

A GUIDE TO SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

Obviously there will always be a certain amount of luck involved in succeeding at interview and the outcome will, to some extent, depend on the chemistry between the interviewer and the interviewee. However, there are some rules to follow which should take much of the fear and uncertainty out of the process.

Above all, there is one golden rule: **First impressions count!**

This may seem a trite observation, but our consultants who interview every day can confirm its truth. The tone for the whole interview can be set within the first few seconds and the rest of the meeting should be spent confirming a good impression, not dispelling a bad one.



PRESENTATION

- Make sure that you are looking smart and that nails, hair and shoes are clean. This is not the moment to wear wacky ties or socks, whatever statement you think they make.
- A firm (and dry!) handshake is essential. Be ready to greet your interviewer. Lounging on a sofa surrounded by papers does not lead to a smooth getaway.
- Meet your interviewer's eye, without unnatural staring, and do not be afraid to smile. There is nothing more depressing than interviewing candidates who do not display a glimmer of sense of humour or enthusiasm. Obviously this is not an appropriate time to be cracking jokes, but do try to establish a rapport on a human level as soon as possible. This can be particularly difficult in a panel interview where there are a number of interviewers, but try to direct your answers and eye contact to all members of the panel from time to time.
- Be aware of your body language. Research shows that only a small proportion of the communication between people is effected by the actual words spoken. Intonation, facial expression and body language are very significant, so don't fold your arms, perch/sprawl on your chair or cover your mouth with your hands. These techniques will do nothing for the interviewer's impression of your self-confidence

PREPARATION

- Do not be tempted to be blasé about any interview: you risk letting yourself down.
- Make sure that you have planned your route and arrive in good time, but not too early. Spend any spare time you may have gathering your thoughts so that you are composed and relaxed. Moreover, there may be information in the waiting room which could be relevant. Don't forget to be pleasant to the receptionist, secretary, etc, as their views are often sought.
- Your consultant should have provided you with information before you attend the interview, but do not neglect your own avenues of enquiry.
- If the position would involve relocation, make an effort to research and explore the area. This shows commitment and interest from you and, in any event, will be an essential step in your decision process.

- Read your CV carefully and be prepared to talk knowledgeably, and in detail, about your experience and interests. You should be able to talk about each transaction/matter listed, its purpose, structure, the parties, etc. – this is often the only method by which your technical ability will be assessed. Candidates will often be asked questions such as “What was the greatest challenge in this case/transaction? Why and how did you overcome it?”
- However, the most important preparation is to know yourself. Many candidates dissolve into stunned silence or incoherent babble when asked to explain their strengths as a person and as a prospective employee. Yet surely this is absolutely essential! Take the time before an interview to WRITE DOWN your strengths, both professional and personal and against each one provide an example, which proves your point. This will enable you to give far more focused answers and will remove the risk of your tongue running away with you. Do not be tempted to take a short cut: writing these down will fix them in your mind. Give some thought to cogent reasons as to why you wish to leave your current position and any other particularly difficult matters, but do not try to learn the answers “off-pat”.
- Finally be clear in your mind what you would like to achieve from the interview: you will then be much more likely to achieve it.

THE INTERVIEW

- An interview is always going to be something of an unknown quantity, but the majority of interviews follow a predictable pattern. Many professionals have little or no training in interviewing and are not necessarily good at it! It is therefore important that you know what your ‘selling points’ are and that you communicate them effectively. It is no excuse to say; “he didn’t ask me the right questions”. Do not be domineering, but do not be afraid to steer the discussion to your advantage.
- The essential elements of any interview are:
 1. Reasons for leaving your current/last employer
 2. Reasons for joining your prospective employer
 3. Strengths and weaknesses
 4. Aspirations and ambitions
 5. The benefits you can bring to the role/company
 6. Your questions
- All of these can be prepared in advance and therefore should hold no fear. The ‘weaknesses’ question is always tricky: be truthful, but try to stress any positive side. Don’t give examples of ‘measurable’ weaknesses: e.g. drafting, attention to detail, etc.
- Don’t be defensive. If you do not know the answer, say so and explain why, without whinging. Similarly, try not to be negative about current/past employers as this may leave an interviewer with the impression that you are difficult to get on with. Be aware, however, of ‘good cop/bad cop’ interviewing techniques, which can just be designed to see how you react under pressure.
- Many companies are increasingly using psychometric testing as part of the selection process, which usually consists of a choice of adjectives which most, and least describe you. Don’t be put off by these: they are usually confirmatory or used to give interviewers clues as to areas, which they might explore in greater detail. Be honest and definite in your reasons. Some questions are obviously loaded but don’t be tempted to second guess the tests: they are often too sophisticated for this and give a ‘cheat score’.

- If you are being interviewed at a large multinational or by a human resources professional, expect the interview to be more structured and do not become irritated if some questions seem irrelevant. In these situations interviews may be constructed around certain criteria, e.g. motivation, leadership potential, ability to delegate, etc, and will be the same for all management grade staff.
- Try to avoid waffle and back up statements with examples (see above). This will make your answers much stronger and more convincing.
- Finally, do have some intelligent questions prepared. It is probably best to picture yourself on your first day in your new post and consider things you will need to know in order to do your job effectively. Whom do you report to? How is work delegated to you? What support will there be for you? It is perhaps best; however, not to ask about remuneration at the first interview unless questioned directly. Employers will much prefer to hear of your enthusiasm for their position career progression, etc., than your interest in the salary package. This aspect is most effectively handled by your consultant who will be able to advise you and act as an intermediary.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

It is essential that you contact your consultant as soon as possible after the interview and tell him/her your impressions, both positive and negative. Interviewers will be interested to hear feedback and your consultant will be able to relay this, which can be critical in determining the outcome.