

Interviewing Skill Development

Interview Guidelines

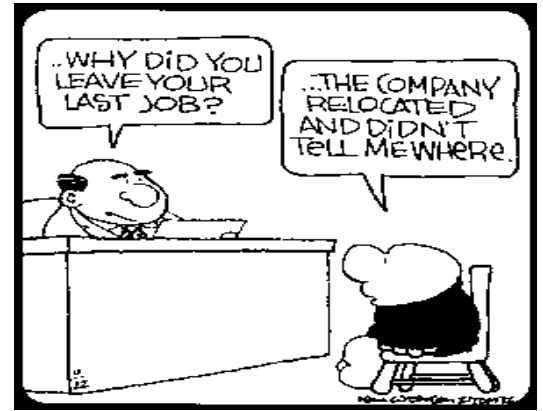
Most **interviews** are face-to-face meetings between the interviewer and job candidate, for the purpose of mutual evaluation. The interview gives the job candidate an opportunity to sell their assets and to distinguish themselves from other candidates. Here are a few tips to consider:

- ◆ Employers form an opinion about a candidate within a few minutes after meeting, so **make a good first impression**.
- ◆ **Rehearse your answers** to questions aloud before the interview so that answers flow smoothly from your lips. The better prepared you are - the more confident you'll feel.
- ◆ **Accept as many interviews as possible** - even with companies or for jobs that you're not interested in - to build your interviewing skill and confidence.
- ◆ **Interviews can take many forms** - phone screening, one-on-one, panels, and stress interviews. If possible, find out in advance which type to expect.
- ◆ **Phone interviews** are often used by employers to pre-screen applicants and to select the best candidates for face-to face interviews. Due to the one-dimensional nature of this style of interview (auditory), candidates need to create a positive impression with good answers and a confident voice.
- ◆ Even though the interviewer may be evaluating you, **you are also evaluating them** – notice whether workers appear happy, how attractive the facilities are, and whether this is an employer for whom you'd like to work.



Interviewing Dos & Don'ts

Remember, you'll never have a second chance to make a first impression.



DO'S:



- ◆ **Before the interview**, make extra copies of your resume to take with you; bring paper and pen, write down questions to ask.
- ◆ **Wear clothing appropriate** for the position. Be conservative. Notice what successful people in your field wear and emulate them.
- ◆ **Arrive 15 minutes early** so you'll be relaxed and ready for a productive interview.
- ◆ **Be enthusiastic** and friendly. Speak clearly and with self-confidence.
- ◆ When meeting the interviewer, **offer a firm hand-shake** which conveys confidence.
- ◆ Everyone likes to hear his/her name, so **refer to the interviewer by name**, if comfortable, during your conversation.
- ◆ **Maintain eye contact** with the interviewer.
- ◆ **Listen** to what the interviewer says and ask questions or make statements that reflect your attention.
- ◆ **Give brief stories or examples** of past work successes (in school, as volunteer, in employment) to highlight your skills.
- ◆ **Research the company needs** and then describe which of your skills might help solve their problems and benefit them.
- ◆ **At the end of the interview, give a one-minute sales summary** matching your skills to the job requirements. Ask for the job – few people do. So tell the interviewer that you want the position.
- ◆ **Follow up after the interview** first with a thank you note and later a call.

DON'TS:



- ◆ **Don't smoke, chew gum or accept beverages.** These are distractions. Stay focused on your objective - to sell yourself and get the job.
- ◆ Don't slouch. **Sit tall** and slightly forward to create an impression of interest.
- ◆ Since your interviewer's attention span may be short, **don't talk for more than 60 seconds** at a time.
- ◆ Don't answer questions too quickly. **Give thought to each answer.**
- ◆ **Don't** offer non-essential information or **badmouth former employers.**
- ◆ Don't get emotional or defensive. Tell what, not how. **Don't lie.** Be honest in a positive way.
- ◆ **Don't bring up the topic of salary** until the offer is extended. If asked about it at an early point in the interview, if possible, suggest that you discuss it later after you've discussed job duties and your qualifications.

How to Answer Difficult Questions

When asked a difficult question, take a moment to reflect before answering. Speak about your accomplishments and relate them to solving company problems. Interviewers want to know what kind of person you are, whether you are a good fit with other workers, and whether you will make a positive contribution. (*Answers from Knock 'Em Dead by Martin John Yate, Bob Adams, Inc. Publishers.)

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- ◆ **Tell me about yourself.** Ask the interviewer what in particular he/she would like to know about you. Describe your accomplishments that match their job specs. Stick to information relevant to your qualifications for the job.
 - ◆ **What is your greatest weakness?*** Describe your weakness so that it is seen as a positive characteristic. Possible weaknesses might include over extending yourself on projects, working till the project is complete, etc. Or describe a weakness from the past, how you turned into a strength and what you learned from the experience.
 - ◆ **Why did you leave your last job?*** Prepare a brief statement explaining why you left - ending on a positive note about the skills you offer. *"I really enjoyed using my administrative skills in my last job, but left to receive my accounting certificate. Based upon our discussions, I am very capable of performing this payroll position."* If due to a disability, you might state that you were unable to perform certain aspects of the job, (such as heavy lifting or continuous typing), depending upon your limitations. Avoid using words such as injury, rehabilitation, or workers comp to explain your reason for leaving. Employers interpret these negatively.
 - ◆ **Why do you want to work for us?*** Do your research and tell why you would select them. Relate your skills point-for-point to those described by the interviewer or in the announcement.
 - ◆ **Why have you changed jobs so frequently?*** If applicable, explain that you wanted to gain broad experience and that you are now seeking a position that you can commit to. Say that it's not due to poor performance.
 - ◆ **Why were you unemployed for so long?*** Be sure to have a good explanation for all unemployed periods. Describe any training, traveling, or career exploration that you did during these gaps.
 - ◆ **What would you like to be doing five years from now?*** You might say that, if hired, as you gain knowledge and experience on the job, you would be receptive to any jobs within the company which may become available. Emphasize that you strive to be professional and a team player.
 - ◆ **What did you dislike about your last job?*** Indicate that overall you liked everything about your last job. You might select a minor part of your job which was not a favored duty and explain that even then you performed this duty well.
 - ◆ **What do you think of your current/last boss?*** Keep it short and sweet. Comment on his/her professionalism and a positive personal characteristic, even if you didn't like him/her.
 - ◆ **Describe a difficult problem you've had to resolve.**
* Make a list of past problems you've resolved. Rehearse a few to describe during an interview. Describe the steps you took to resolve the problem. Make sure that there was a positive outcome

Salary Issues

You'll usually be asked about salary expectations prior to being offered a position, so do your research before the interview to provide a realistic range. Remember not to bring up salary or benefit issues before an offer has been extended. Salary negotiations normally come after a job offer has been extended. Tips:

- ◆ Prior to the interview, **research salary ranges for the position.** Use salary.com or Eureka.org so you can give a range, not a single number.
- ◆ **When an offer is made, take time to consider it.** It's customary to ask for a day or two to consider the offer. State how excited you are about it and that you are confident you will make a valuable contribution.

*Answers from *Knock 'em Dead* by Martin John Yates, Bob Adams, Inc. Publishers



Asking Questions

When the interview is winding down, the interviewer will typically ask if you have any questions you'd like to ask. It's important to prepare a few questions in advance. Asking questions shows that you are inquisitive and have done your research. A few examples include:

- ◆ "Is this a new position or was it held by someone else?"
- ◆ "What are the first priorities of this job?"
- ◆ "How does this department fit into the overall organization?"
- ◆ "Is this department considered a profit center?"
- ◆ "Who are your company's chief competitors?"

Asking For The Job

As the interview comes to a close, summarize your skills that relate to the job. This is your opportunity to really sell yourself and to show that you are the best person for the job. Many job offers are lost because applicants fail to ask for the job. **So ask for it.**

"When will you make a decision?"

Ask about the next step in the hiring process. There may be further interviews planned.

"Is this the only interview or will there be other meetings?" You could say, "I am very enthusiastic about the position and the contributions I can make. If your decision will be made by the 30th, may I call you then if I haven't heard back from you?" Remember, if you don't ask, you won't receive.

Remain visible.

Be sure to send a thank you note to the interviewer within two days of the interview. You want to remain fresh and current in the interviewer's mind. If appropriate, contact the interviewer by phone a week later to express your interest and to inquire about the status of the position.

Professional References

Employers will request references of an applicant usually just prior to making an employment offer. They usually request two business, work, or educational references and one personal reference. Before providing an employer with a list of references:

- ◆ Speak with each reference in advance and ask whether they will give you a **good reference**. (Don't assume that they will. Many jobs have been lost due to negative remarks.)
- ◆ Give them details about the position so that they can better prepare for a call.



Sample List of References

Your Name
Address
City, State, Zip Code
Telephone

Name of Professional/Work Reference
Job Title
Your Relationship to Person
Length of Time Known
Telephone/Email

Name of Professional/Business Reference
Job Title
Your Relationship to Person
Length of Time Known
Telephone/Email

Name of Professional/Business Reference
Job Title
Your Relationship to Person
Length of Time Known
Telephone/Email

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Interview Checklist

Ask a friend to evaluate your “mock” interview performance by using this checklist.

Name _____

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Maintained good eye contact, smiled and appeared likeable.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Good posture, no slouching.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Voice – easy to understand; good volume and speed.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Appearance – neatly dressed appropriate for position; no excessive jewelry, tattoos, etc.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Gave thought to answers before speaking. Good content to answers.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

No mention of personal information (age, marital status, children, religious/cultural affiliation, etc.)

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Good use of numbers to quantify experience and detailed description of accomplishments.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

Gave good examples of skills (brief stories) to exemplify qualifications.

Good ___ Could Improve ___

“Sold” your skills. Asked for the job.