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Interview Preparation Guide

- 1 You must sell what you are capable of doing for the employer. This is best accomplished by giving examples of accomplishments you have done previously for companies that are relevant to the position you are interviewing for. The basic theme for any interviewing process is that behavior tends to repeat itself. Past behavior is the best predictor of future behavior. Whatever the interviewer finds, a pattern of the past will be assumed to repeat in the future. Like it or not, your past accomplishments are the manifestations of your corporate worth.
2. You must approach the interview process with a positive attitude.
3. Your objective should be to get an offer. You can neither decline nor accept an offer you do not get. Uncertainty during the interview process invariably produces bad results.
4. Before you get there, know what you can do for the company. Candidates with marvelous qualifications lose out not because they couldn't do the job, but because their confidence did not come through. They did not sell themselves convincingly enough. They did not inspire confidence.
5. Learn everything you can about the company from every available information source. It is critical that you use the Internet to find out if they have a web site. We have noticed that companies that have sites have a very strong expectation that they be used. Remember, confidence is rooted in knowledge, knowledge is rooted in preparation. Never go into an interview unless you have thoroughly researched the company.
6. Understand that the interviewer's interest in you is purely selfish. It is no different than your selfish interest in the company. They want to hire the person who can do the most for them. All attention should be focused on what the company wants, with your agenda temporarily taking a back seat. If you focus your attention on yourself, you will get in trouble in a hurry. When you have created a strong desire in the company to hire you, you can lay out the things you want; and if they are in the realm of reason, you have an excellent chance of achieving them.
7. Never bring up the subject of benefits, salary, and vacation policy or bonuses until the interviewer brings them up.
8. It is in your self-interest to delay money discussions until the end of the interview process. Hopefully by the end a strong desire to hire you will exist, and you will have a lot more information. From your perspective, these are ideal conditions to discuss money. If the interviewer asks salary expectations early in the interview, you should respond, "I want the best offer you can make based upon my education and experience." If after this statement the interviewer still persists, try a somewhat vague response like, "I'd rather learn more about the position and your expectations prior to discussing compensation." When the time is proper to discuss salary; avoid under selling yourself, but realize that excessive salary demands are one of the main causes of offers not being extended. Many people feel they should start high and negotiate. At best this is an extremely risky strategy in today's sophisticated environment. Most of the clients are very limited as to what they will negotiate unless they are in a very unusual situation. Rarely will you be forced to nail down an exact asking price. In this case, I believe in adding a little cushion and stating, I would like "\$". The word like implies some flexibility.

9. The people you interview with must like you in order to be hired. Basic human relation's skills and proper packaging of you are absolutely critical. Next to no one, regardless of qualifications, gets hired who is not liked. Many less qualified people get hired because they are liked. Best interview skills often win over best qualifications. The single most influential factor in the job interview situation is not your experience or qualifications, but your personality-how you present yourself during the interview. How you look, how you communicate your ideas, how well you listen, how much enthusiasm you generate- The following is strongly suggested:
- A) Never interrupt the interviewer. If you do interrupt, you will have all the charm and appeal of a snake. If the interviewer wants to talk, let him. Good listeners are universally liked. If possible ask additional prompting questions to keep the interviewer talking. You will be getting potentially valuable information and there is no risk in listening.
 - B) Do not force information on the interviewer. This is a major turn off. Know in advance the points, experience, traits, and accomplishments in your background that you hope to discuss. Look for natural feeling opportunities to bring them up. Remember the interviewer, for many possible reasons, may want to handle the interview differently than what you expect. If this happens, do not be disappointed. If your human relation's skills are good, you are in good shape. The person doing the interviewing, most of the time, is not a professional interviewer schooled in "secret techniques". He or she is simply a person with a problem: luring somebody to fill a job.
 - C) Have a list of well thought out questions you plan to ask. The interviewer's perception of how sharp you are is heavily influenced by the questions you ask. Consider these;
 - 1. What are the main strengths a person who gets this job needs to have?
 - 2 What type of problems are you having?
 - 3. What is the career path for someone in this position?
 - 4. What sort of performance is the company expecting?
 - 5. What is the #1 priority for the person who takes this job?
 - D) Arrive early for the interview. Don't show up at the office but be on-site 1/2 hr. early.
 - F) Dress in an appropriate manner. Over the past few years, customs regarding dress have changed dramatically. What is proper dress varies widely from organization to organization. The best approach is to ask the company official responsible for setting up the interview what their recommendation would be regarding proper attire.
 - F) Get a haircut, trim beards, and mustaches.
 - G) Get on a first name basis as quickly as possible.
 - H) Smile, this really helps. Be enthusiastic, be responsive, radiate energy.
 - I) Use a firm handshake.
 - J) Maintain eye contact, but don't overdo it; you will lose track of the conversation if you do.
 - K) Sit up straight and stay just a little tense. If you are totally relaxed, you may drift into contradictory body language which is something people read intuitively. Lean forward occasionally to indicate the interviewer is being well received.
 - L) Never make negative statements about former bosses, past companies, or your present company. If absolutely necessary, speak in terms of "problems" versus very specific criticism.
 - M) Wait to be offered a chair before sitting.
 - N) Do not smoke or chew gum.
 - O) Do your homework, it will show in many ways.
 - P) Thank the interviewer for his time.
 - Q) At every opportunity express gratitude for past employers and bosses.

- R) Carry a folding binder that holds a legal pad. It is a lot less cumbersome than a brief case. It looks professional and gives you something in which to carry cards, resumes, pens, etc.
- S) It is strongly recommended that you take some notes whether you need them or not.
- T) To each of us our name is our identity. It is very important to remember the interviewer's names and to use them. Some things to make it easier are:
1. Request the company provide a list of the interviewer's names and titles in advance of the interview.
 2. Ask the interviewer for a business card. Then put the card in a side pocket of your binder with most of the name showing.
 3. Write the name down in your notes several times.
 4. Use the name in conversation as quickly as possible. If you are addressing someone it is a good strategy to start any statement with his or her name. This can be done repeatedly. Instead of being awkward, people very much enjoy the repetitive use of their name in conversation.
- U) Pay attention to the people that support the people you are interviewing with. Doing well with them gives the impression you fit into the organization easily. Also in certain situations, they can provide a wealth of unfiltered information.
10. Always try to answer questions and make statements in a direct and concise manner. Failure to do so will get tuned out very quickly. Avoid answering questions with only Yes or No. Give explanations whenever possible. State things about yourself that relate to the situation. Do not brag.
11. Make sure you understand the question before answering. Answering the wrong question is a real "turn-off". It gives the impression you were not paying attention, which is insulting. If necessary, ask to have the question repeated or clarified.
12. During the interview, you should concentrate on only two things:
Making the interviewer like you and gathering as much information as possible. Being liked gets you an offer. Information gathering helps you assess the interview when you get back home. Trying to process the information during the interview causes mistakes. The best strategy is to try your best to be in a position to get an offer. It can always be turned down; or upon reflection, you may withdraw from consideration.
13. Very seldom is it possible to get all the information you want during the interview. Once an offer is extended, you can easily get any reasonable information you request.
- 14 Preparing question lists are important.
- A) The questions you ask, including the words you select to express them, will strongly influence the interviewer's assessment of you.
 - B) They prevent you from overlooking needed information. After the interview, you can easily determine the information you still need to get.
 - C) Preparing lists will make you much more organized and efficient. The interviewers will notice. Question list preparation is strongly advised.
15. The first list you should carry in your binder. Make a list of all data you need to gather. Out of that data you need to make up 10-15 of the best questions. Be sure some are questions like these: What things make it attractive to be an employee of this company? What qualities do you appreciate most in a member of your staff? Having 10-15 questions is very important because at one or several points in the interview, the interviewers will ask if you have any questions. At this point the very shrewd thing to do is to pull out your questions list, scan it, and ask a couple of questions. This will make it crystal clear to the interviewers that you took the interview seriously and were prepared. My favorite question is: Mr/s. [Employer], if I'm am chosen for this position and one year from now receive an "outstanding" review, what is it that I would have accomplished during the year to achieve that result?

16. You must know and be prepared to discuss why you want to change employers including reasonably detailed explanations for each past job change and your accomplishments for every employer ideally expressed in dollar values. Interview processes are usually characterized by suspicion on all sides. Both sides fear mistakes. Not giving specific enough information about the above areas usually leads to negative inferences on the interviewer's part.
17. In trying to work up your accomplishments, focus on the problems you have dealt with, the solutions to those problems, the results of the solutions and the value of having the problems fixed, preferably expressed in dollar values. The more you are given credit for being able to do the more you are worth.
18. Never lie or be dishonest. Many catastrophic things can occur if you do this, especially if you get the job. Exaggerating is lying.
19. Do not get drawn into even a low-key argument. If a statement you have made is challenged, quietly stick to your position if possible, hedge with statements like; "In the environment I have been in, this is how it was handled. If there are better ways to do it, I would be very interested in learning them." Even if the interviewer disagrees, you are exhibiting reasonableness and flexibility. Remember, the interviewer may be testing you by playing devil's advocate. If you argue, you cannot win even if you are right.
20. As early as possible in the interview, you need to ascertain what the company and the interviewer are looking for. One approach to accomplish this is to say, "The recruiter gave me enough information to get me excited, but I still have a fuzzy picture of your needs. Could you describe the position and what kind of problems need to be solved." Put this way, it is very difficult for the interviewer to duck your question.
21. Every answer you give should, in one way or another say one of the following three things:
 1. I am able to do this job.
 2. I am willing to do this job.
 3. I can fit in.

At some point say the five words that almost every interviewer will respond to: "I won't let you down."
22. Forget about whether or not you are going to get this job. Concentrate on the interview itself. Don't even think about the outcome; it will only interfere. The object of the interview is to communicate to the interviewer the three things mentioned above: your ability, your willingness and your suitability.
23. Here are some questions you should be prepared to answer:
 1. Tell me about yourself. (Be prepared, and don't ask; Well, what do you want to know?)
 2. What do you think of our operation here?
 3. What is it about this job that interests you most?
 4. What do you consider your strengths/ weaknesses?
 5. Why do you want to leave your present job?
 6. Do you think you can get along with?
 7. I am a little bit concerned about your lack of?
 8. We work a lot of hours here, is that going to cause any trouble at home?
 9. What do you do in your spare time?
 10. What unique methods have you used for problem solving?
 11. You have had quite a few jobs in your career, why?
 12. I am surprised your salary isn't higher considering everything you say you have done?

13. Tell me what you think this job really involves?
 14. Do you have any problems following company policy?
 15. What was it about your last job that bothered you the most?
 16. What did you like best about your last job?
 17. What are your long-term goals?
 18. What kind of contribution do you think you can make here?
 19. What is the most difficult challenge you have ever faced?
 20. What are you doing to improve yourself?
 21. How long do you think you could be happy in this job?
 22. What would you say are your most important accomplishments to date?
 23. How creative a problem solver are you?
 24. Can you motivate people?
 25. What was your favorite subject in school?
24. Be observant, look around for possible conversation points--things the two of you may have in common (photographs, trophies etc.). Anything you can mention or bring up that will get the two of you sharing information, showing mutual enthusiasm, will make the rest of the interview go more smoothly.
25. If by the end of the interview you are interested in the position, ask for the job, This does not commit you to anything. It will positively affect compensation. It may be the difference in getting an offer or a rejection letter.
25. As soon as possible after the interview, write or e-mail a brief thank you note to everyone you interviewed with.

To sum up:

The job interview is the moment of truth in job hunting-- so crucial and organic- an aspect of getting hired that entire books have been devoted to the subject. Yet interviews are probably the trickiest aspect of job hunting in which to dispense advice.

The problem is the interview is very much a game-- a game moreover, in which the rules are constantly changing. Ostensibly, you and the interviewer are having a civilized conversation. You greet one another. There is some small talk. The interviewer asks you some questions. You answer them. The interviewer asks you if you have any questions. The questions get answered and so forth.

But while all of this is going on, the interviewer is playing out his or her role in the game:

Paying attention not only to what you are saying, but to how you are responding. The interviewer is making an evaluation, computing nearly everything you say and do, the better to judge whether your ability, experience, education and personality fit the job and the company. The interviewer knows you are doing your best to create a positive impression. The interviewer knows that as hard as the two of you may try to make the interview seem natural and unforced, the interview is, by nature, an unnatural and forced situation. Much of how the interviewer evaluates you will be determined not so much by the qualifications you enumerate and the personal qualities you exhibit during the interview, but by your interview performance in general. How you play the game!

So what we have been talking about in the preceding pages is the job interview as a performance in itself. You already know, or should know, the qualities that make you special. You already know or should know, the skills and the attributes it takes to do the job being discussed. Your task in the interview is to make the sale: to sell the person (or persons) who interviews you on the idea you already know ahead of time: that you are the best person for the job.

The Most Important Advice: Be a good listener! Seek first to understand and then to be understood. Many good candidates do not get offers because they talk too much and don't take the time to understand the questions. Often times, a good interviewer will use silence as a ploy to keep the interviewee talking. There is a good chance he or she will say too much. Once, you've understood the question and answered it; shut up.

Sample Follow-up Letter:

Dear Mr. /Ms.

Just a brief note to thank you for taking the time to talk with me today about the position you're looking to fill. I enjoyed our conversation and found your comments very helpful.

As I told you during the interview, I'd like the chance to show how well I could handle the job. I am more convinced now that we have spoken that it's a job I could do well, and I'd be delighted to discuss the matter further with you at your convenience.

I look forward to hearing from you. Thanks again for your time and encouragement.

Sincerely,