

HINTS FOR THE PERFECT STRESS FREE INTERVIEW

All you need to know to get it right the first time:

Strange as it may seem, research suggests that interviewing is one of the of the most unreliable management techniques. The majority of managers and senior executives have not been trained in interviewing skills. This can work to your advantage: you can train yourself to present the best possible picture of yourself and your accomplishments. It is important always to tell the truth in an interview but with forethought, rehearsal and good preparation; you can present what you have to offer in the most positive and attractive way.

Managers and senior personnel are often less well prepared than the average job seeker because it's not something they often do. Probably within your current role you are used to being listened to but remember an interview is a conversation. It's important to talk for not more than 60% of the time. If that sounds extreme, remember that most jobs are lost through something you say and not something you don't. Make the interview an interactive process. While you are chatting on endlessly, your interviewer is losing interest!

Preparation:

The key to interview success lies in the amount of preparation you carry out prior to the interview. 'The amount of people who turn up at a senior level without looking at the Web site is astounding' says Graham Thompsett, recruitment manager at Jaguar and Land Rover. 'Sometimes they don't even know what the cars are in the Jaguar product line'.

Have clear objectives before attending the interview:

- To be better prepared than the competition
- To get onto the final shortlist / to find out if you really want the job
- Look at the web site - think of the business and its' issues as a whole and not just the division you have applied for. For example: International issues, environment, changes in market place, stock exchange fluctuations, etc
- Study the company literature - make a note of the chairman, MD's names - know who are the key personnel
- Ask your consultant to provide detailed information on the person who will be interviewing you / download the last set of accounts from Company House
- Prepare a range of questions to ask, using your research of the company and knowledge of the industry
- Avoid asking about benefits such as holiday or car allowance. These can be discussed at the second stage and your consultant will be able to brief you
- Be prepared for personal questions, and always respond firmly and politely
- Work through answers to likely questions, especially those about your strengths and weaknesses

Prepare your questions prior to the interview, write them down if necessary. It is appropriate to take the odd note down (estimated turnover for next year, future projections, etc). However, furious note taking during the interview by the interviewee is off putting and distracting to the interviewer.

Questions you may wish to ask

- Company growth plans
- Reason the role has become available
- More detailed job description
- How many people will report through to you
- Who will you report through to
- Company training program
- Study support

Dress for the interview:

Be traditional rather than avant-garde. Dark colours are more powerful than lighter colours. Get a good hair cut. Women with long hair should have it tied behind neatly. Less, rather than more, jewellery. Conservative ties, joke ties are not suitable. Clean shoes and finger nails. If you smoke, avoid smoking until after and wait until you are fully out of view from the client.

The hand-shake:

No one is going to offer you a job on the basis of a handshake, but a good friendly and firm handshake may just contribute to the overall impression you wish to create. Keep a hanky handy as stress can make you perspire more.

Are you sitting comfortably?

Body language is thought to contribute to over 60% to the credibility of what people say, so in the interview situation it is very important to get this aspect correct. Walk tall into the interview with shoulders back. Sit as far back in the chair as possible but keep your posture forward. A 'low leg' cross position is appropriate.

Body language and NVC's (Non verbal clues):

What we say with our bodies is very powerful, and you can increase your likelihood of success by ensuring that you give out positive non-verbal clues. The main positive NVC's are as follows:

- A high smile rate
- Nodding the head when the interviewer is speaking
- Leaning forward while listening and when replying
- A high level of eye contact
- However balance is key, it's important not to overdo things...

Look at the interviewer

It is important for you to look the interviewer in the eye this will make you appear more confident. Research carried out in 1978 identified a positive relationship between qualification for a position and eye contact. Those that had good qualifications but made no eye contact were considered to lack self-confidence and be less suitable. Would you put someone in a job that appeared to lack confidence?

The three main questions:

The good news is that interviewers ask 3 basic questions. All their questions fall into 3 general areas, which are the major concerns of the selector:

- **Can this person do the job?** This question is about experience, track record, and achievements - in short, what you have done. About 60% of a professional interviewer's time with you will be spent on assessing your experience and how suitable you are for the role. It's up to you to take any questions and respond in such a way that you can deliver relevant information about your skills and experience.
- **Will this person do the job?** This question is about your disposition and approach to work. How hard working are you? How motivated, committed, loyal, etc? All the aspects which convince your potential employer that you will do more than just fulfil your contract. This is the selection equivalent of the retail slogan 'service with a smile'. It is that additional commitment to personal excellence, which indicates not only that you are able to do something but also the positive way that you will do it.
- **Will this person fit in?** It doesn't matter how good you are, unless you fit the company image you are unlikely to get the job. The more senior you are in an organisation the more important fitting in becomes. At interview, provided you agree with the company value system of your potential employers, it is very important for you to take whatever opportunities they may give you to show how you can fit in.

Most frequently asked questions

- Why do you want this job?
- What do you know about our organisation?
- Why should we hire you?
- What is your major achievement?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What are your strengths?
- How do you get things done?
- What do you look for in a manager?
- What motivates you?
- Where do you see yourself in the next 5 years?
- Describe a difficult situation and what you did about it?
- How do you deal with conflict in the workplace?
- Why are you dissatisfied with your present job?
- Why have you stayed so long/so briefly with your present company?
- Why were you made redundant?
- Do you like to work within a team or on your own?
- Given the achievements in your CV, why is your salary so low/high?
- How could your boss improve his/her management of you?
- What decisions do you find hard/easy to make?
- On taking this job, what would be your major contribution?
- What aspects of this job would you delegate?
- What makes you think you can be successful with us?
- What support/training will you need for this role?

How long do you expect to stay with us?

'I'm looking for a career opportunity and as long as you are happy with my work, I will stay while I can advance my career and develop within the company. I hope that will be for a considerable length of time.'

Why do you want to leave your present firm?

I'm keen to further develop my current experience and because there were no future openings within my present firm I have had to look elsewhere.

Do you prefer working alone or within a team?

My record shows that I have achieved results in previous jobs that depended on team work and my ability to motivate staff. I recognise that someone who runs a department has to take decisions alone based on the best information available. I have no problems in doing that and I know that my decisions have to be properly communicated to all concerned.

What do you think of your boss?

I have enjoyed working with him/her and have learnt a lot especially within....(pop in relevant points here).

Closing technique:

Usually the interviewer will thank you for your time and ask if you have any further questions. It is a good idea to ask at least a couple of questions. These will depend on what information was provided during the interview. Examples:

Business Q's: How has the business coped with the economic market? Future growth plans?
Personal Q's: How long have they been employed by the business? What attracted them?

Read the body language of the interviewer - if they are busy shuffling papers and fidgeting in their seats, they probably have another meeting to attend and do not want to spend unnecessary time repeating them-selves. Obviously, if a question has not come up during the interview and it is relevant, then go ahead and ask it.

It's best to sum up with 'It's been an interesting meeting. I think you have just about covered everything and I would like to acknowledge that I am very interested in the role because...'. This is your opportunity to show the interviewer that you have listened to and taken on board the relevant points during the interview. Keep it brief.

After the interview

Remember to inform your consultant why you were or not interested in the position - give facts rather than 'it's a great company to work for'.

If the interviewer has passed on business card with email it is appropriate for you to email and thank them for their time and acknowledge interest.

No matter how good an interviewee you become, you will not win a job offer every time. The chemistry may have been wrong. Don't despair as you can't win them all. But you can learn not to make avoidable mistakes and to promote yourself effectively at the next interview.

Good luck!