

# INTERVIEWING SKILLS - A GUIDE TO THE SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

The Interview can be one of the most stressful events in your life, the following are some of the key points to consider when you are preparing for your interview;

An interview is a dialogue that takes place between the employer and the prospective employee. The employer will want to find out information about you – obviously, they will be concerned with your skills and qualities as a worker, but just as important is the impression that you make as a person. Remember that there may be a number of applicants with qualifications like yours, so you will all look roughly the same on paper. The interview will give you the chance to sell yourself on the merits of your personal qualities.

The first step towards a successful interview is preparation. It is essential to do some background work. Find out as much as you can about the organisation, work environment, and the job responsibilities. The more you know about the company, the more confident more prepared you will be and the more confident you will feel answering the interview questions. Researching the company will also let you know if the company is really for you!

As well as finding out about the company, it is important to consider what qualities the employer is looking for in the candidates. A recent poll revealed that employers rate the following aspects as the most impressive and important qualities among their candidates:

- Honesty and integrity
- Enthusiasm
- Verbal ability
- Appearance
- Sense of humour

Honesty in particular is an important trait. You may be able to wow an employer with your dazzling verbal skills and cutting-edge charisma, but without such attributes as trustworthiness and integrity, even the most highly skilled and articulate job seeker may experience only limited success. The employer may therefore spend some time assessing the strength of your moral fibre.

The employer will also be interested in your other characteristics. They may well ask you probing questions in order to find you more about you, and so you should be prepared for these questions. The questions may include:

- “Why are you interested in this position?”
- “How do you handle yourself under stressful situations?”
- “Do you have any hobbies or special interests?”
- “How would you describe your working habits?”
- “What interests you about this job?”
- “What is your greatest strength/weakness?”
- “Do you function well as part of a team?”
- “Tell me about your previous work experience.”
- “What else would you like to tell me about yourself?”

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When you are answering these questions, you should answer accurately, but at the same time remember that your replies should illustrate your suitability for the offered position. You must be able to articulate your strengths to your prospective employer.

Remember also that the interview isn't one-sided: although the interviewer is evaluating your credentials and deciding where you may fit into the company, you are also interviewing to determine whether you like the company and feel that you would be happy there. You may therefore want to prepare some questions of your own. Sensible questions include:

- "What are the major responsibilities of this position?"
- "What qualities are you seeking in the person to fill this position?"
- "What are the major strengths of your company?"
- "How can I be a good employee for the company?"
- "Who would I report to?"

You may want to have a practice interview with a friend. Record this practice interview, and listen to yourself afterwards: this is a good way to spot any flaws in your technique.

When the day of the interview arrives, take a deep breath and RELAX. It is natural to be nervous, but remember that you've done your homework and you are well prepared!

How you present yourself will make a big impression on the interviewer. Double check the time and place of the interview. Plan to arrive not on time but 10 minutes early: even though the interviewer may be sympathetic to the delayed train or the motorway accident, it is all but impossible to recover a negative first impression. Dress conservatively, and make sure that your shoes are clean and your hair is neatly combed. Greet the employer with a firm handshake and maintain eye contact. Remember that you are representing not only yourself but also your company.

Did you know that it takes only 7 seconds for someone to form an initial impression about you? Make those seconds count!

Most interviews will begin with an initial greeting and some small talk. A good interviewer will put you at ease during this part of the interview. After the initial greeting, the interviewer may give a more detailed explanation of the position or added information about the organisation.

Next, the interviewer will begin to ask questions. At least some of the questions you have prepared for are bound to come up but don't be surprised by ones that you weren't expecting. The interviewer is not trying to catch you out; they just want to find out more about you. Don't ramble when you give an answer, or the interviewer may feel that you are wasting their time. Remember that you are trying to sell yourself to the employer, and so you may want to have a few 'selling points' in mind when you go into the interview.

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During the interview, you must:

- Respond to the objectives and needs of both you and your employer; not just one or the other.
- Listen intently to the interviewer. If you have listened properly you will be able to answer questions effectively by tailoring your answers to respond directly to needs identified earlier in the interview.
- Retain control throughout. An air of confidence and self-sufficiency will always impress. However, don't go too far and try to take control of proceedings: you must not try to rush the interview. Also, try not to be overly anxious.

At some stage you will be given the opportunity to ask questions of your own. It is impressive if you produce a notebook containing your questions. Try to make sure that your questions are reasonably pertinent to the type of work offered and the company itself. Do not ask for information you could easily have obtained outside the interview: do not waste the interviewer's time.

When you have asked your questions, the interviewer will end the interview and explain the next stage in the recruitment process. Before you leave, thank the interviewer for their time and consideration.

The important aspects of success in an interview can be summarised by three keywords:

- PREPARATION
- PRESENTATION
- ATTENTION

To finish, here is a table of desirable and undesirable personality traits, which should be expressed and avoided respectively in your interview:

## GOOD

- ✓ Maturity
- ✓ Dependability
- ✓ Friendliness
- ✓ Enthusiasm
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Punctuality
- ✓ Leadership skills
- ✓ Patience
- ✓ Speaking skills
- ✓ Adaptability

## BAD

- ✗ Poor personal appearance
- ✗ Inability to express oneself
- ✗ Disinterest
- ✗ Indecisiveness
- ✗ Laziness
- ✗ Inability to take criticism
- ✗ Late to interview without reason
- ✗ Asking no questions of own
- ✗ Undue nervousness
- ✗ Limp handshake

## Good luck!