

## How to Succeed at Interview

The purpose of an interview is for an employer to gather as much information as possible about a prospective employee. They need to be certain that you are going to fit comfortably and effectively into their team and that you have something to offer their organisation.

The interview will allow you to find out everything you need to know about the firm and the position. You need to be sure that this is the right role for you.

### 1. Preparation

#### Doing your homework

You will be fully briefed by your consultant before your interview, but you also need to do some of your own preparation. Take a look at the firm's website, ask for their corporate brochure or annual report, and read the business press for any articles about them. If you're knowledgeable about and interested in the firm, you'll come across as proactive and committed.

#### Re-read your CV

Make sure you read your own CV carefully before any interview. Your interviewer is likely to use your CV as a guide when asking you questions. If you haven't stayed in one job for long, or there are some gaps in your CV, make sure you can give positive reasons for this. Think about the skills you've included in your CV - based on this, what will you actually bring to the firm? Consider the responsibilities and achievements you have listed under each job with particular emphasis on the past 3-5 years. Can you elaborate on your achievements?

#### The job description

Make sure you are fully familiar with the specification of the job for which you are interviewing. What key skills and experience are they looking for? Can you draw direct examples from your own CV? Can you describe recent achievements which are relevant to the new job?

Think of examples from your own experience which demonstrate your personal competencies as they might relate to this job.

#### What to wear

Dress smartly and professionally. Some firms have 'dress down' policies but it's usually safer to wear a suit. If you're not sure, talk to your consultant.

#### Plan your journey

Allow plenty of time for the journey and aim to arrive 10 minutes early. Remember to get clear directions and to plan your route in advance. If you are driving check out where you can park and how close it is from the car park to the firm's offices. Remember to take change for parking meters. If you're delayed, call your consultant immediately so they can phone the client on your behalf. Don't forget to turn off your mobile phone when you arrive.

## 2. During the interview

### Some helpful tips

- If you are nervous, take a few deep breaths before you go in
- Give a firm handshake
- Be confident in yourself
- Maintain eye contact and sit up straight
- Smile - this shows you are friendly
- Respond honestly to questions, making your answers concise and relevant
- Think carefully before answering
- Ask questions if there's anything you don't understand
- Listen to the interviewer and show interest
- Relate your own experience and skills to the position
- Don't interrupt the interviewer
- Avoid folding your arms or fidgeting in your seat

### Questions you might be asked

- Tell me about yourself? Give a short summary of your qualifications, career history, skills and what you will bring to the role.
- Why do you want to leave your current position? Don't be negative and don't criticise former employers. Focus on positive reasons such as a new challenge, more responsibility, or the need for a change if you've been in your current role a long time.
- What do you enjoy about your current job? Try to focus on things that will be part of the job you're applying for.
- Would you explain your current role? Describe how you fit into your department, your reporting lines, who you interact with and your key responsibilities.
- What have been your main achievements so far? Think about recent work achievements, such as projects you've been involved with. What were the results, how did they impact the business?
- What are your strengths? A very common question. Think about three or four of your main strengths and how they would benefit your new employer. Examples include technical proficiency, flexibility and positive attitude. You may also be asked about weaknesses. A weakness is not necessarily a negative, particularly if you can explain what you do to overcome it.
- Have you ever come across a difficult situation at work and how did you handle it? Make sure it's a work-based problem that didn't originate with you.

### Other questions to prepare for

- How would your friends/colleagues describe you?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- How do you cope when your work is criticised?
- Do you like to work in a team or by yourself, and why?
- What are you looking for in a firm?
- What can you bring to this organisation?
- How do you work under pressure, and how do you deal with pressure?
- How would you react if you were asked to work late at short notice?
- When you're not busy, what do you do?
- Why should you get this job over other candidates?

## Competency Based Questions

Your interviewer might ask you to give examples of how you have dealt with certain work-related scenarios in the past. This type of questioning is used to explore your capability in a number of different behavioural or situational competencies. If asked these types of question you give you should consider the situation, the action you took, and the effect it had. Here are some common examples:

### 1. Planning and Organising

Tell me about a successful activity or event that you planned recently. Talk me through the background. How did you approach it? What were your first steps? What specifically did you do to ensure its success? What did you learn about planning as a result of this exercise?

### 2. Resilience and Tenacity

Describe a situation in which you had to work under pressure. What was the cause of the pressure? How did you feel and react? What impact did this have on your work?

### 3. Teamwork

Tell us about some of the best teams you have worked with? What specifically made them good teams? What part did you play in their success? Can you give some examples of when they really performed well? What learning from these teams do you continue to apply?

### 4. Communication

Tell us about a time recently when you have had to communicate something that was difficult or complicated to get across? What was the message? Who were you communicating to? How did you go about it? What was the outcome?

### 5. Decision making

Tell us about a time when you have had to make a difficult decision? What happened? How did you communicate the decision? How did you display urgency in the process?

### 6. Leadership

Describe a situation where you had to manage an individual or team through a period of change? How did you deal with this? What actions did you take to ensure a smooth transition during this period? What was the outcome of this? What challenges did you face during this period? How did you manage these?

## Questions for you to ask

Having a few well thought out questions shows you are interested and that you are taking the interview seriously. It's also your chance to assess the firm. Even if the interviewer has already answered most of them, prepare a few to ask at the end. Here are some of the questions you could ask:

- How does the department fit into the firm?
- What are the personalities of the team or manager?
- What sort of person is the team looking for?
- How long was the last post-holder in the position?
- Are any internal candidates interested in the position?
- What's the firm's culture?
- Do you run an induction programme?
- Why does the interviewer think it's a good firm to work for?
- How does the interviewer feel that your skill set meets the requirements of the role?

Unless you're specifically asked, don't talk about salary at a first interview.

**Closing**

Thank the interviewer and be positive, stating that you have enjoyed the interview and that you would be delighted to be invited back. Ask what the next stage of the interview process will be.

Remember to phone your consultant with feedback as soon as you can.