

Interviewing Essentials: Strategies for Creating a Positive Impression

Congratulations! If you have been called for a job interview, the employer must have been impressed with your resume. You successfully passed the first critical step in the job-seeking process.

The impression you make during the next step, the interview, is usually the deciding factor as to whether or not you will receive a job offer. As a result, many people—especially those new to the workforce—are nervous going into a job interview. Being prepared is the key to alleviating this stress and gaining a competitive edge.

Types of Interviews

Interviews may follow different formats, but most fall into one of the five categories below. You may not know what type of format an interview will follow until the interview begins. By being familiar with the different types ahead of time, you will be able to adapt as necessary and make the most of your interview opportunity.

- **One-on-One:** One person interviews each candidate and then makes a hiring decision. Sometimes the interviewer may use a patterned format in which certain predetermined areas are explored, using questions that may have been written in advance.
- **Panel:** Members of a panel alternately ask questions of an applicant.
- **Impromptu:** An applicant meets a potential employer for an unplanned, unstructured interview, often in an informal environment, such as a restaurant, party or some other social setting.
- **Telephone/Video Conference:** An applicant is interviewed over the phone or via video conference. Such an interview may follow any of the above formats.
- **Job Fairs:** Groups of applicants wait in lines to talk to recruiters from various employers. It is almost akin to an assembly line approach to interviewing.

Interviewing Tips

Regardless of the interview format, following the basic steps below can help you maximize your chances of success.

- **Know the Organization:** Before the interview, take time to learn about the organization by researching its Web site, annual report, organizational structure, mission statement and any other resources that may be at your disposal.
- **Be Prepared:** In addition to learning about your potential employer, review your resume and/or job application. Additionally, carry a few copies with you to the interview. This will allow you to more easily provide information that may be required or complete an application form if one is necessary and was not already provided. Also, discuss anticipated questions and rehearse the interview ahead of time with a friend or family member.
- **Stay Focused:** Listen carefully to each question before formulating your answer and communicate clearly. For a telephone interview, plan ahead of time to be in a quiet environment free of potential distractions. In the case of a video conference interview, look attentively into the camera or screen when the questions are being asked.
- **Be Enthusiastic:** Show that you are interested not only in the job for which you are applying, but also in the overall business or organization.
- **Be Honest:** Explain what you can offer in terms of skills, knowledge, strengths and experience, including any volunteer work you may have done. If you do not have experience in a certain area, say so, but indicate your willingness and ability to learn new skills. Do not embellish the truth; simply present yourself as a positive person with skills to offer.
- **Don't Talk Too Much or Too Little:** Provide concise answers to the questions. One-word answers or terse responses that provide little real information should be avoided. At the same time, do not ramble. Also, remember that the interviewer, not the applicant, determines when the interview is over.
- **Be Yourself:** Do not put on an act. You will feel more relaxed and will better assist the interviewers in learning about your skills and knowledge if you present yourself sincerely.
- **Dress For Success:** You do not get a second chance to make a good first impression. Therefore, dress appropriately for the type of job for which you are applying. Looking your best shows you are serious about the job and may also make you feel more confident.

- **Follow Up:** Always ask the interviewer a few questions to demonstrate your interest in the position. In addition, send a thank you note shortly after the interview, expressing your appreciation for the opportunity to learn more about the job and the organization.
- **Stay Positive:** Do not give up if you do not get a job immediately. Rather, view each interview as a learning experience that will eventually help you land the job you want. After each interview, think about the things you did well, as well as the areas where you think you could improve, regardless of the outcome.

Resources

Below are resources available that provide guidance on effective interviewing:

- The **Job Accommodation Network (JAN)**, a service of the U.S. Department of Labor's (DOL) Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), provides information on workplace accommodations and other employment issues for individuals with disabilities, including interviewing. To access JAN, call 800-526-7234 (V/TTY) or visit www.askjan.org and select employment, then Job Seeker and Employee Resources.
- **CareerOneStop** offers a wide range of information and tools to assist job seekers in preparing for employment. For interviewing tips, visit www.careeronestop.org.

Additional sources of interviewing advice may include teachers, guidance counselors and your school or local library.

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