

Interviewing – The Key to the Job Offer

Surviving the Interview Process

All the work you've been doing so far in your job search is preparing you for the opportunity to be face-to-face with a decision maker. The interview is probably the biggest hurdle you will need to successfully get over in your job search.

Unfortunately, the person who receives a job offer is not always the most qualified candidate on paper, but rather the candidate that knows how to best present his or her strengths and value to the organization during the interview. Hiring managers tend to hire people they like both personally and professionally and typically refer to that as being a *"good fit."*

We usually think that interviews come about as a part of the hiring process where someone reviews your resume and decides that they'd like to meet you to discuss the open position. Yes, interviews can happen that way, but you are also going to find yourself in interviews as you network with individuals who have hiring authority or know of others who have hiring authority. So, expand your definition of an interview and remember that first impressions are lasting impressions. Practice your small talk and look for ways to connect with others to find commonalities. Then link your mutual interest with exploring a new career opportunity.



Now, even if you're thinking, "interviews don't scare me," or "I don't get a nervous stomach or sweaty palms when I'm talking about myself." Focus on making sure you are prepared for the interview or meeting and you will greatly improve your chance for success.

Interviewing and networking feedback tells us that many hiring managers evaluate candidates very, very quickly in a face-to-face interview. Often times as quickly as the first 30 seconds! They have already reviewed your skills, qualifications, education and work history from your resume and possibly previous interviews, and are now taking a closer look to see who will be a "fit" for the team and organization. In determining a candidate's "fit" many elements are often considered:

- physical presence, energy level and appearance
- firm handshake (neither limp nor a vice grip)
- body language including posture, facial expressions and eye contact
- verbal tone, accent and grammar
- perceived personality traits, style

What is an Interview?



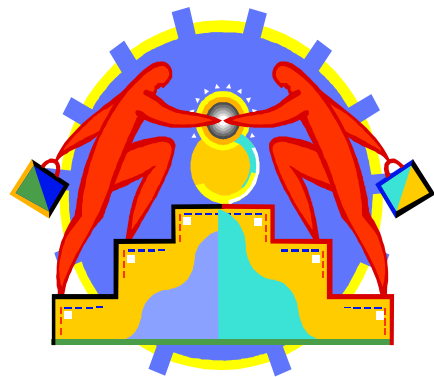
As mentioned previously, interviews are perceived differently today than they were 5 to 10 years ago. An interview today is a business dialogue, a formal conversation in which people exchange information and make decisions. These conversations can take place at a networking event, while waiting in an airport or physician's office or between you and a person who has a job opening. This is an employment interview. Or, it can be a conversation between you and a person who has information that will be helpful in your job search. This is an informational interview. Be aware of yourself. You might find that they have more than information available!

It's wise to approach these conversations as potential interviews with the mindset that the conversation could lead to a job, even if it initially is a networking meeting. You never know where that hidden job might be. It might be right in front of you.

Informational Interviews

As discussed in our chapter on networking, networking activities often require you to meet with a contact to secure information that will be helpful to your job search. This type of meeting may be held in a casual environment such as over coffee or lunch, or it may take place in a business setting.

Wherever your meeting is taking place, focus on being prepared by thinking about what you want to accomplish through your conversation. Research and prepare a list of questions you need answers to so you accomplish your goals and do not waste your contact's time. Use the following information provided on preparing for a networking meeting so you'll be organized, and the image you present will be that of a winner.



Throughout the conversations find opportunities to share information about your knowledge, skills and abilities, as appropriate. The more each contact learns about you from your questions and the information you are willing to share, the more they will be able to determine where you fit in their organizations, or who they know who needs a person with your experience.

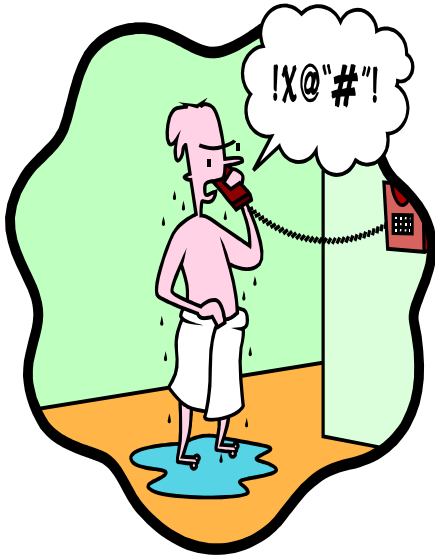
Discover what you have in common with the person you are talking with by asking about his or her job, professional background, education, hobbies, goals, etc. It is human nature to like people who are similar to you, so help the individual see where you may have common interests and build on them.

Screening Interviews

Before you are invited for a face-to-face interview, you'll more than likely be contacted by phone for a screening interview. Employers use this type of interview to narrow down the number of candidates they feel are qualified for the position. Based on the responses they solicit, they will be able to focus their attention on only those candidates who appear to have the strongest abilities, necessary knowledge, and best-fit for the position. These are the individuals who will be considered for a second, more detailed phone interview or a face-to-face interview. So, can you see how important it is to handle the screening interview well?

Here's an example of a typical screening interview:

- The caller will tell you he or she is calling to confirm your interest in the position for which you applied. That's usually the first question asked since it may have been a few weeks from the time you initially showed interest in the position.
- Next, he or she will ask for a few minutes of your time to ask you some questions. It is in your best interest to take the call immediately as the individual will move on to the next candidate who appears to be a good fit, if you are not available. Make sure you are prepared and ready to answer the screening questions. Remember, this is their process for eliminating weak candidates! Refer back to your file on this particular position so you can quickly scan the job posting and the research that you did on the organization and its culture.



As illustrated by the cartoon, taking a screening interview when you're not ready can be a disaster. On the other hand, delaying it may have consequences as well. However, if it is a bad time for you for the interview, it's perfectly acceptable to ask if you can call back in order to be the most prepared. You may respond with, *"To tell you the truth, you caught me in the middle of something. May I get your name and number and call you back in xx minutes when I'm able to give you my full attention? I'm very interested in your company and this position and want to make sure I'm at my best."*

Screening Interviews (continued)

Typically the person doing the screening is not the hiring manager. You need to keep this in mind as you are conversing, since he or she may or may not have high level knowledge of the position or type of work involved. If you provide too much detail, it may not mean anything to them. Most screening interviews are meant to validate what is found on your resume, find out why you are looking for a job and determine if you sound like someone who will fit with the manager, team and organization. So, as you're preparing to answer a technical question, you might tell the caller, *"If I am providing too much or not enough detail around the technical elements, please let me know."*

Remember to utilize your 30-second commercial and use your responses to questions as an opportunity to demonstrate that you have the knowledge, skills and abilities to be successful in the role. Look for opportunities to draw parallels between your personal values to the organization's values — just remember to be genuine. A recruiter can usually identify a desperate attempt to sound perfect for a role.

Since the purpose of the call is to ask you specific questions and determine your fit, the interviewer may schedule another phone interview or face-to-face interview with you immediately or let you know if someone else may be contacting you for the next steps in the process.

The entire screening process is usually short and to the point. You need to convince the individual in 5 minutes or less that you are a strong candidate worth his or her consideration. When you have this person's attention, the individual may move on to ask questions about your salary history, reasons for leaving other organizations, what responsibilities you enjoyed most and least and investigate what you know about the organization. Remember, tell a memorable, honest and compelling story that leaves the person wanting to hear more about you and the value you will bring to the organization. Don't just rehash your resume - bring it to life!

Tips to remember for successful phone screening interviews:

- Smile and project enthusiasm—pretend someone is sitting in front of you
- Talk slowly, and think before you answer a question
- Remember to allow for silence while the interviewer takes notes—don't worry about dead air time
- Take notes!
- Refer to your file containing the job posting, your resume and submitted cover letter and your research notes on the organization



Face-to-Face Interviews



During a face-to-face interview, the interviewer is trying to assess your abilities and interests by asking questions about your past work experience and education. Again, the interviewer is looking for information to determine if you are a fit for the role, team and organization. If he or she determines you are qualified and a fit, then the questions may move to more personal issues such as benefits, salary, work hours, etc., or you may be invited to move on to another interview or step in the process.

Everything that you have accomplished has led up to and prepared you to market yourself during this interview. Your job in the interview is to share information about yourself that will help the interviewer understand how your qualifications and skills relate to the needs of the organization. Actively listen and respond to questions with interest. Ask questions to gain as much information as you can about the responsibilities of the position, the style of the manager, the culture of the organization and the related needs and problems of the organization.

Depending on factors such as corporate culture and skill of the interviewer, the interview experience may be stressful. You might even be asked inappropriate questions. If you are prepared and confident, you will be able to handle any unusual situations without getting ruffled.

Remember you are being observed on how you will fit into the organization, so reflect the values and behaviors that are valued within the organization. It is rare to find an environment that perfectly aligns with your beliefs and values, but you should be able to see many similarities and believe that you can happily work in the culture.

Ask questions to help you uncover the true culture of the organization outside of what is posted on the company website or provided to you by a recruiter. Some questions you may consider asking include:

- How does the company celebrate success?
- How does the hiring manager handle employee mistakes?
- How does the team address conflict?
- Why do employees stay with this company?
- What is the current employee turnover rate? Why do employees leave? Why is this position currently open?
- What traits do successful employees demonstrate?

Face-to-Face Interviews (continued)

During the interview it is important to not only be aware of the physical environment and the energy level of the people in the office, but to also consider:

- How clean, organized and welcoming is the lobby?
- Are employees friendly and courteous or rushing around without interacting with each other?
- Is the interviewer prepared and on time?
- Were you given a schedule along with a good explanation of the interview process?
- Does the company appear to be understaffed in any areas?

Interview Preparation Before

What is your attitude toward face-to-face interviews? Feelings of nervousness, anxiety, or stage fright are valid, since your performance will be closely observed and reviewed by an audience - the interviewer. You can overcome these reactions to interviewing by preparing in advance.

Actors rehearse before opening night, and athletes undergo rigorous training and many even practice positive visualization before a game or competition. Each projects confidence because of the extensive preparation before the event.

Similarly, to polish your own performance in an interview you should also prepare and practice your presentation. With proper preparation, you will be more relaxed, making it possible to think clearly and respond more quickly.

Take this opportunity to prepare yourself emotionally for the interview. The following suggestions will help you build self-confidence:

Know yourself: be able to clearly articulate your accomplishments and strengths; rehearse your 30-second commercial

Realize the control you exert during an interview: don't try to run the interview, but look for opportunities to present your strengths

Visualize your success: mentally walk through the interview process seeing yourself poised, calm and connected with the interviewer

Prepare your responses to questions typically asked in an interview

Prepare the questions you will ask of the interviewer

Do your research on the company and the interviewers

Look like a winner and present your best professional image

Have the right tools: copies of your resume, a pen, etc.

Have a list of references prepared



EXERCISE - AM I READY FOR AN INTERVIEW?

To determine your level of preparedness for a face-to-face interview, complete the following questionnaire by rating your level of agreement: 1 = Strongly Agree; 2 = Agree; 3 = Not Sure; 4 = Disagree; 5 = Not Applicable

Questions	1	2	3	4	5
1. I have a well-thought story for the question: "Tell me about yourself."					
2. I can clearly and concisely explain my accomplishments in each role I have performed.					
3. I can clearly and concisely explain my education and career history with effective reasons for why I left each position and/or organization.					
4. I am a good story teller regarding my past roles and responsibilities.					
5. I can clearly and concisely explain my educational background.					
6. I know how to describe my strengths and relate them to success in the position for which I am interviewing.					
7. I know how to reveal an appropriate and honest weakness if asked by an interviewer.					
8. I am aware of my body language and eye contact.					
9. I can clearly and concisely explain my work style, preferences and dislikes.					
10. I have an understanding of how I am perceived by others (co-workers, past managers, customers) and can articulate that to an interviewer.					
11. I can clearly and concisely describe where I see myself in the next three to 10 years.					
12. I understand the importance of speaking positively about past employers and managers—even if my experiences with them were less than perfect.					
13. I have comprehensively researched the industry, organization, and people with whom I will be interviewing.					
14. I am comfortable with silence and will not allow myself to talk to simply fill "dead air time."					
15. I have prepared at least 5 compelling questions to ask interviewers about the role and the organization.					

Scoring:

If you selected mostly Strongly Agree for the majority of the questions, congratulations, you are prepared for a successful interview. If you selected mostly Agree for the majority of the questions then you just need to practice a bit and increase your level of confidence. If you selected mostly Not Sure for the majority of the questions, then you need to use this workbook to help you prepare and build your confidence. You may want to consider utilizing your EMI career coach hours for assistance with this function of your job search.

“One can never consent to creep when one feels an impulse to soar.”

- Helen Keller