

# THEORY AND TECHNIQUES OF THE INTERVIEW

## 6. JOB INTERVIEW REJECTION

### 6.1. The Reality of Rejection

Every job seeker, no matter how talented and experienced, has received at least one dreaded rejection letter in his or her career. And, no matter how talented and experienced the job seeker, rejection always brings up deep seated insecurities and that inevitable question: "Why?" Even though it is a drag to be rejected by a potential employer, the key to landing a job is not to dwell on missed opportunities and just keep focusing on possibilities.

If you don't have a job and are getting rejection letters after interviewing, the process can be both scary and depressing. Do not let yourself get so down on yourself or depressed that your interview skills suffer. Each job interview has to be a whole new world of positive thinking. Don't reflect on past losses, failures, or rejections when preparing for an interview. Prepare and put a positive spin on everything that you discuss with your interviewers. Positive thinking will get you far in interviews. After each interview sit down and make a list of everything you thought went well and the things that you think you could have improved upon. Then, if you don't get the job at least you will have given yourself some feedback that you can use to improve your interview skills the next time. Sometimes interviewers will tell you why you didn't get the job but you can't count on that. You have to create your own after action review in order to improve your skills. Don't focus on rejection. Treat your job search like a sales job. You are selling product "You Inc." to a potential employer. Don't focus on the sales you lose but try to learn from them in order to improve your pitch until you close a deal. Keep in mind that many times the jobs you don't get are blessings in disguise even though you may not think so at the time. Don't think "what's wrong with me?" when you are rejected for a job because, in truth, there may not be anything wrong with your interview skills or your ability to do the job. It may be that you and the company aren't a good fit for each other, and that is nothing to get depressed about.

In today's fast paced and competitive society, job hunting can be a challenge that will leave some individuals feeling depressed and hopeless. You begin your search with confidence and passion, but as you receive one rejection phone call or letter after another, you begin to experience self-doubt. Make no mistake that in any job hunt, you will be rejected at some point, no matter how good you are. When you're at this point, you must not allow yourself to sink into this quicksand of rejection. Don't ever give up because that perfect job opportunity could be just around the corner. For any given employment opportunity, there are usually hundreds of applicants applying, which allows prospective employers to be very choosy. Decisions are usually made based on whom the employer deems will be a better fit for their company. If you find that your phone is not ringing off the hook with interview offers, it might be a good idea to contact companies you've interviewed with and attempt to get feedback. This will help you understand why you did not receive an offer, learn from your experience, and give you an opportunity to further develop your approach. Try not to think of rejection as failure. Focus on the things you did well, and continue to build upon your strengths and talents. Take a good constructive look at what you can do to improve, whether it is your written documents or your personal interview. Think of the whole process as a chance to grow and learn from the experience. Every opportunity you have to better yourself provides you with a better chance at getting that next employment opportunity.

The last thing to remember after you get passed over for a job is that no decision is irreversible and nothing is permanent. The hiring manager may change his or her mind and/or the candidate they choose might not work out. Of course, neither of these things are in your control, but your reaction to the situation is. Even when you've been passed over for a job, you want to be the peak of professionalism and gratitude. After all, if the job does become open again in the future, you want them to already be thinking highly of you.

## **6.2. Working Through Rejection**

Job hunting can be a grueling and demoralizing experience. The troubled job market worldwide has created an overabundance of qualified candidates, many competing for the same job. Hunting for a job not only means having the right qualifications, developing a sterling resume', a killer cover letter, and razor sharp interview skills, but also having to outdo the other candidates, many of whom may be more qualified on paper than you. Unfortunately, even after all that, rejection is possible, even likely. Rejection can be tough to deal with, especially when a job you really want (or need) is on the line. So how can you deal with that rejection

and turn it into something positive? The following tips are meant to assist you in the event that you experience interview rejection;

1. **Attack it Head-On:** Although results (and circumstances) vary, it is sometimes possible to turn a “no” into a “yes” and turn a rejection around. If your potential employer calls you and tells you they’re going with another candidate, ask them why and try to find an opportunity to highlight the skills that could give you the edge over the other candidate. Don’t make emotional appeals or come off as desperate. Give the employer a real, tangible reason why they really should hire you instead.
2. **Develop Your Plan:** While it might seem awkward to ask an interviewer for feedback, a good strategy for honing your job interview skills is to get an honest assessment of your performance. If the interviewer is willing, ask them to list what they felt your strengths and weaknesses were in the interview, so you can use that data to fine tune future interviews. Make sure the interviewer knows you want constructive feedback, even if what they have to say may not send your self-esteem soaring.
3. **Practice Your Pitch:** Once you have some data on how you could have improved your interview, use it to prepare yourself for the next application process. Sit down with some note paper, figure out the strengths and weaknesses in your skill set, and figure out how you can maximize your positive attributes and compensate for your weak spots. If you have the time and the resources, consider shoring up some of those weak spots with some software training, online classes, or research to get yourself up to speed.
4. **Don’t Blame Yourself:** It can be hard not to get down on yourself when you make every effort to land the job of your dreams, and still get rejected. But in truth, sometimes a rejection is not about you at all. Often, perfectly qualified candidates, who might be perfect for the job in question, get turned down due to circumstances that are entirely invisible to the applicant. An employer might be able to better relate to another candidate, or have some sort of past history with that candidate, or any number of a thousand small things that can lead to not getting hired.
5. **Don’t Make it Personal/Remain Positive:** Even more important than not taking your rejection out on yourself is not taking it out on others. Don’t get defensive with the interviewer, or turn to social media to publicly complain about the employer for rejecting you. Don’t burn your bridges by showing

resentment or anger at being rejected. Try to stay in touch with that company, if you can. You never know if that other candidate might not work out. Most of all, the best thing you can do after getting turned down is to stay positive and not get discouraged. Keeping your energy positive is vital to maintaining your sense of well-being, which you will need to perform effectively in the next job interview scenario.

### **6.3. Post-Rejection**

Being rejected after a job interview can severely dent your confidence. Many candidates tortuously dwell on being turned down, often forgetting the bigger picture. Rejection, while not pleasant, can often be blown out of proportion and viewed as a sign of failure. However, by thinking objectively, candidates can use it to build on their core strengths, address development points and ultimately find a job that suits them best. At the very least you should feel as though you have learned something through the interview process. We all learn from our experiences, and interviewing is no different. However, if you performed to the best of your ability, displayed all your relevant technical expertise, demonstrated your competencies and communicated in your most engaging manner in an interview but were still turned down, then you can take comfort from knowing that it was the wrong job for you. You may find your mind unable to rest until you establish a logical explanation for the rejection. Thorough feedback may not be provided, as candidates are often rejected because of an interviewer's gut feeling, despite meeting technical requirements. Instead of dwelling on the disappointment, keep your mind focused on other opportunities and continue to present yourself to the best of your ability. If you find you are facing continuous rejection then use it as a means for developing resilience. But ensure that you also take action to remedy any personal shortcomings brought to your attention from feedback.

Take the time to begin to narrow your job search. The job market is getting more competitive by the day. Pre-recession organizations had larger budgets and less lean organizational processes. Thus, they were more flexible in their hiring. If a candidate matched 90% of their criteria they would consider that a good fit. Now, with stricter requirements, companies cannot afford to hire you unless you are a 100% match. Thus, be highly selective with where you apply. Don't be afraid to turn down opportunities pitched to you as perfect by headhunters and recruitment agencies if you feel they are not right. Where you feel you are suitable, research the role, the company, its culture and the team you will be working with in as

much detail as possible to gauge how appropriate you are before accepting an interview. If you are being represented by a headhunter ask them to provide you with as much accurate information as possible and back this up with your own research. It is advisable to read the profiles of those interviewing you on LinkedIn.

Additionally, you may need to address the issues. Whatever the reason for rejection from one company there is a way it can be improved and transformed as a reason for acceptance at another. The most common reason for being turned down is a lack of technical knowledge. To improve this, you may simply need to revise answers for technical questions in more detail or you may need to pursue further courses/qualifications. You should always ensure that you obtain feedback post interview, either from your headhunter or the firm directly. Another common reason for rejection is interview style. Interviews can make the most confident of us extremely nervous. After all, you are being interrogated under a spotlight and the slightest miscommunication or, worse, the mood of the interviewer, can jeopardize your chances. Some people of incredible technical caliber struggle under such close scrutiny. Often it is a psychological thing. People know there are so many external factors influencing the decision and by giving too much thought they set themselves up to fail, forgetting that excellent preparation, coupled with an ability to think on their feet, can help them overcome the sternest of objections from interviewers. Competency based interviews are increasingly used now and many people fail to deliver at these as they require highly detailed responses.

The following are a few questions you may want to consider before embarking on your next quest after a rejection:

- **Has the job market changed since you began your search?** Canvassing input from those in your field of work would give you great insight into what to expect. Are the skills required the same? Do you have the required background?
- **Did you clearly demonstrate on your cover letter and resume' that you meet the criteria for the job?** Even though you may have all the relevant qualifications, knowledge, skills, and experience, if you don't make this sufficiently clear in your application, the employer is unlikely to interview you.
- **Were there errors in your application or was it hard to read?** It is a proven fact that most employers will disqualify an individual simply because there were typos or spelling errors in their application. Copy editing your resume' package is so very important: Have your friends, relatives, and colleagues critique it. The more eyes that read it, the less likely it will be that

errors sneak through. A+ Resume's for Teachers uses a highly-trained team of writers and editors to prepare your documents.

- **Have you been using the same approach every time without success?** You must be very careful not to get yourself into a set pattern. If you find that something is not working, change it. Diversity and flexibility are key.

#### **6.4. Gaining Feedback**

Now, back to how to actually deal with that rejection. Sure, it's disappointing and maybe even painful, but it can also be very useful. They didn't hire you for a reason. Put a different way, there was something about your portfolio, your experience or your skill level that kept them from hiring you. So what do you want to do? Find out what that reason is. Once you find out what was missing from your portfolio/experience/skill level, you can work on it and be better prepared for similar opportunities in the future. One job rejection is just an opportunity to improve yourself for the next one. Get in touch with your main contact at the company, probably the HR person. First, genuinely thank them for the opportunity. Then, let them know that you'd like to continue improving and ask, based on their impressions, what you could improve on in the future. If you don't get a satisfactory answer from the HR person (something like, "Oh, we just decided to go in a different direction"), you can get in touch with the main person you interviewed with. Again, be polite, grateful and brief. You are hoping for some feedback, but you don't want to annoy him/her. The worst case scenario is that you don't get any real feedback. The best case scenario is you get some solid feedback to work with and improve yourself, your skills, or your portfolio for the next dream job you come across.

This can be difficult, but it is essential for your development. You may find it easier to receive if you apply through a headhunter as they usually have long standing relationships with employers, ensuring that candid feedback is given to them about a candidate post interview. Make the interviewer aware how important feedback is to you, as this will show them how committed you are to self-development and may convince them to hire you. Attitude can be just as important as ability. A follow up email after an interview is the best way, showing professionalism and interest in the role. Most people will not do this, so you will be separating yourself from the competition. You should also state in the email that you welcome any feedback (positive or negative) as a way to improve and that you take each interview as a learning experience. This will encourage a more detailed

response. Once received, take any feedback with an open mind and make the relevant improvements to find the job you want.

After the trials and tribulations of an unsuccessful interview and after receiving a rejection letter, the last thing you may want to do is ask for interview feedback. You may just want to curl up into a ball and lick your wounds. It's okay to be disappointed. Naturally you applied for the job because you really wanted it, but you should also take some comfort in the fact that you have actually received a rejection letter. Why? There are three reasons for this: You are the privileged minority. A recent poll by about.com tells us that just a quarter of candidates (27% to be precise) always/usually receive a rejection letter. So, if you do get one you are part of the privileged minority. It means the channels of communication are open: By sending you a rejection letter the company has given you a sign that they are the kind of employer who is responsive and to some degree cares about rejected applicants. This means that they are likely to be much more receptive to a request for interview feedback, than a company who has not bothered to contact you. The channels of communication are open. You have an opportunity to get feedback to improve your future interview performance: A post interview rejection letter should be considered as an invaluable opportunity to get detailed interview feedback which can help you to understand why you went wrong – and how you can adapt your future job search or interview technique process to improve your chances of getting a job. This is why a post-rejection letter should be considered a gift. The opportunity should not be squandered and you should ensure to request interview feedback from any interviews where you got a post rejection letter.