

# **THEORY AND TECHNIQUES OF THE INTERVIEW**

## **3. PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW**

### **3.1. Prepare Mentally & Physically**

In such a tough corporate environment it has become harder than ever before to land that all important interview so when you do, you want to be sure you make no mistakes. The key to being successful at anything in life is to put in the effort and hard work. If you haven't prepared yourself properly for an interview, then any experienced interviewer will catch you out sooner rather than later. However, there are a number of ways to make sure that you are properly geared up for that all important interview. It is important to get yourself in the right frame of mind. You want to be in the best possible shape when you arrive for an interview. A positive mental attitude is the key so think back to any previous successes you have had, in any walk of life but particularly job related. Visualizing these will automatically put you in a good frame of mind. Also, make sure you know exactly where you are going when you set out and that you leave yourself plenty of time when you get there. Turning up late or flustered puts you in a slightly panicky mindset and this is the last thing you want. Additionally, make sure that you look the part. It goes without saying that you don't want to turn up for the interview looking scruffy, because first impressions are everything. Everything about you is a shop window and interviewers will be scrutinizing every aspect. For example, if your shoes are dirty or your appearance is messy that is an instant mark against you. It may sound silly but it says that you lack attention to detail.

### **3.2. Review Your Qualifications**

Have you taken the time to match yourself to the job specifications? Prospective employers will want to know that you have properly understood what it is they are looking for in a candidate. Make sure that you have fully understood the role you are applying for by studying the job specification and whether your skills and experience would make you a suitable candidate. To illustrate, there have been candidates in the past who spent a great deal of time talking about big corporate deals they have closed, when in actual fact the job spec stated that someone with a

totally different skill set was needed. Had they explained why their skill set was suited to the exact role, they would have had a far better chance.

### **3.3. Do Your Homework and Solicit Help**

When in doubt make sure to ask for advice from someone who might be able to help you. If you know someone who has worked for the company you have applied for, then talk to them and find out about the company culture and the person interviewing you. Something like LinkedIn can also be a big help here. Failing that, do you know somebody who works in a similar role for another organization? Also, make sure that you do your homework. Thanks to the internet it has never been easier to do some research on the organization you are hoping to work for. Any interviewer is immediately going to dismiss a candidate who turns up not knowing his or her stuff, so it would be foolish to not do your homework. Some general facts about the company, for example an award they may have recently won, is good to drop into the conversation before the interview has started. After that, you should know more specific details about the job you are going for. If you are applying for a finance position, you should have a good grasp of their latest accounts, or if you are applying for a sales role, looking at recent deals the company has made is a must.

Have you taken the time to anticipate the type of questions that may be asked of you? There are some traditional questions that are typically asked of interviewees. Sample questions, responses, and points to consider are included here;

- “What’s your biggest weakness?” is a classic canned interview question that many people dread. Answering this question is a bit of a tightrope walk: While you don’t want to be too honest (“I have a really hard time staying motivated”), you won’t fool anyone by trying to spin an obviously good quality into a weakness (“I just can’t bear to do less than outstanding work!”). Instead, think of a genuine issue you have as well as ways you have managed to work with/around it (“I’m not naturally a very organized thinker, but I’ve become very organized on paper and in my personal space as a result”).
- “Where do you see yourself in five years?” is another common question that can take you off guard if you don’t see it coming. Your panicked reaction might be to blurt out, “Working diligently for you, of course!” but unless you are actually trying to get a job in your chosen career, this probably isn’t a good strategy. If you’re going after what will clearly be a short-term job

or even one that lasts only several years then be honest about what your greater aspirations are (ex. going back to school, starting your own business); ambition is a very desirable trait in an employee – to say nothing of honesty.

- “Why do you want this job?” is so straightforward it can throw you for a loop. If you’re going into a field you care about, you will have a much easier time answering this. However, if, like many people, you’re just trying to make ends meet, you can answer the question by using it as a way of highlighting your skills (“I shine in fast-paced, high-pressure situations and would love to have the opportunity to cultivate my talents here”).
- “Why did you leave your last job?” is a common question that shouldn’t be hard to answer provided that you didn’t have a major blowout with your previous employer. If you did, be honest (without being bitter or laying blame, as this will make you look ungracious and hard to work with) and try to put a positive spin on things.
- Don't be afraid to admit that you don't know something. While you definitely want to seem knowledgeable, don't lie to make it seem like you know something you don't. You probably won't fool your interviewer, and admitting to not knowing something is much more impressive than lying during your interview. If need be, just acknowledge that you do not know the answer but will find out more about it and let them know afterwards.

Another tip is to research the company’s profile and background. Start by looking into their future goals and plans. Conducting the interview with this in mind will make you seem like a good long-term investment. You should also be ready to talk in depth about the industry, the organization, and the position you are applying for. More specifically;

- Learn your interviewer’s name and job position before going to the interview. You may need to call the company to find out.
- Talk to current employees. Show initiative while getting a feel for the office environment. Learn as much as you can about the company from people who work there.
- Know as much about the company as possible. You can't change your employment history or your qualifications, but you can work harder than every other applicant by being supremely knowledgeable about the company. Use the company's website, their annual report, and newspaper/business magazine articles to gather as much information as possible.

Another idea is to develop some questions of your own. At some stage in the interview you are going to be asked if you have any questions. This can often make or break your chances. This is when you need to take control and ask the interviewer almost as many questions as they asked you. Take every chance to drill down the role and the company. Generic questions like “what are the hours” won’t tell you anything of significance. What you really want is information such as what a typical day consists of and what are your key performance indicators. Challenging the interviewer like this immediately tells them you are a proactive person, and they will be sure to remember you when the interviews are all done. First off, you have to have an idea of the questions you will be asked. Sit down and think about the questions you would ask if you were the one conducting the interview. It’s best to prepare for a wide variety of questions by thinking about your own career goals, long-term plans, past successes, and work strengths, but you should also brace yourself for the deceptively simple questions that most employers like to throw at their interviewees as well. As a note, you can’t possibly anticipate every question, but think of the biggest ones. Completing this homework exercise will provide you with a base to answer whatever the employer throws at you.

### **3.4. Final Recommendations**

Job interviews are stressful enough without something going wrong. If you’ve been on the job market for even two weeks, the importance of preparation has been emphasized. You’re told to inventory your skills and experience, so you know what to highlight in the interview. You’re told to do company research, so you can demonstrate your interest. You’re told to generate accomplishment statements and stories to incorporate into your responses. You’ve practiced your responses to tough interview questions. You have extra copies of your resume’. You’re ready to go. When preparing for a job interview there is so much in your control. Don’t let the small, yet important details trip you up. Can you imagine the stress and frustration you’d feel if you arrived at the interview destination only to find out that you were in the wrong place? To compound matters, you may still have just enough time to make it to the correct location, only if there is no traffic or other potential obstacles. So, you race off to the other correct location hoping you make it, but you might not.

It would be unfortunate to lose out on a job opportunity because you didn’t know where to go. To avoid making this mistakes, simply take these four steps:

1. Confirm the interview location, address and point of contact. Do this for follow up interviews, too.
2. Ask for location markers, milestones, and cross streets.
3. Use an online mapping application (ex. Yahoo! Maps, Google Maps, Mapquest) to get the best possible route.
4. Do a test drive to the location. Take the time to make sure you're going to the right place. In this competitive job market, you can't afford to make mistakes.

Finally remember to monitor your emotions and body language during the interview. It is important to be confident about yourself and your abilities, without going over the top. Employers want people who are lively and full of self-belief, but they also want someone who will work well alongside their existing team. Be careful not to cross the fine line between confidence and arrogance, as the latter is something managers rarely look for in new hires.