

How to prepare yourself for an Interview

Being interviewed for a job can be a scary business and even the senior, well seasoned amongst us are prone to nerves. Just remember being nervous can be a healthy sign and one that means you are preparing yourself for what lies ahead. However for some nerves can all too easily become panic and overpowering emotional conditions such as these can hinder your ability to perform well or even perform at all. The good news is that help is at hand and with a little preparation even the most nervous of us stand a good chance of success.

Firstly understand that to get an interview is great. Congratulate yourself on navigating the first of many hurdles. After all it means that your initial job application, probably in the form of a letter and a CV, has been met with some degree of approval. However you should be realistic in accepting that pulling together a letter, at your leisure, and attaching it and a CV to an email is child's play when compared to what might greet you in an interview situation. But heh! don't panic as we are here to help!

Interviews, whilst serious and important, can and should be fun. We all know they can also be stressful, especially if things do not go as planned. This document will help you prepare sufficiently so that the former is likely to be your experience. Like with most things in life, preparation is the key to a successful outcome and this statement has never been truer than when associated with interviews.

Do Some Research and Ask Questions

It is rare for a company to interview just one person for any given position. The likelihood is that there are many more candidates out there than there are jobs. This situation is healthy for the employer but not so for you the candidate. You are going to have to stand out from the crowd and impress the interviewer in order to make it through to the subsequent stages and eventually the main prize – the role you are so eager to fill.

Firstly, you will need to make it easier for the interviewer to select you for the role than any other candidate he or she sees. You must appear better suited for the position and that clearly goes beyond your appearance, style and interview technique.

To really distinguishing yourself above all others you must exhibit some good knowledge of the company and in particular the role and ask pertinent and

relevant questions throughout the interview at appropriate points. However get the balance right and never appear to take over the interview. By appearing more acceptable for the job than anyone else you make it difficult for the interviewer not to seriously consider you for the position. Here are some techniques to help brush up your relevant knowledge.

First, research the company beforehand. Don't get caught looking dumbstruck by showing ignorance about what the company does, or how it is positioned among its competitors. Such information is freely available on the Internet and probably on the companies own website. Never fail at the first hurdle or your interview will be shorter than you expected.

Some other good sources of information might be

- Company literature – ring up and ask for it. Show some initiative.
- Local papers – bigger companies adopt regular and high profile PR. They like to let the world know what they are up to. Even this knowledge can keep you one step ahead of the interviewer.
- Company organised tours – great for historical tidbits and product knowledge
- Financial news sources – printed and the web are good sources
- The library – an under utilised resource, especially since the growth of the net
- Other media – such as the radio an TV

Know your role

It is within your interest to find out as much as possible about the actual role you are applying for. Why not call the department you would end up working in and try to find a friendly voice. Explain why you are calling and you will surprised just how helpful some people can be and inside knowledge gained here could be crucial during the interview.

Of course, whilst being interviewed, you have the option of coming clean on the source of your knowledge or keeping your fact-finding sources a secret. In many cases, interviewers will be impressed if you know pertinent facts about their company that are not in the public domain.

One area that many candidates fail in is the ability to ask the interviewer to repeat or explain questions in more detail in fear of this being interpreted as an inability to understand simple questions. Quite the reverse is true. Asking for clarity shows you are interested and can also put the interviewer into a slightly less dominant position as they begin to doubt their own ability to get some points across. Don't abuse this tactic.

Notes

Keep notes during the interview. Summarise the key points covered by the interviewer and highlight any points which they did not cover for when you get the opportunity to speak.

Take your turn

After the interviewer has finished with their questions they will undoubtedly ask if you have any further questions. If they do not always speak up and state that you have some questions which you would like to ask. Now it's your turn to ask what your duties will be in the new post, what the starting salary will be, whether there will be opportunities for advancements and how salary increases are managed etc. This will make the interviewer feel that you are actively interested in the position, and will reinforce the feeling that you are very knowledgeable in your field. Avoid following a line of questions that the interviewer obviously cannot answer or feels uncomfortable answering. This could result in the interviewer feeling bored, annoyed or defensive.

Dress Accordingly

If you are applying to a conservative company, as most financial companies can be, dress conservatively. Men should opt for a dark suit, plain shirt, tie and good shoes. Fashion may dictate style in some cases but a cutaway collar, double cuffed shirt, clean, un-creased silk tie and well polished black shoes such as brogues are considered the norm for senior positions.

Women should opt for a business like skirt of knee length or greater or a trouser suit; with a blouse (not too see thru) and finished with appropriate shoes, nothing too glamorous. Keep the Jimmy Choo's for impressing your friends at swanky parties and Michelin starred restaurants.

However, if the company is a little more relaxed you can add varying degrees of colour but never get out the whacky tie your kids bought you at Christmas and always avoid those comedy socks lurking at the back of the drawer. Always look smart and organised, because no matter how laid back the company may appear, you still have to make a good first impression as someone who will give 100% for the sake of the company.

Smart casual

Never wear jeans or cords, Khakis or Chino's (American's take note). Whilst these may be acceptable in the workplace itself they are never appropriate wear for the interview.

Always avoid creased or dirty clothing or anything that is “in style” this season. Always remove piercings that are on show other than earrings (avoiding oversized varieties). The continual glimpse of a tongue piercing can be extremely off-putting for an interviewer.

Some major Do's and Don'ts

- Do make sure you know where the interview will be held. Make sure you know how to get there (by whatever means). If you go by car you really need to research where you can park.
- Don't wear anything new - wear something that you are familiar with and comfortable in.
- Don't leave your mobile phone switched on.
- Never chew gum or eat anything unless offered to you by your interviewer
- Always ask for a drink if not offered as this will help you to avoid a dry mouth which is a common nervous reaction.
- Try to avoid saying “and” and “hmm” repeatedly. Practice not saying them before hand.
- Do try to use correct grammar and always speak slowly and clearly.
- Do ask what it was about your application that made the company want to get to know you better.
- Always ask at the very end how you stand with regard to the application