

TIPS TO HELP YOU PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

Preparing for the Interview

RESEARCH

Don't forget to research the organization/company before the interview. Learn what you can about the workplace prior to the interview. Ask your friends, do library or internet research or ask the organization for any printed information. Make sure you are familiar with the company or organizations products and/or services

WHAT TO WEAR

Rule #1: Always be clean, neat and tidy.

Appropriate attire varies from industry to industry. What is appropriate to wear to an "accounting" interview may not necessarily be appropriate to wear to a "waitressing" interview. It is as important to be as neat and tidy as possible. In some traditional industries (i.e. the banks) you may want to dress even more conservatively. If possible go by the location ahead of time to see how people who work there are dressed. At the very least you should always wear clean, ironed slacks and a nice shirt.

CALMING YOUR NERVES DURING THE INTERVIEW

- Do quick check of your appearance before entering if possible
- Arrive 10 minutes early (never be too early though!)
- Take long and deep breaths
- Think positively: you have nothing to lose and everything to gain from the experience
- Get a drink of water if your throat is dry; ask for water if you need to and it isn't offered or bring a bottle in your bag

BODY LANGUAGE

- Greet the interviewer (and end the interview) with a smile and a firm hand shake
- Make eye contact when answering questions

- Don't have anything in your mouth except your teeth – no gum or candy!
- Sit and stand with straight posture. Do not slouch or sit back in an overly relaxed manner.
- Try to keep your arms at your sides – not in front of your mouth/face, on the interviewer's desk or folded across your chest

THE INTERVIEW

There are 2 types of Interview Questions:

1. Traditional
2. Behavioural

GIVING INSIGHTFUL ANSWERS

- Make sure you understand a question before you answer it. Ask for clarification if you do not understand the question. Try to ask for clarification instead of saying "What?"
- Avoid slang
- If a question is complex or challenging, it is fine to take time out to think about it
- Be honest when answering questions
- Support your skills, strengths, talents with concrete examples
- Be concise in your answers (don't go on and on and on and on; get to the point!)
- Use correct grammar. Say "yes" instead of "yeah"
- Be aware of how quickly you are speaking. Don't be afraid of pauses.
- use positive words when talking about your skills (i.e. demonstrated, developed, enhanced, established, improved, solved, organized)
- don't talk about salary until the interviewer raises the issue
- develop at least 5 questions that you may want to ask the interviewer. For example:
 - what future career opportunities exist within the company?
 - will I work independently or as a member of a team?
 - what are some of the common characteristics of employees who excel in this position?
 - how often is an employee's performance evaluated?
 - when will the hiring decision be made? What is the next step in the process?
 - is the company open to change? Will I be able to offer suggestions?
 - what kind of training should I expect and for how long?
 - is a written job description available?
 - please tell me a little bit about the people with whom I would be working closely.

You want to have at least 5 questions prepared. Some may already have been answered in the interview and you don't want to get stuck with nothing to ask at the end. If you have no questions to ask, often an interviewer assumes that you are not that interested. Choosing where to work is a big decision and you want to look like you care about the big decisions you make.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself

Many interviewers use the question as an initial icebreaker. When an interviewer asks this question, s/he wants to get a general feeling about you and gives you the chance to relax and open up.

Select your experiences and skills that describe you in terms of how they have prepared you for this job. You might focus on your strongest skills, greatest areas of knowledge, things you do best and key accomplishments – all relevant to the position you are interviewing for.

Be careful not to give a whole life history and don't just state what is on your resume. Write it out in advance so you are confident in your ability to answer this question – it should not be more than 250 words long (3 minutes)

2. What are your greatest strengths?

do not stop at one. Give them two or three of your top strengths, preferably that match requirements in their job description. For example, if they require someone who can “meet tight deadlines” you might want to talk about how you always finish something that you start, no matter how great of a challenge it is, talk about having “great determination.” Use concrete examples to illustrate how good you really are- tell them about a time you stuck with something difficult

3. What are some of your weaknesses?

The answer is never that you have no weaknesses – no one wants to hire a know-it-all. select an area you would like to develop or have already worked on and have taken major steps in improving. Never choose a weakness that would ever get in the way of the work you are applying for.

“One of my weaknesses is that when in meetings where we are brainstorming or discussing issues, instead of waiting for someone to complete their thoughts I have a tendency of jumping in. I have a lot of great ideas and suggestions/feedback I would like to offer, but I need to wait until one has finished with his/her thoughts before jumping in. What I have tried to do is write down my thoughts as they come to me and address them when it is my turn. “

An interviewer wants to hear an answer that indicates awareness and motivation.

4. Why did you leave your last job? Why do you want to leave your current job?

See HIV in the interview

Explain your leaving in the best light possible. Speak honestly, but not negatively about your reasons for leaving or wanting to leave. Saying you are seeking different challenges is always a good answer for being laid off, quitting or fired. Never talk badly about your previous employer or company-your interviewer will assume, fair or not, that if hired you will soon be characterizing his or her company in the same negative terms.

5. What do you know about our company?

This is your opportunity to tell the interviewer just how wonderful the company and the organization is. This is when researching the company will come in handy. Those who don't take the time to do the research may not be considered as other candidates who did research will have demonstrated a lot more interest.

6. What can you do for our company? Why should we hire you?

Research is the key here as well. You know the company does and hopefully what they value in their employees (read the qualifications of the job description) : focus your answer on how you have the skills, abilities, and talent to benefit the organization.

7. What type of supervisor do you like? What do you think of your old boss?

Be as positive about your previous boss as possible. If there were characteristics, qualities or approaches that you did not agree with turn those around in to ways you would like to be supervised. (eg. I work well independently and appreciate the autonomy to make my own decisions however; I also appreciate a manager who is willing to help me learn new skills)

8. What kind of salary are you looking for?

A discussion of salary does not usually come up in your first interview but later on in the process. You should not bring it up first; let the employer introduce the subject. If you do have to discuss salary, give an appropriate range. Try to overlap your range with the high level of the job posting range. Another way to handle this question is by asking the employer what type of salary they feel appropriate for the responsibilities for the position you are applying.

9. What are your long term goals? What do you want to be doing 5 years from now?

Do not say anything that might cause the company to believe that this is just a short term position until you find something better. It is important to address this question in terms of things that you hope to do or accomplish within the company.

For example: " as long as the values of the company correspond with mine, I hope to be working with this company. Or "as long as I am able to make a valuable contribution to this company, I hope to be successfully working here."

10. You seem to be under/over qualified.

The real message in stating that you are over qualified is that the interviewer thinks that you want too much money or that you will not be satisfied with the job and will continue looking until you find something better. If you feel that you match, thank the interviewer for thinking you have outstanding qualifications, but reassure them that this is a good job for you.

Try to find as much information as possible so that you can determine if you are overqualified or under qualified. Chances are if either is true and you get the job, you will be unhappy. So make sure your qualifications match the position.

HIV in the interview

By law, employment interviews focus on a person's ability to perform the essential functions of a job not on his or her disability. Legally you do not have to disclose your current health status in any job interview. Remember, lots of people have gaps in their resumes. Having an employment gap does not mean you won't be considered for the position. If you are qualified, an employer will usually consider you for the position.

If possible, you should avoid discussing medical issues: not mentioning a medical problem in a job interview does not preclude an employee from asking an employer to accommodate the impairment later. Although HIV may be uppermost in your mind, it may be the farthest thing from a prospective employer's mind. If you want to bring it up, that's fine, but be aware that some people may know little about HIV/AIDS and some people may not handle it well.

Do you have gaps in your resume that you need to face? You can offer a variety of reasons for leaving your previous job without referring to medical issues. For example: "the job ended and my contract was over." "I decided to go back to school", "wanted to pursue a dream of being self employed. I learned a lot, but I missed working with people and the regular pay check" or "I needed time off to deal with an illness in the family".

If you can't avoid discussing the issue:

1. Open it
2. Explain it
3. Close it

1. Open it: face it head on when asked why you left your last job. You can simply state : "I have some medical issues to deal with."

2. Explain it: Provide a small amount of detail to satisfy the employer's curiosity and to pre-empt further questions about this topic. You might want to continue with " I had very good care, so I am ready to go back to work now. I feel great these days."

3. Close it: End the discussion and move on to the more important subject of why you are interesting, able to do the job and how you came to have the skills to do the job. For example, you could then add " I've taken some computer classes while I had the extra time. I learned a lot about Microsoft Office software and I learned I enjoy working on the computer"

A well told story can turn the description of a medical leave into a forceful and convincing story of initiative, resourcefulness, intelligence and skills.

POST INTERVIEW

Send a thank you letter/note/email to the interviewer, in a reasonable amount of time.

For example:

Date of interview

Dear Mr. Peabody,

Thank you for taking the time to interview me for the Customer Service Representative position at the Royal bank. It was a pleasure meeting you and learning more about your organization.

Reflecting on what I learned in our meeting, I feel i could learn a great deal from this experience and could also bring a lot to the position and the organization.

Again, thank you for your consideration. I look forward to hearing from you and the possibility of joining your staff.

Sincerely,

Jane Doe