

## interview guide

An interview is a two way process - the potential employer will be learning about you and vice versa. Information will be gained not only from the answers given to their questions, but also from the kind of questions you ask and the opinions you hold. There is no magic formula on winning an interview, but there are a number of basic skills and do's and don'ts.

### be positive

The most important thing is to have the right attitude. You must go to the interview with the sole intention of being offered a position. Too many candidates during the course of an interview give too much consideration to whether they want the job or whether they are suited to it. Do not give the interviewer the opportunity to exclude you by excluding yourself. Once you have an offer, you can then say yes or no.

### preparation

Preparation for your interview is vital. You have to know why you have chosen the particular job, and find out as much as possible about the employer. Do your homework on the company. Names of top people, directors etc. Obtain product information and a set of accounts, which will give you the size and feel of the business. Make sure you plan how you will get to the interview - do a dummy run if at all possible. Allow time to go to the toilet and freshen yourself up - make sure you arrive for the appointment early, but enter on time.

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. Most interviews are won during the first 3-5 minutes. What you have to do in order to be different, so that they remember you out of all the other candidates, is to hold their concentration for more than the magic 3-5mins. Each minute after is a bonus. The chemistry between you, the candidate, and the interviewer is most important - you must get on and it is you who has to compromise in order to win the interview.

### practice

There are just a few crucial questions that occur again and again at interviews: -

"Tell me about yourself"

This is where you have the stage for just three minutes so you have to rehearse your response.

- Write down as you did in your CV your past history, write it as a story.
- Rewrite it several times as though you were actually talking it through and make it last for 3 minutes. Add one line at the end like "Can I expand on anything in more depth for you?" or "Is there anything you wish to know about in more detail?"
- Read it out aloud to someone else and modify it according to their response, then tape it and learn it.
- Once you know your script then put some mannerisms and actions into it so the whole thing comes alive - be yourself, relax, and smile, add just a little humour into it and remember the last line or something similar, which invites the interviewer back into the interview.

- "Why did you leave your last job, or why are you looking for another?"

Rehearse your answers so you are not caught out.

- Do not tell untruths that can be checked. If you state something make sure you know your subject.
- Always be positive, any negative things that may have happened to you - turn them into something positive.
- No one can predict the exact questions that an interviewer will ask, but to prepare, think about how you would answer the following questions:
- Review your past positions, education and other strengths.
- What do you know about our organisation?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- What are the most significant accomplishments in your career so far?
- Describe a situation in which your work was criticised. Focus on how you solved the problem and the lessons you learnt from it.
- How would you describe your personality?
- How do you perform under pressure?
- What have you done to improve yourself over the past year?
- What did you like least about your last position?
- What is your ideal working environment?
- How would your co-workers describe you?
- What do you think about your boss?
- Have you ever fired anybody? What was the situation and how did you handle it?
- Why should we hire you?
- What kind of salary are you looking for? What other types of jobs/companies are you considering?
- How do we know that you won't leave the company for another role soon?

Prepare answers on paper to any possible questions that may come up and by doing this it will hopefully lodge in your mind if the question arises. Never be afraid to say, "I don't know".

## prepare your questions

Write on a small card any questions that you want answered - make sure you have at least three good questions - at least when you are asked you are well prepared - you have to stand out from the other candidates. Sample questions could include:

- Why is this position available?
- What type of training will be offered to the person in this position?
- What obstacles must be overcome for the person in this position to succeed?
- What are your goals for this position?
- How will my performance be evaluated?
- What opportunities are there for growth in the next 12 months? Two years? Five years?

Do not ask what the salary is, what the pension is, and what holidays you get. Your only job at the interview is to win it - they will offer you the position if they want you, and then we can negotiate the best terms.

## the interview - what to take

- Job specification.
- Your letter calling you for your interview.
- Your C.V. (Two copies in case they want another one).
- Copy of your application form.
- Diary, pen, pencil, small pad or notebook.
- Newspaper - a good quality one. Make sure that you cannot get caught out. A newspaper can lead you into any conversation so make the utmost use of it - you can argue and express yourself against articles in newspapers.
- Name of interviewers.
- Do not take notes during the interview, unless you get agreement first and then only note something that is vital.

## the interview - do's and don'ts

### DO

- Relax.
- Arrive 10 minutes early. Late attendance is never excusable. If you are running late, call them, apologise and ask if it will still be convenient for them to see you, offer to come back later if not.
- Clarify questions. Be sure you answer the question, which was asked.
- Get the interviewer to describe the position and responsibilities early in the conversation so you can relate your skills and background to the position throughout the interview.
- Give your qualifications. Stress the accomplishments that are most relevant to the job.
- Conduct yourself professionally. Be aware of what your body language is saying. Smile, make eye contact, maintain your composure and don't slouch.
- Anticipate tough questions. Prepare in advance so you can turn apparent weaknesses into strengths.
- Dress appropriately. Make your first impression a professional one.
- Ask questions throughout the interview. An interview should be a mutual exchange of information, not a one-sided conversation.
- Do not bring: big bags, plastic bags, bottles of water, crash helmets etc. to the interview; and do not chew gum!
- Listen. This is probably the most important ability of all. By concentrating not only on the employer's words, but also on the tone of voice and body language, you will be able to pick up on the employer's style. Once you understand what they are looking for you can tailor your answers accordingly. Connect and relate.
- Motivate yourself, \*be positive\* and energetic.
- Be polite, stand up when you are introduced to someone.
- Sit up straight, don't lounge around, but do try to relax.
- Talk face to face and maintain eye contact throughout the interview.
- Sort out your hands - practice what you are going to do with them.
- Try to talk to the receptionist or secretary if at all possible - their opinions are often asked.
- Remember you are being interviewed as soon as you walk in the door - in the reception, loo, on the stairs, everywhere.

- Be enthusiastic; speak up so the interviewer can hear your replies to their questions. Before leaping in with an answer, consider it for a moment before replying - do not rush
- Try to find out as much as possible about the job - where you will fit in etc.

## DO NOT

- Answer vague questions. Rather than answering questions you think you hear, get the employer to be more specific and then respond.
- Never interrupt the employer. If you don't have time to listen, neither does the employer.
- Don't smoke, chew gum or place anything on the employer's desk.
- Don't be overly familiar, even if the employer is doing all of these things.
- Don't wear heavy perfume or cologne.
- Don't ramble. Long answers often make the speaker sound apologetic or indecisive.
- On the other hand, don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no". Explain wherever possible.
- Do not fiddle and fidget around.
- Don't keep running your hands through your hair - let the interviewer see your face.
- Don't hesitate when asked "Tea or Coffee". \*Be positive\* - "Coffee please, white, one sugar" or whatever.
- Avoid telling them about any problems - you have none! \*Be positive\*. Try to find out their problems and then you can tell them how your experience can help them.

If the interview is running late or is constantly interrupted with 'phone calls', offer to come back at a more convenient time - you must make sure that you get a fair hearing.

## closing the interview

Too many people second-guess themselves after the interview. By closing strongly and asking the right questions, you can eliminate the post-interview doubts that tend to plague most interviewees. If you feel that the interview went well and you would like to take the next step, express your interest to the hiring authority and turn the tables on them. Try something like the following:

*"After hearing more about your company, the position and the responsibilities at hand, I am certain that I possess the qualities that you are looking for in the (title) 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 hiring authority to be honest with you about his or her feelings. If concerns do exist, this is a great opportunity to overcome them. You have one final chance to dispel the concerns, show 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.

## follow-up

Immediately after the interview, make notes of anything you may have overlooked and note the questions where you may have struggled with the answers. Think of the qualifications the employer is looking for and match your strengths to them.

Make sure you are fully aware of the next stage after your interview. When and how they will contact you (via Christian Bassett Consultants), how many will be short listed for another interview, when that will be, what do they see as their first priority, how quickly do they want someone on board etc...

Immediately after the interview, write a follow-up letter to the interviewer, thanking them for your meeting, listing the primary job tasks as you understand them and how you can meet those tasks. You would welcome a second interview etc. - not too long - try to make it a page.

I hope these notes will give you a few ideas on how to have a successful interview. The main thing is to rehearse, act out the interview with your friends, partner, or even the mirror!

Finally, always give me a call at the earliest opportunity after the interview to give me your feedback and comments.