the winning interview technique and you dramatically improve your chances.

The Basic Technique

The "winning interview" is finding out what the open position requires and convincing the interviewer(s) that you are the man or the woman for that job. The key is to be convincing. You must seize the initiative at some point during the interview and subtly direct the interview process according to your own strategy.

What Are Employers Really Looking For In The Job Interview?

The "winning interview" technique requires a thorough understanding of the conscious as well as the subconscious things that employers are looking for when they interview candidates for a position. How well you do in the interview will depend upon how well you prove you meet tangible, as well as subconscious criteria compared to the other candidates.

I. Qualifications

- i. The interviewer is, obviously, looking for a technically qualified person than can do what the employer needs to get done. But they look only as far as they must in this direction. It will do little good to dwell on what a marvelous supervisor you could be. Appearing overqualified is just as unhelpful as appearing under-qualified.
- ii. Qualifications are what the employer is consciously looking for and as mentioned earlier, there will be more than one candidate who meets this first test. Therefore, the things the employer is subconsciously looking for become at least as important as qualifications--and perhaps even more important.

II. Optimistic, Positive Attitude

- iii. The employer is looking for optimistic statements and positive reactions to his/her questions. Pessimism and negativism never won a job offer for anyone. Enthusiasm counts!
- iv. Elaborate on those things that bring out your honestly optimistic and positive attitude. It is not necessary to "fake it," and the employer will know right away if your enthusiasm is forced.

III. Someone Who Likes the Employer and What the Employer Does

- v. The employer is looking to hire someone who has a high opinion of the position being filled and the hiring company. If you like the employer's products, current employees, the location of the office, or any other item related to the position in question, you should say so, with enthusiasm.
- vi. The employer is going to hire someone who finds the work of the company, and the position being offered, interesting. It is up to you to let the employer know about your interest.

IV. Indications that the Candidate will Stay with the Company

- vii. No employer wants to hire someone who will likely leave the company. The problem with making the proper impression in this very important area is that interviewers seldom ask direct questions about longevity. Instead, the interviewer will ask: "Why are you looking for another position?" or, they may ask, "What are you looking for in a position?"

It is important to realize that either of these questions--or variations of them--are actually seeking a response that indicates what the potential employee's longevity in the position is likely to be. In response to these questions, the candidate must indicate his intention to stick with the position being offered and with the company that is offering it. Speak of earning your stripes in the organization and seeking a long-term career opportunity, but **do not speak about security** - do not even use the word.

There is a simple and effective way to answer questions about longevity--one that will be fully satisfactory to the interviewer. In answer to either of these questions, the candidate should:

- 1) Make a positive statement about the former employer.
- 2) Make a short, positive, general but relevant statement about what he/she is looking for in a new position.

As an example, consider the following:

QUESTION: "Why are you looking to change positions?"

ANSWER: "Well, Jill, I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at the XYZ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more aggressive situation. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions to the overall quality and quantity of work performed."

The answer was brief, positive, and general but to the point. That is the kind of answer that will tell the employer what he/she wants to hear about your potential longevity. It is a good way to convey how you feel about the right position with the right company.

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

There are several things that you can and should do to prepare yourself for the interview. What you do before the interview can make the difference between receiving or not receiving the job offer. Pre-interview preparations, in the order of their importance are:

1. Prepare a résumé for the specific interview.
2. Research as much as you can about the company you will be interviewing for. You will feel more comfortable during the interview, and it will also allow you to show genuine interest in the company during the interview. The idea is to be able to converse in a knowledgeable way about the company and what it does.
3. Be prepared to "play by the company's rules," meaning you should follow whatever procedures are suggested or required without question or comment, no matter how ridiculous the "rules" may appear to you. Many companies have set procedures for interviewing. You can make friends by complying fully and "fitting in" to this new culture.
4. Plan how you will dress for the interview. This may seem trivial, but you would not want to miss a job offer simply because someone did not like the way you were dressed. For a professional position, dress conservatively. Research has shown dark gray and navy blue to be the two best suit colors (solid or pinstripe).
5. Arrive at the interview early--it is a good idea to arrive for the interview fifteen minutes before your actual appointment.
6. Keep yourself in a positive frame of mind.

Answering Tough Questions

You should prepare yourself to answer a number of questions that are almost sure to be asked.

"Do you have any questions?"

Ask questions that are job related, but avoid asking nonessential/trivial questions such as, "what do you pay?" or "what is the vacation policy?" or "can I leave at 4:30 on Tuesdays" or "what is the retirement program?"

"Are you willing to travel?"

The proper response should indicate flexibility. There is certainly room for personal preference to be expressed on this point. If you do like to travel, you should respond enthusiastically.

"Do you object to overtime work?"

This question is usually not what it seems. Again, the proper response indicates flexibility. A good answer might be, "I have always been flexible when it comes to work beyond business hours, Jill. I am project-oriented, not clock-oriented, and I will do whatever is necessary to get the position done."

"Will you relocate?"

If you are not willing to relocate, say so. If, however, there is any flexibility in your stance, you should indicate it. This question does not usually mean that you will be transferred as soon as you take the position. Rather, it asks if you would be willing to relocate later if the opportunity should arise. A job with a required and immediate relocation will almost certainly be described fully before the interview starts. Remember that you can explore the relocation question after the offer. Do not let the possibility of relocation dampen your enthusiasm for getting that offer.

"Why do you want to work for our company?"

This is an opportunity to pay the company compliments and make a friend at the same time. Perhaps you like what the company does, or the location, or the people, or their products.

"Why did you leave your last position?"

If your job history shows that you have moved around quite a bit, make a positive statement that indicates longevity in a job is one of your goals. You should also compliment your last employer and state that you are looking for a place to make real contributions over a longer term.

Salary Related Questions

Some of the most important questions during a job interview are related to salary. Ideally, salary negotiations should come after a job offer. However, salary questions may be asked during the job interview.

Sharp candidates view salary and job title as tactical issues that pale in comparison to the vital issue of what firm you will be joining. Other facets of the position, like opportunity, benefits, and room for growth, may outweigh starting salary as a consideration.

In responding to salary-related questions, the candidate is wise to promptly and precisely disclose their current salary if asked.

"What are you looking for in the way of salary?"

Do not give a number. You should respond, "I want the best offer you can make so that I will fit into your organization." No matter how many times you are asked, no matter how many people ask you, stick with this answer.

"What do you want to be when you grow up?", or "what are your goals?" Questions

If I were ever asked that question, I would say that I would like to become a very highly respected member of your team who could always be counted on to get the job done well and on time and who was viewed as a really good person to work with. Does this answer fit you? If so, use it.

ANATOMY OF THE JOB INTERVIEW

Interviews take various forms and are conducted in various sequences. There is no standard pattern: some require testing; more than one person may interview you; the interview may include lunch with a group of interviewers. Although there is no standard "structure," there are recognizable steps or stages within any interview sequence.

I. The Arrival.

Usually, the first person you will meet is a receptionist who will direct you to the proper place at the proper time. The receptionist may or may not be expecting you. Tell him/her who you are and who you would like to see. Then follow his/her instructions.

II. The Initial Contact.

Whatever form the initial contact with the company personnel may be, your greeting should include a firm handshake and an enthusiastic "hello", followed by an introduction of yourself.

III. The Ice Breaker.

In every interview, there is a very short interval before "business talk" starts that is filled with "small talk". You should respond with pleasant enthusiasm to remarks and questions. This is also your opportunity to get on a first-name basis with the interviewer. After the ice breaker, do not hesitate to drop the "Mister Smith" and simply call the interviewer "Amy" or "Jim" unless you get a strong feeling against it. **Thank your host for taking the time to see you and say how pleased you are to be able to meet him/her.**

IV. Chronological Interview or Topical Interview?

Unless the candidate-that's you--does something about it, the interview can, and probably will, be a chronological interview to a close--by active choice-- after no longer than 5 to 7 minutes of introductory time. Do it sooner if you can. Avoid it all together if you can. The candidate can do this by seizing the initiative and beginning the all-important "Topical Interview". This must be done subtly, without a domineering or manipulative appearance.

Shifting to the topical interview is not difficult. The candidate should look for his first opportunity to ask the

simple question: "Bill, what exactly will my first assignment be?" or, "What is it, exactly, you need me to accomplish?" When the interviewer responds with a description of your initial responsibility as a new employee, the topical interview and your opportunity to convince will have begun.

V. The Topical Interview.

Instead of being guided by a backward review of your previous positions, the topical interview focuses upon responsibilities of the specific position for which you are being interviewed. Remember, your strategy is to find out exactly what will be expected of you in the new position and to convince the interviewer, or prove to him/her, that you can perform exactly as expected.

The initial question in the topical interview is the question that began it: "Bill, exactly what will my first assignment be?" The interviewer will list activities or duties that you will be expected to perform.

Your responsibility will be to relate each of the items of the list to your experience, knowledge, or exposure. Make the relationship between the requirements and your ability as close as possible. Where specific experience is available, use it by all means. Where specific experience is lacking, relate your knowledge of the subject.

Once the "first assignment" is covered, move on with a question such as: "What else will I be expected to do in this position?" Follow up each statement of responsibility and duty with related experience and knowledge, wherever possible. Continue the "what else" questions-the topics of discussion-until all aspects of the position are covered. The topical interview is your principal technique in learning what the position entails and proving that you can do it.

During the Topical Interview, you should:

- a. Compliment your interviewer on his or her approaches to problems. Your interviewer(s) must become your advocate if you are to secure the job position--let them know you admire them.
- b. Take the opportunity to imply that you expect to be with the company for a career length of time. The interviewer will be continuously looking for such indications. Be careful not to suggest that you consider the position in any way temporary.
- c. Speak and act during the topical interview as if you already have the position. This means using "will" and "can" rather than "would" and "could". (Example: "What will be expected of me?" rather than "What would be expected of me?")
- d. Be careful not to speak negatively about mutual friends or acquaintances that may come up during the interviewing process. Keep the conversation strictly positive.
- e. Respond to questions fully, honestly, and positively. Go well beyond simple "yes" and "no" answers to elaborate on points that appear to be important to the interviewer, and especially on those points that you can get excited and show a positive, enthusiastic, and optimistic response. Remember--three sentences in a row, maximum!

From the beginning of your meeting and before moving in to close the sale, build personal bridges and establish personal rapport with you interviewer(s). Referring to them by name, asking about their experience with the company, what they think of its strong and weak points, their family status, what they think of the community, where they went to school, and what advice they would give to a new person starting off in the company are all means of saying, "I like you and care about you as a person." Don't be distracted from the topical interview, but do remember that this person across from you is more likely to serve as your advocate if he/she likes you as a person.

It should be easy to detect the point at which you have convinced the interviewer of your capabilities. When this point is recognized, it is time to make the active decision to close the interview. Closing can be achieved easily by asking the interviewer if he believes you are qualified for the position. This question-asked at the strategically proper time (usually 85% to 90% of the way through the interview)-signals the beginning of the important interview close.

VI. The Interview Close

The closing phase of the interview is perhaps the most important aspect of the interview for making a lasting impression. It solidifies all that has gone on previously in the interview, and leaves the interviewer a positive impression that will set you head and shoulders above competitors for the position.

There are four parts to the interview close:

1. You ask (to begin the close) if the interviewer believes you to be qualified for the position.
2. No matter what the response to that question (which will likely be non-committal), you follow with a

- statement that you know you can handle the position.
3. You make the statement-an even more positive indication of your interest-that the position is exactly what you are looking for that you would like to have an offer.
 4. Finally, as you are preparing to leave you tell the interviewer you would enjoy working with him or her personally.

By following this technique in closing, you will have convinced the interviewer that you can do the job. You will have to let him or her know that you are definitely interested and that you would like an offer. Perhaps more importantly, you have to let him or her know you will be a part of his/her team and that you are, in effect, the right candidate for the position.

A typical sequence for an interview close might be as follows:

Candidate: "Tell me, Bill, do you think I qualify for the position?" (This starts the interview close.)

Interviewer: "Yes, Jane, I think you do. However we have several more interviews to complete before we can make definite decision on making an offer."

Candidate: "Bill, from what you have told me, I know I can do the job and I would definitely like to have the position. Can I count on your help in strongly advancing my candidacy?"

At this point you should expect to be dismissed or taken to another interviewer. All interviews-no matter who the person may be-should be handled in the same fashion: with a topical interview and a strong close. You must convince *all* parties in the interview cycle you are the candidate for the position. Assume each interviewer knows nothing about you and start your interview procedure from scratch.

VII. The Exit

Your exit from the interviewer's office will conclude the interview. This should be viewed as an additional opportunity to display your positive attitude. At the interviewer's office door (or at the elevator) you should repeat that you will excel at the position, and that the position is exactly what you are seeking. The opportunity for personal touch is also present at this point. You should take the opportunity to say that you would enjoy working with the interviewer personally (unless the interview was a total disaster). This reinforcement at the exit phase can make the difference between receiving and not receiving a job offer.

VIII. After the Interview

After the exit-while the interview is still fresh on your mind-write down what you feel are the strong and weak points of the interview. Now you may review your performance prior to your next interview and work on a stronger presentation of yourself as "right" for the position in question.

Promptly call your recruiter so you may be debriefed while memories are fresh. Your recruiter will then be able to close the loop with the client company and probably get some early feedback for you. Most importantly, your recruiter can provide information for a follow-up note to the company and to whom it should be addressed.

The interview cycle is now complete. You have doing everything that the "winning interview" requires.

Common Mistakes in Interviewing

1. Losing Sight of the Interviewing Objective. The objective is to get a job offer within a framework of the truth and being sincere. Do not let your preliminary judgment of the company affect your interview. *Solution: maintain your interview technique and strategy.*
2. Being Too Modest. For one reason or another, the job candidate-especially candidates for key technical positions-tend to understate their capabilities. Do not, for example, forget that knowledge of how to solve a particular problem can be a strong qualification even though that knowledge may not have been applied directly to your job experience. Do not let the fear of misrepresenting yourself prevent you from relating the full scope of your experience and knowledge. *Solution: make the most of what you have.*
3. Asking "Me" Questions. Remember your objective is to get a job offer. Chances are that the Personnel Dept or the interviewers will answer most of your questions in time. Don't pursue questions about what the company can do for you during the interview. *Solution: emphasize your ability to contribute to the company's goals.*

4. Failure to "Sell" Your Abilities Throughout the Interview Sequence. There is no such thing as a "token" interview. It may be true that some people you interview have no power to hire you. But they almost certainly have the power to keep you from getting the offer. You should treat every interviewer as if he were key in getting position. *Solution: treat any person you meet as important.*

General Tips On Interviewing

- Do not tell jokes.
- Remember that the role of Personnel Departments is to screen people, thus they fill a vital role in the hiring process and interview sequence. Do your best to make friends in this department.
- When negatives arise during the interview, try to turn these into positive statements.
- Do not let minor discourtesies steer you on a wrong course. If you are treated in discourteously, do not respond in kind. Be patient and understanding.
- Do not discuss either your personal problems, or those of the interviewer.
- Always go well beyond simple "yes" or "no" answers.
- Do not overstay your interview period, nor let it turn into a "social hour."
- Interview with confidence.
- Remember that you will get a meaningful career opportunity from the interviewing process. Far more often than not, job loss or job changes eventually brings tangible improvements in a person's career situation.