

Tips for a successful interview

Interviews can take place in a variety of formats; in a formal or more relaxed atmosphere, in the HR Department or in other premises, with one or several interviewer(s).

Most of the questions that you will be asked at interview and these are divided into three categories:

1. Your CV and work experience. You have given the interviewer a menu, and clearly you will fail if you cannot support any of the items contained within it.
2. Yourself.
3. A topic. Depending on your personal background and experience you may be asked questions about the industry, about function, about changes in organisation or management techniques.

The keys to a successful interview are **preparation, practice and performance**

Preparation

Having been invited to attend an interview; the first thing is to check

- the date
- time (what is the likely timetable, will you be there over lunch)
- location (do you know how to get there)
- the name of the interviewer(s). Will there be more than one interviewer?

The best way to confirm the details is via the interview organiser.

The next step is to collect as much information about the organisation as you can — turnover, products, markets, locations, plans for growth, problem areas — as this will not only show the interviewer you have prepared for the meeting, but it will generate questions for you to ask at the interview. Here again, the interview organiser can be a fruitful source, and may provide a company report, product brochures or even a video. Where possible, once you know you have an interview, obtain up-to-date financial and market information about the organisation. Visit the company's website for more information.

The third aspect of your preparation is identifying your own information needs. What is the nature of the role to be filled (if this has been made known) and how do you fit the bill? Why has the vacancy arisen, and what are the opportunities for personal growth and development? What are the problems facing the job initially, and how will your progress be measured? What are the criteria for successful performance? You will also need to find out about the organisation structure, reporting relationships, subordinate staff, and the style and culture of the organisation.

Practice

What sort of person are you? Why did you leave your last company? What are your strengths and weaknesses? Have you ever had any failures? What are your career aims?

These are some of the most difficult questions to cope with, and the best way is to rehearse the answers beforehand, either on your own or, preferably, in a simulated interview with your consultant. You have spent a lot of time preparing your CV, and the interview is an opportunity to amplify the main points and to add some flesh to the bones.

Here is a checklist of the most commonly asked questions. You are strongly recommended to work through the questions as part of your preparation to avoid surprises. If you feel comfortable about most of your responses, you will be able to concentrate on the progress of the interview and will demonstrate greater self-confidence

- Take me through your resume
- What have been your achievements to date?
- Are you happy with your career to date?
- What do you like, dislike about your present work?
- Tell me about the most difficult situation you have had to face at work and how you tackled it?
- How does your job fit into your department and company?
- What kind of people do you like working with?
- What are your preferred working conditions, working alone or in a group and why?
- Why do you think you would like this role?
- What can you bring to this organisation?
- How would your colleagues describe you?
- Why should I give this position to you instead of the other people on the shortlist?
- What five adjectives would you use that best describe you?

Performance

In theory the interview is a two-way process, in which your aim is to find out whether the job on offer is the job you want, and the interviewer's aim is to decide whether you are a suitable candidate for the job. In practice, however, many interviewers are not particularly skilled, and the resultant discussion can be disjointed — long silences, frequent interruptions, lost documents, closed or multiple questions, and sometimes aggression. Since the time belongs to the interviewer, you must follow her/his lead, but you can alleviate the situation.

- Answer the question that is asked, and do not volunteer irrelevant information
- Keep your answer concise.
- Concentrate on facts, not opinions.
- Speak clearly and confidently, and do not allow yourself to be discouraged.
- Constantly remind yourself that you have something to sell, and focus on how you can make a positive contribution in the role.
- Listen carefully for the unspoken questions (for example, the interviewer may make a comment that masks her/his concern over a particular issue, such as your age or lack of experience) and try to remove that concern by your subsequent response.

Having prepared your own list of questions for the interviewer, make sure that you get an opportunity to ask at least some of them. Always stick to the facts released officially by the organisation rather than any popular rumour. Open-ended questions will always bring out more information than closed yes/no questions, and you will be more appreciated for having given the interviewee a chance to expound her/his pet theories. Avoid all questions about salaries, hours of work, holidays, etc., and concentrate on establishing the nature and value of the role to the organisation.

Shake hands firmly, make frequent eye contact, and try to establish early rapport with the interviewer. Your body language is vital, so do not fidget or twitch or wring your hands. Above all, sit upright (do not slouch) and keep alert. When the meeting is over, stay positive — thank the interviewer for the opportunity to talk, and look forward to the next meeting.

Do Not:

- Try to be too clever.
- Lie, pretend or give evasive answers
- Lose your temper.
- Get flustered or panic.
- Criticise your former employers