

1. Preparing For The Interview

Introduction:

Your performance at an interview is the major determinant as to whether you are successful in securing a position. Clearly there are a number of variable influences which will affect the outcome of the selection process, but you can minimise the affect of those variables and enhance your chances by being well prepared. There are many instances where the best candidate presents poorly at interview and is unsuccessful and reverse examples where competent candidates present well and secure positions over more suitable applicants.

Remember that an interview is a 'two way street'. The employer will try to determine, through questioning, if you have the qualifications, experience and behavioural fit necessary to do the job. You must determine, through questioning, whether the prospective employer will give you the job satisfaction / security / challenge / variety / opportunity for personal growth and career progression you seek.

Many executives and managers mistakenly believe that because of their past experience they can 'walk' into new roles and as a result they fail to prepare. Remember that the market at all levels of management is fiercely competitive.

Being well prepared gives you the inner calm to present with confidence.

The following may be of some assistance to you:

2. Personal Preparation

2.1 Presentation

Preferably dress in a dark blue, navy, black or grey business suit. Women tend to have more dress and colour options and should also wear a jacket.

Pay attention to all facets of your dress and grooming. If you need a hair cut, have one and ensure your shoes are clean. Despite trends, the dishevelled, crumpled and unshaven look will not work in your favour.

Avoid going 'over the top' with very bright colours and wearing too much jewellery.

2.2 Employment History

Review your career to date. For each role review your key accountabilities, successes and achievements and reasons for leaving

Relate your experience to the role on offer, why are you applying for the role and what you think you can offer the position.

Ensure you have identified suitable referees and they have agreed to act as referees. Sometimes the interview and selection process occurs very quickly and the prospective employer may want reference checks carried out within hours of a meeting.

What have you really enjoyed about your career to date ? What are your most significant achievements to date ?

2.3 General

Why are you applying for the position ?

Think about what you can offer the role

Strengths, limitations, interests, goals and ambitions

What words describe you characteristically ?

Why have you been promoted in the past? What differentiates you ?

What are you offering a prospective employer ?

3. Employment Interviews

3.1 Interviewers

Interviewing is a difficult and confrontational process for many people. Some people are confident and skilled at it, whilst others are very poor, even though they may do it fairly often. Whilst we say all applicants should always be well prepared for an interview, often the interviewer conducting them is not.

The success of interviews tends to be driven by preparation and personality. Bear in mind Line Managers may not interview very often, therefore abilities and styles tend to vary widely. To an extent, it is important that you take some measure of control and where possible present specific information about your experience which is directly relevant to the position you are applying for.

It is very common for candidates to develop a good rapport with the interviewer and spend a lot of time with them, but cover very little relevant ground. You may think you have done well, but the interviewer is likely to relate to most candidates in the same manner, because that is their style. Try and keep the conversation on track, answer all questions fully and only provide relevant information. Elaborate where appropriate.

Many interviewers like to find some 'common ground' to start the discussion and this may relate to your interests, sport, school, university or some current news topic. This is 'safe ground' and is the time to build rapport. Alternatively other interviewers will be far more forthright and direct and go straight into questioning. Others will be friendly and polite and factual and will expect you to be prepared and have answers.

3.2 Interview Process And Structure

In many cases the first contact and interview will be with an external consultant. This is the first screening phase and is very important as you are being considered along side all other applicants. This is where the importance of your resume comes in.

Initial client interviews may be conducted by HR Managers and / or Line Managers

Interviews may be conducted one on one, some will involve two, maybe three people or it may be a panel interview

Some interviewers are experienced and the interviews may be structured with very specific information being sought. Others will be very unstructured and may go in any number of directions, an approach which is sometimes intentionally used

Be prepared to attend up to three of four interviews. This will often be determined by the seniority of the position; company policy; the confidence of individuals to make a decision; structure of the management team; number of key people the position interacts with.

In many cases interviews will be personality driven. Listen carefully to what is being said and understand what is being asked and why.

Some interviewers will stick to the information in your resume and use that as the guide for the discussion. Others will have read your details and may not refer to your details at all.

Some interviewers like a free flowing discussion (Conversational Interviewers) whilst others will tend to deal with a specific topic and may well take notes (Task Interviewers)

On other occasions where you may be on a second or third interview the Executive / Manager interviewing you may be relying on the recommendation from his / her colleagues and is merely 'giving you the once over' and seeing whether you will fit into the team and 'culture' of the business.

3.3 The Interview

Each interviewer has issues which are important to them. Things you do or say will trigger positive and negative emotional responses on the part of that person. Sometimes it is the perceivably 'small' things that go in your favour or against you in the final selection process. An interview is a sales process, you only have a few minutes to make a good first impression. Unfortunately some external consultants and HR Managers shortlist you on the basis of whether they like you, rather than whether you may be a good candidate for the position.

3.3.1 Positive Things To Do

- Relax. Treat the meeting as a discussion not an interrogation
- Always be on time. Telephone if you are unavoidably delayed
- Interviews are about presenting with confidence
- confidence comes from being prepared
- Ensure you are appropriately presented and your shoes are clean
- Smile
- Shake hands firmly
- no bone crushers or 'wet fish'
- Be yourself and be honest with your self as to what you want to get out of the meeting
- Eye contact is important, but use it appropriately and do not stare
- Answer all questions fully, but honestly.
- Be enthusiastic. Show interest and excitement in an appropriate manner
- Explore questions about the company, its products, services and direction
- Again, be prepared

- You may feel the interview is not going well. It may be a rapport issue, or you feel you have not answered the questions well. Do not be discouraged. Often people still get to a second interview and end up securing the role.

- On the other hand the interview may be going very well but your 'gut' instinct tells you it is not the position you are after.

3.3.2 Things To Avoid Relating To Interviews

Be aware of the following and avoid if possible:

1. Being late for the meeting
2. Poor or inappropriate personal appearance
3. Lack of expression and enthusiasm. If you are ill, tell the interviewer
4. Poor handshake
5. Lack of preparation
6. Being too verbose. Too talkative. Overselling
7. Not answering the questions fully. Avoidance
8. Poor eye contact. Continually looking down or away. Staring
9. Abrupt, overbearing, aggressive, conceited, expressions of irritation, superior attitude, arrogance
10. Inability to express thoughts clearly and logically - poor diction or grammar
11. Lack of planning for career- no purpose, goals or direction
12. Voice tone. Lack of interest and enthusiasm- passive and indifferent
13. Lack of confidence- nervousness
14. Dwelling on issues not directly related to the role - i.e. salary and conditions, past experiences of little relevance or interest
15. Avoiding answering questions. Being evasive. Failing to deal with uncomfortable issues
16. Lack of tact / maturity / courtesy
17. Big noting yourself, giving no credit to your colleagues
18. Condemnation of past employers and individuals
19. Failure to ask constructive questions about the position and the company. Poor research
20. Being overly pedantic on issues not that important to the role. Don't go overly prepared and detailed with four pages of questions.

3.4 Possible Questions To Answer

Be prepared to answer questions like:

1. Why did you apply for the position ? What appealed to you about the position advertised ?
2. What do you know about our company ? Why would you like to work for us ?
3. What do you see as the overall purpose of a role like this ?
4. What are the key outcomes that a person in a role like this should aim to achieve ?
5. How do you measure success in a role like this ?
6. In view of what the role requires, what experience and achievements in this area can you demonstrate ?
7. What are your strengths ? Why have you been promoted in the past ? What are you offering us ?
8. What aspects of work / this role do you enjoy ? What motivates you and gets you out of bed in the morning ? What sorts of challenges do you like ?
9. What is your level of ambition ?
10. Do you prefer to work individually, as part of a team, work on the periphery of the team or lead the team ?
11. Do you like the stimulus of the task with reasonable structure, or do you like regular change and challenge ? Are you an initiator or a finisher ?
12. Do you actually enjoy managing people or does it just go with the territory ?
13. Give us an example of any difficult people issues you have had to deal with ?
14. What is your management style ? What style of management do you respond well to ?
15. What interests you about our company, product or services?
16. Tell me about some of the most significant difficulties challenges that you have had to face in your career to date. What was the outcome ?
17. What do you regard as your most significant achievements to date ?
18. Give me an example which demonstrates your initiative
19. What do you consider to be your limitations or weaknesses ?
20. What do you think determines a person's progress in a good company?
21. Are you willing to relocate? How do you feel about regular travel ?
22. What are your interests outside of work ?

3.5 Some Questions To Prepare

Questions to prepare will depend on the role you are applying for and may relate to Product Range, Strategy, Equipment, Processes, Market Direction, Company Structure, the Position, Opportunities. They may include some of the following topics:

1. Reason the position is available?
2. Structure of the business / department
3. What is the Strategic direction of the business?
4. What is the core business? Is that likely to change in the near future?
5. What are the things that most significantly influence the success of the business ?
6. Where does it see its future?
7. Market share. Market trends. Quality positioning
8. Key Result Areas (KRAs) for the position over the next 12 months
9. How will the incumbent's performance be measured?
10. Culture of company? Management style ?
11. Anticipated induction and training programme?
12. Culture of the business
13. Equipment type and capabilities
14. Significant areas within the business that need to be reviewed and changed
15. Core operating strengths / weaknesses
16. Union issues
17. Competencies / skills / qualifications of employees. Length of service
18. Terms and Conditions

3.6 Closing The Interview

1. Ask what the next step is. When can you expect to hear back. How many people are being interviewed ?
2. Ask the interviewer(s) if they are still interested in you. Indicate that you are very interested in the role. If you are in two minds go away and think about it.
3. If the position is clearly not for you tell the interviewer.
4. If you are offered the position at the interview, then hopefully you will have a good feeling as to whether you want the role or not, but do not feel under pressure to say yes. If you need time to think about the position in terms of opportunity and the conditions on offer, then say so.
5. If it is your second or third interview and you were expecting the meeting to be conclusive and to be offered the position and it does not happen, then ask them what their concerns may be.
6. Thank the interviewer(s) for their time and for considering you as an applicant.
7. End the interview with a positive smile and firm handshake.