

Preparing for the Interview

Before you walk into any interview, you should know everything about both the company and the position. Here are some tips - some do's and don'ts - to help you prepare.

Research The Employer

Your recruiter will be able to give you a brief overview about the company, but you should always search the web or the library for additional information. You'll want to learn about the company's structure, culture and finances. Read press releases, mission statement, and search for any news items about the company.

After you've studied the company, write down questions to ask the employer. Here are several example questions:

- Why is this position available?
- What training programs will be offered?
- What are your goals for this position?
- What obstacles must I overcome to succeed?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What opportunities are there for growth over the next 12 months? In the next five years?
- What growth do you anticipate for your firm over the next 12 months? Do's and Don'ts of Interviewing Do...
- Arrive 15 minutes early. Late attendance is never excusable.
- Clarify questions. Be sure you answered the questions the employer really asked.
- Get the interviewer to describe the position and responsibilities early in the conversation so you can relate your skills and your background to the position throughout the interview.
- Discuss your qualifications. Stress the accomplishments that are most pertinent to the job.
- Conduct yourself professionally.
- Be aware of your body language. Smile, make eye contact, don't slouch, maintain your composure.
- Anticipate difficult questions. Prepare in advance so you can turn potential weaknesses into strengths.
- Dress appropriately. Make a professional first impression.
- Ask questions throughout the interview. An interview should be an exchange of information, not a one-sided conversation.
- Listen. This is probably the most important skill of all. Concentrate on the interviewer's words, the tone of voice and body language. You will be able to pick up on subtle hints about the interviewer's style. Once you understand how an interviewer thinks, pattern your answers accordingly. Don't...
- Answer vague questions. Rather than answering questions you think you hear, get the employer to be more specific and then respond.
- Interrupt the employer. If you don't have time to listen, then neither does the employer.
- Smoke, chew gum, or place anything on the employer's desk.
- Be overly familiar, even if the employer is.
- Wear heavy perfume or cologne.
- Ramble. Long answers can make you sound apologetic or indecisive. On the other hand, don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no." Explain yourself in detail whenever possible.
- Lie. Answer questions as truthfully as possible.
- Make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies.

Too many people second guess themselves after an interview. By closing strongly and asking the right questions, you can eliminate the post-interview doubts that tend to plague interviewees.

If you feel that the interview went well and you would like to take the next step, express your interest and turn the tables a bit. Try something like the following:

"After hearing more about your company, the position and the responsibilities at hand, I am certain that I possess qualifications for your position. Based on our conversation and my qualifications, are there any issues or concerns that you have that would lead you to believe otherwise?"

You have a right to be assertive. This is a great closing question because it opens the door for the interviewer to be honest with you about his or her feelings. If concerns exist, this is a great opportunity to overcome them. You have one final chance to dispel the concerns, sell your strengths and end the interview on a positive note.

A few things to remember during the closing process:

- Don't be discouraged if no definite offer is made or specific salary discussed. The interviewer will probably want to communicate with the office first, or interview other applicants, before making a decision.
- Make sure you answer the following two questions: "Why are you interested in the company?" and "What can you offer?"

- Express thanks for the interviewer's time and consideration.
- Always ask for the interviewer's business card so you can write a thank you letter as soon as possible. Follow Up

When you get in your car, immediately write down key issues uncovered in the interview. Think of the qualifications the employer is seeking, and match your strengths to them. Then, call your recruiter!

Follow up at this stage is critical. Finally, write a thank you letter no later than 24 hours after the interview has ended.