

THEORY AND TECHNIQUES OF THE INTERVIEW

2. STAGES OF AN INTERVIEW

2.1. How to Begin An Interview

For interviewers, a job candidate might look really great on paper, but at some point you're going to have to talk to him/her to make sure they're the best possible person to fill your open position. Whether conducted by a panel of hiring managers or in a one-on-one setting, or in a room with a dozen other candidates waiting nearby, the oral interview involves getting the candidate to talk about themselves and to share the experiences that demonstrate if they're a great fit. How you start the interview will set the tone for the rest of the interview. The basic items that you will need for an interview are a recording device, pen and paper. Also, a quiet setting is essential to the success of your interview. Choose a quiet place that is as free of distractions as possible. Even if you work in a bustling office, find a corner where you'll be less likely to encounter noises or activity that can make it difficult for you and the job candidate to concentrate. Welcome the candidate to the room or area and ask them to sit down. Smile and maintain an open, friendly posture while giving the candidate a few moments to get comfortable. Start off with an "ice breaker," also called small talk. Ask the candidate if they are enjoying the weather or whether they had problems finding the office, anything to lighten the mood a bit before you move into the challenging portion of the interview. Explain any details they may have to take or how long the interview is expected to last. If you're recording the interview for other people to listen to later on, ask the candidate to say and spell their name. This allows you to have a record of the person's identity, should you lose your notes and need to recall certain information by listening to the recording. Depending on the nature of the interview, you may also want to state the date and the location of the interview, so it's saved on the recording. Start your line of questioning with a relatively easy question, such as "tell me what you know about our company" or "tell me why you want to work here." This gets the candidate talking without having to dive in too deeply at the start of the interview.

2.2. The Interviewers Role

Most employment interviews are often unreliable predictors of job performance. Despite this, they remain the most common selection method for most employers. For businesses, understanding the various roles that the interviewer plays can help ensure that the interview is conducted in the most effective way, and that the most suitable candidate is chosen.

- **Analyze The Candidate** - First impressions can be so powerful that most interviewers make judgments regarding a candidate in the first 30 seconds of an interview. The interviewer should try to overcome those first impressions and use well thought out, structured questions to assess the candidate's ability to do the job. Questions must also be posed that can detect how the candidate might act under pressure. The best way to do this is to take note of non-verbal communication and body language. The best candidates will make eye contact, maintain a straight posture and listen intently to what you are saying.
- **Market Your Company** - An interview should be a mutual exchange of information where the candidate is also interviewing the interviewer. A desirable candidate will be in demand, and a wise interviewer will attempt to win over the candidate, while making sure they have all the information she needs to make an informed decision. It is important to let the candidate know how your company can benefit them in terms of salary, benefits and career advancement. A candidate should leave the interview impressed by your interest in them, and by what your company has to offer.
- **Be Prepared** - Some research stresses that the interviewer should be as prepared as the interviewee. Before starting the interview, the interviewer should carefully review the candidate's cover letter, resume', background information and references. It is important to keep questions focused and relevant so they are tailored to individual job candidates. For example, if a candidate for sales position spent the last few years working in finance, ask him/her how their background can help them become a successful sales rep.
- **Be Clear About Process** - Businesses often fail to clearly communicate the recruiting process to candidates. Many companies might have a candidate turn down a job offer purely out of disappointment with a lengthy recruitment process. It is important to let job candidates know your interview sequence, such as how long it will take to get back to them following the interview, and how many times they might have to come back for additional interviews. Be clear and precise with your instructions so interviewers don't get discouraged by lengthy hiring processes.

2.3. The Time Factor

For interviewees, when you're going for a job interview, it is highly recommended that you attend at least 15 minutes prior to the interview. Doing so, it demonstrates professionalism and shows respect to both you and the interviewer's time. Coming in a few minutes early allows you to gather your thoughts and information with less anticipation. It's also good just in case of any delays, such as traffic delays or getting lost, because being late for an interview comes across as a bad first impression. It gives the interviewer the impression that if you cannot show up on time for the interview, what makes he or she think you can show up on time for the actual job position you're applying for. This hurts your chances of getting the position. But for some reason you cannot avoid these delays, you should call the company and inform them about your situation because a simple "traffic" excuse is a weak one. If the delay or situation is a serious one, reschedule your appointment. It's best you don't waste the interviewer's time because time is valuable. Also, it's best you don't show up too early for the interview either. Showing up extra early for a job interview is a sign of desperation. It demonstrates that you have way too much time on your hands. You want to show the interviewer that your time is just as valuable as his or her.

For interviewers, remember to plan your schedule accordingly when preparing for interviews. Major meetings should not conflict with interviews, so it is best to review and double check your schedule prior to planning to conduct interviews. Also, have an interview time frame planned out. Typically, interviews take 10 – 15 minutes. Remember to adhere to your established time frames, especially if you have more than 1 interview scheduled on a particular day.

2.4. Three Main Stages

For interviewees, getting an interview brings on two emotions. The first is excitement, especially if you will be interviewing for a position you really want. The second is fear; especially if the stakes are high and you really need the job. An interview is about two parties, you and the prospective employer, getting together to see if there is a match. The process is skewed in the employer's favor, particularly now because job supply is low and demand is high. So, it's important that you use the interview as your chance to stand out and make the best impression possible. In order to ace an interview, you have put yourself in the shoes of the employer. By understanding their thinking, and the three stages of the interview, you can do well. Below are the three important stages of an interview:

Stage I: The Invitation

If an employer thinks you can do the job, you will be brought in for an interview. Many clients say to me that they hope a perspective employer believes they can do the job. They already do, or you would not have received the invitation to interview with them. To get to Stage I, make sure your resume' matches the bullets in the job description as closely as possible. Employers are looking for a match of skills and abilities. If you have too few qualifications on your resume', you will be seen as being underqualified. Too many, and you will be seen as overqualified or all over the place. Close matches have the best chance of being brought in.

Stage II: The Meeting

During the interview, it's all about having your personality shine though. Jobs are won and lost based on personality. The employer is thinking the following: Do I like you? Are you normal? Will you get along with everyone else? Can you get up to speed quickly? And, will you make me look good? Stage II is your time to show your passion, what makes you unique, to handle objections, convey how committed you are to the job, and how you will make your boss look like a star. Don't overdo it. Quiet confidence will set an employer at ease, but arrogance will cost you the job. Nonverbal contact is vital, and will go a long way towards giving your prospective employer an initial impression of you. Smile when you first meet the interviewer. Have a firm handshake and be sure to maintain eye contact when speaking or listening. If there is more than one interviewer, shift your eye contact between them so that no one is left out. When the interviewers ask you a question, listen carefully and know what you're going to say before you start to answer. If you don't understand the question, ask them for clarification. If you're asked a question to which you don't know the answer, don't bluff. Be honest and admit you don't know, but offer to get back to them with an answer later. And then make sure you do get back to them! This job interview is as much for your benefit as it is for your potential employer's. Be prepared to ask questions about the job requirements and type of work you'll be expected to do. Hopefully, you will have assembled some questions ahead of time during your preparation stage, so you should have plenty to talk about at this point. The important thing is to be active during the job interview process. Don't just sit passively, waiting for something to happen.

Stage III: Closing & Follow-Up

After an employer interviews several people, the choice in many situations comes down to two candidates. Both can do the job well, and both are very well liked. At this point, it becomes, "Who is the best match?" If you are hoping that an employer will see why you are the perfect candidate on their own, you have already lost the position. You have to lead them there from the start. For example, if you are switching industries, tell the interviewer why the industries are similar. If you are going after a different job title, show how your background has prepared you for that role. If you were unable to get this across during Stage II, contact the employer and see if they will have another conversation with you before they make their decision. It never hurts to ask and they might just say yes. The interview is simply your opportunity to make sure you come across as the best candidate for the job. If you can get through these three stages effectively, the job you want can be yours. When the interview concludes, ask if they're interviewing any others for the position and when you can expect a decision. Shake hands with everybody in the room and thank them for their time and for considering you. As soon as you get home from the interview, send a note (e-mail is acceptable) to everyone involved in the interview. Thank them once again for their time, and let them know that you'll follow up with them in two weeks if you don't hear back before then.

Remember that the key to a successful job interview is diligent preparation. With a little time and effort, you can make yourself ready for all three stages of the job interview process and hopefully convince your prospective employer that you're right for the position.