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Interviewing Tips

Ok, your resume and cover letter have gotten your foot into the door – exactly what they are supposed to be used for. As for getting the job – well that's entirely up to what happens during the interview.

Do your research! And be prepared.

Prior to the interview, you need to do research on the organization and the position you are interviewing for. Only by doing your research can you ask and respond to questions in an intelligent and informed manner. The research will also allow you to assess how you “fit” with your potential employer.

Nowadays, the first place to begin your research is usually the web. Find out if they have a web site and go through it for more information. If the company is public, check out their annual report, either through SEC-EDGAR, or at the library. Go on the web and do some news searches at Yahoo! or some other search engine. Who are their main competitors? Are they planning a merger, involved in restructuring or downsizing, or expanding their workforce? Are they introducing a new product or service? Are they involved in any new developments or projects? You will want to incorporate some of this information into your responses and questions during the interview.

Other resources include friends, family, classmates, professors or anyone else you can turn to. Of course, the best thing is to know someone who works in the company for additional insight. Prior to the interview, prepare a list of references and a few extra copies of your resume and whatever else the employer might have specified.

It sounds like commonsense, but make sure that you never smoke, drink, or eat during an interview. Avoid slang or any use of profanity. Never bad-mouth a former employer or co-worker and never reveal any confidential information about an organization with whom you have worked. Also try to avoid discussing things about your personal life that may give the impression that you won't be able to concentrate on the job.

Dress Attire

First impressions are extremely important. What you wear and how you present yourself are crucial to your success on the interview. Most interviewers will have already decided if they want to hire you or ask you back for more interviews in the first few minutes. The rest of the interview serves to reinforce their decision or might sway their decision to give you the benefit of the doubt. Follow these guidelines for dress attire:

For Women: Wear a professional dress or skirt, stylish blouse and jacket, or suit. Wear colors that flatter, and avoid very busy prints. Choose coordinating shoes with a moderate heel. Neutral stockings are the norm. Use make-up in moderation, and keep jewelry to a minimum. Make sure your hair is neatly combed and doesn't hide your eyes. This is important for establishing rapport during the interview.

For Men: Wear blue or grey business suit (a conservative pattern such as a stripe or glen plaid is also acceptable), with light colored shirt and coordinating tie. Wear black shoes and socks - no sneakers or athletic shoes. Hair should be neatly combed and kept fairly short. Keep jewelry to a minimum.

Of course, these guidelines are for somewhat conservative firms, such as investment banks and the Big Four Accounting firms. It's a different story if you're interviewing for other types of firms.



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The Actual Interview

Get there 15 minutes before the interview is scheduled to begin, unless you have to fill paperwork, in which case, get there even earlier. **DO NOT BE LATE!** As you wait for the interviewer, observe the interactions of the co-workers and the general environment. Do not forget that you are also interviewing the company. You do not want a job where you will be unhappy and uncomfortable. Use this opportunity to familiarize yourself with the surroundings.

Firm Handshake!

When the interviewer comes out to greet you, you should stand up, make eye contact, extend your hand, smile, and introduce yourself. All of this takes only a few seconds, but it will set the tone for the meeting. Remember, first impressions. Throughout the interview, keep your hands on your lap or by your sides. Hand gestures are ok, but don't overdo it. As with anything, do it with **MODERATION!** It's ok to be nervous, but don't let it control you!

The Interview Begins

The interview is the opportunity for you and the interviewer to see if there's a match, but in qualifications and culture-wise. The first few questions might be unrelated to the job. The interviewer is trying to get to know you as a person. A question many interviewers are asking themselves is "Would I be able to work with this person eight hours a day, five days a week, and not even talking about overtime or if the 'shit hits the fan'?"

Interview Questions

Some standard interview questions are below. Be prepared to talk about each of these questions /answers in depth. Practice your answers before the interview. Be able to talk at least 5-10 minutes non-stop about each, but when actually on the interview, don't go over one to two minutes! **DO NOT BABBLE ON!** If the interviewer is interested, they will ask you to expand or ask more pin-pointed questions. That's where your 5-10 minutes of pre-interview practice comes in. Same things applies to whatever is on your resume.

Sample Questions:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. How would your best friend describe you?
3. What are your short and long term goals? How are you preparing to achieve them?
4. What are your greatest strengths?
5. What are your weaknesses?
6. Why did you choose your college?
7. What was the best and worst thing about college?
8. How did you get interested in this field?
9. Give me an example of your leadership ability?
10. Are you a team player or an individualist?
11. Why should I hire you?
12. Why do you think you can do the job?
13. Tell me about a recent problem and how you solved it?
14. How do you define success?
15. Tell me about the best job you ever had?



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Sample Questions (continued):

16. What do you think makes a good manager?
17. How would you handle a subordinate who wasn't working up to potential?
18. Do you have plans for graduate school?
19. What have you learned from participating in extracurricular activities?
20. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
21. What do you know about our organization?
22. How do you feel about working with diverse types of people?
23. How would you feel supervising workers older than yourself?
24. What do you do for fun?
25. Do you work well under pressure?
26. Are you willing to travel? Relocate if necessary?
27. Who do you admire most? Why?
28. Describe a mistake you made and how you learned from it.
29. Why did you leave your last position?
30. What haven't I asked you that I should have asked?

Inappropriate Questions

Although rare, it is possible that during an interview you will be asked questions that can be classified as inappropriate. In fact, some of these questions are illegal and blatantly discriminatory. Most interviewers are professionals and will not ask these types of questions, however, you should be prepared to deal with them. You can either inquire about the question's relevance to the job, or refuse to answer. Keep in mind that if you choose the latter approach it is likely that you will no longer be considered a viable candidate.

Asking Questions

When it's your turn to ask questions, you should ask intelligent questions that were not answered yet, or ask questions that clarify something. Since you obviously don't know everything about the interviewer, the position and the company, this is time to find out more. Remember, the interview is a two way street.

Some sample questions to ask:

- How long is the training program? What is involved? Can you go through the program at your own pace? Is it rotational? What happens at the end of the program?
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this position? What is a typical day like?
- Is there a six month review? How is performance measured? Who conducts evaluations?
- Where did the last person in this position go? What career paths are available?
- How is the economic climate affecting your organization?
- How would you differentiate your organization from your major competitors?
- How much travel is involved?
- What is the timetable for filling the position?
- What is the ratio of on-the-job training to classroom time?



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Closing the Interview

Do not discuss salary or benefits during an interview. This should only be discussed after an offer of employment has been made. If the interviewer asks you to name what salary you are looking for, deflect the question and respond by saying that you would rather wait and discuss salary once a job offer has been made. If you feel really pressed you can either respond by saying that it would depend on the responsibilities involved, or you can cite an acceptable salary range.

Ask the interviewer if there is anything else he/she wants to know. Make sure you communicate your enthusiasm and interest in the position. Find out what the next step will be and when you may expect to hear from the organization. Ask for a business card so you can send a thank-you letter within twenty-four hours. If no card is available, make sure you get the correct spelling of the interviewer's first and last name. Thank the interviewer for his/her time and express your pleasure at having had the opportunity to meet with him/her. Follow-up by phone if you haven't heard anything within two weeks.