

Interview guidelines

Congratulations! You have been successful in securing an interview. You must now ensure that you perform as well as possible to secure the job. The interviewer will be assessing not only your own strengths and weaknesses, but also your skills, attitudes, stability and motivating factors. Be positive - the company wants to see you because you have skills they are interested in. After reading these guidelines, if you have any queries whatsoever, please get in touch - we're always here to help.

It's all in the preparation...

- Prior to your interview, do some background research on the company such as when they were established, how many offices they have, their product range etc. Trade publications are useful sources of up to the minute information - ask your Consultant if you are not sure of the best titles.
- Make sure you know the exact time, date and location of your interview, the name of the interviewer (together with the correct pronunciation of their name) and their position within the company.
- Aim to arrive five to ten minutes early (**no more**) to give yourself a chance to relax before you're called into your interview.
- Plan your route - you can use websites such as www.streetmap.co.uk to find the exact location.
- If you have been provided with a job description, read this thoroughly. If not, your Consultant will be able to provide the information you will require.
- Give some thought to the types of questions you might be asked, e.g. *"Why does this job interest you?"*, *"Why do you want to work for our company?"*, *"Why do you wish to change jobs at this stage?"*, *"What skills do you have that are relevant to the position for which you are interviewing?"*. Page 2 covers commonly asked interview questions in more detail.
- Prepare some questions for the end of the interview - it will not reflect well on you if you cannot think of anything to say when asked if you have any questions. However, your questions should not be related to the salary, benefits package, working hours etc as this line of questioning could give the interviewer the impression that these issues are more important to you than the job on offer. We have provided some examples of the types of question you could consider asking on page 3.
- Find out as much as you can about the job. Study the job description and try and work out what sort of person is required and match that to your own strengths and skills. Your Consultant will be able to provide you with full information about the position.

Typical interview questions

The interviewer's questions are designed to enable them to find out certain information. Below are some examples of commonly asked questions along with tips on the type of answers you should provide.

Q. Tell me about yourself

A. They want you to open up to them. Tell them about your qualifications, career history and range of skills. You may also wish to tell them a little about your hobbies and interests.

Q. What has been your greatest achievement so far?

A. The interviewer is trying to find out if you are an achiever. Demonstrate how you achieved something and how it has benefited you. Do you still use those skills?

Q. What are your strengths?

A. We all have them. Try to look at personal attributes such as being a team player or great attention to detail. Make sure you demonstrate how this strength could benefit a new employer.

Q. What are your weaknesses?

A. The interviewer wants to see how self-aware you are. Don't use personal weaknesses such as "I find it hard to get out of the bed in the morning" (this is very unprofessional). Use a professional weakness such as lack of experience (training can overcome that) or one that can be turned into a strength, such as *"I'm very focused at work, so sometimes people think I'm ignoring them"*.

Q. How would your boss/colleagues/friends/spouse describe you?

A. This is another way of asking how you perceive yourself. Choose three or four adjectives that show the positive side of your personality, such as outgoing, reliable, hard working, loyal.

Q. Why do you think you're suitable for this role?

A. If you haven't done your research, you'll struggle to give an answer with substance. Use your preparation and match your skills and personal attributes to what they're looking for. If you're unsure what the role entails, please ask them. You can't convince them that you're the perfect candidate if you don't know what the job is.

Q. Where do you see yourself in X years' time?

A. Do not be tempted to respond in an arrogant manner, e.g. "in your chair". The interviewer wants to know your motivation and career aspirations. Whilst wanting to progress is a natural desire, don't let this overshadow the job you are being interviewed for. A good answer might be; *"I see myself in a role that is both challenging and rewarding whereby I can utilise my skills and knowledge fully. Whatever the role, I want to be successful."*

Example candidate questions for interview:

- Find out why the job is open, who had it last and what happened to him or her?
- How many people have held this position in the last couple of years?
- To whom would you report? Will you get the opportunity to meet that person?
- Where is the job located? What are the travel requirements, if any?
- What type of training is required and how long does it typically last for?
- What would your first assignment be?
- What are the realistic chances for growth in the job? Where are the opportunities for greatest growth within the company?
- Who will be the company's main competitor over the next few years? How does the interviewer feel the company stacks up against them?
- What has been the growth pattern of the company in the last five years? Is it profitable? How profitable? (you could research this on Companies House website before your interview www.companieshouse.gov.uk)
- If there is a written job description, can you see it?
- How regularly do performance evaluations occur? What models do they follow?

Personal presentation - you only get one opportunity to make a first impression!

- The importance of your first impression cannot be overstated.
- Think very carefully about what to wear well ahead of your interview, to give you time to dry clean or wash and iron your outfit.
- Make sure that you are as well presented as possible. Men should always aim to wear a dark business suit, a clean white shirt and a sober tie (not too “loud”). Plain dark socks are best and make sure that your shoes have been well polished and aren't scuffed.
- It is strongly recommended that women should wear a skirt or trouser suit, or alternatively a smart skirt, blouse and jacket (skirts should not be too short). Tights should always be worn and shoes should be well polished and not scuffed. Court shoes are a safe option, or smart boots or shoes under trouser suits.
- For both men and women, jewellery should be kept to a bare minimum as should perfume, aftershave and make-up. If you have visible piercings - nose, eyebrow, lip or tongue - take them out. The interviewer could find them distracting and concentrate on these, not your skills.

- Make sure that you have shaved and have fresh breath - smoking prior to an interview is best avoided to avoid telltale tobacco odour. Likewise, avoid garlic, onions and spicy foods the night before.
- Remember to take a step back in the mirror and ask yourself “Am I dressed for the office or for a night out?”.

Presentation checklist

- Is your chosen outfit clean? (Prepare in good time so that you have time to visit the dry cleaner's if necessary.)
- Are your shoes clean and polished?
- Is your shirt/blouse crisply ironed?
- Get someone to cast a critical eye over your chosen outfit. They might spot things that you won't.
- Pay close attention to your personal grooming.

The interview...

- Make sure that you arrive a few minutes early - **late arrival for an interview is never excusable**. However, try not to arrive any more than ten minutes early. Plan your route to make sure you allow enough time for any unforeseen delays.
- **If, for any reason, you are running late or are unable to attend your interview, it is extremely important that you telephone Sandringham Wood immediately so that we can advise the interviewer accordingly.** Under these circumstances, companies are usually happy to rearrange something more convenient. However, when applicants simply do not turn up, a bad impression has already been created and it is unlikely that the client would wish to pursue your application further.
- **Always ensure your mobile phone is switched off.**
- **Always treat the reception staff in a professional and courteous manner** - their opinion of you is very important and may well be taken into account by the interviewer.
- If asked to take a seat whilst you wait, try to read some corporate literature from the company as this will help create a positive impression - and give you something to focus on!
- If asked to complete an application form, do so as comprehensively as possible - do not simply put “refer to CV”.
- **Try to remain relaxed. Look the interviewer in the eye, smile and shake their hand firmly (but not too tightly).** It's perfectly OK to enter into polite chit-chat whilst they walk you along to the interview room, but remember not to be too informal.
- **Wait until you are offered a chair before you sit down.** Sit comfortably, but do not slouch. Do not fidget or twiddle your thumbs etc. Remain alert, make sure that you maintain eye contact and project a positive image throughout your interview. Even if you decide that the position on offer is not for you, if you create a good impression and impress the interviewer, who knows what other doors might open for you.

- **Think carefully before you speak.** Try to avoid answering questions with a simple yes or no; instead elaborate and provide relevant information and examples, which will enable you to “sell yourself”. Try to have a good understanding of the role on offer as early as possible so that you can ensure your questions and answers are directly relevant to the job. Don't waffle! Make sure you convey your skills, achievements and suitability for the job.
- Many interviewers nowadays ask questions designed to discover how you would deal with certain situations and how you might behave. For example “please describe a situation where you have shown yourself to be flexible” or “please describe how you dealt with a difficult or unexpected situation”. Both are ways of trying to find out more about how you operate as a person. Producing answers isn't as difficult as it may first appear if you have given thought to the interview beforehand. **If you can't think of a work-related example, draw on personal experience** - even being able to successfully share a flat demonstrates that you are a team player with the ability to negotiate!
- Regardless of your feelings towards your current or past employers, a prospective employer won't want to hear never-ending tales of woe or disrespectful comments. **Never say negative things about previous employers** - it is highly unprofessional and could reflect badly on you.

Closing the Interview

- Once the interview has concluded, thank the interviewer for their time and, if you are interested in the position, make sure that you convey this. It is perfectly OK to ask them if they have any concerns or reservations, and, what these are. This might be your last chance to overcome them, so do ask! Do not be discouraged if the interviewer does not indicate that they will be calling you for a second interview or offering you the position. More often than not, they will need to liaise with other colleagues before proceeding.
- Remember to leave the interview with another firm handshake, smile and leave with poise. You are still “on show” until you leave the building and are out of sight, so don't enter into a loud conversation on your mobile phone or light a cigarette in view of the office!

Remember if you have any queries whatsoever, we're here to help.

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