

Interview Tips and Suggestions

Congratulations, your resume and cover letter worked! You've got an interview. Now what? There are a variety of interview situations. You may start with an individual interview and move to a panel interview or visa versa you may start with a screening interview (usually about 20 mins) followed by a more in-depth interview. (individual or panel) You may also have to complete a written test as a screening method followed by a personal interview. Interviews in the retail sector are more and more becoming group interviews where many people are being screened at the same time.

Thorough preparation for an interview is essential. The interview is a source of new job leads. It is not the final step. Many jobs are created when an employer "comes across a good person"; no openings existed until the employer met a person who could do something for the company. Even if there are no job openings at this time you may be considered when the next job opens up.

View the interview as an opportunity to provide useful information about yourself and not simply a test. You have many useful skills and experience, desirable work attitudes and varied personal experiences that could not be discussed in sufficient detail on an application form or even in your resume.

The interview is a very predictable experience for which you are well prepared. Since the questions asked to obtain information are fairly standard and predictable, you can think about your answers beforehand and eliminate the fear of the unexpected.

Be Prepared Before Your Interview

- Find out as much as possible about the company, size, product, mission statement, advertised position, etc.
- Find the best bus route, where to park, etc.
- Prepare questions that you will want to ask
- Try to find the names of the people who will be doing the hiring
- Anticipate employer's questions as much as possible and prepare your answers. Be prepared for unexpected questions.
- Review your letter of application and your resume so you remember what you told the company about your background.
- Bring the names and addresses of your references
- Think in terms of what you can do for the company
- Plan to arrive 10-15 minutes early so that you will have time to compose yourself.
- Be prepared with a paper and pen to jot down pertinent information
- Expect a certain amount of nervousness.
- Get a good nights rest the evening before.

Dressing for the Interview

- Dress according to the position you are applying for.
- NEAT, CLEAN, TIDY is extremely important.
- Specific Interview Clothing/Appearance Suggestions

What should you bring to your interview?

A folder containing:

- Extra copies of your resume
- Copies of your references and letters of recommendation.
- Paper and Pen (don't take notes during the interview, write down next appointment, start date)
- Copies of certificates/diplomas that apply to the job
- Portfolio of sample work
- Company information you have gathered and a list of questions you have prepared (like hours of work, who you will be working with, etc. NEVER ask about money. If they have already answered all your questions say "You have been very thorough...I understand it will be shifts, etc." Play back information you have received through the interview.

Arrival

- Go alone
- Allow time to figure out bus routes. If you are driving allow time for traffic and finding parking. Locate the building in advance so you do not have trouble finding it. When asked if you had any trouble finding us, you will impress them with your ability to locate them and your preparedness.
- Wipe your feet
- Check out your appearance in a rest room is possible; don't make an employee leave their station to take you though
- Relax, be friendly with the receptionist. Don't let yourself get into a conversation while you are waiting. Think work, not personal issues. Keep it light.
- Never butt your cigarette on the ground
- Know the company's mission statement
- Don't arrive more than 10 minutes early

During the Interview

- Be on time
- Greet the interviewer and introduce yourself, be ready to shake hands.
- SMILE!
- Speak clearly, take a moment to compose your answers
- Don't be afraid to be sociable, the employer wants to know that you have a pleasant personality.
- If asked if you would like a coffee, say no thank you.
- Look for common ground
- Be a good listener. If in doubt about a question, request clarifications
- Stay on topic

- Follow the lead of the interviewer; provide a copy of your resume when asked or if you feel it is necessary.
- Leave your personal troubles at the door.
- Show interest in the company. Think about and invite discussion on what you could do for them.
- Volunteer positive information about yourself; lead the interview toward a discussion of your strengths.
- Respond to questions in a straight forward manner. Some questions may only require a very brief answer, (No ONE word answers) with open-ended questions; the interviewer is looking for insight and information. Take your time, collect your thoughts and answer with clarity. Tell the interviewer fully about your qualifications, experience and strengths.
- Carry yourself with an air of confidence. Think about how wonderful it would be to work there.
- The interviewer may present hypothetical situations. Think before you answer and keep in mind that there is no "right" or "wrong" answer.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Be attentive to body language. Never sit with your arms crossed.
- Watch for termination clues
- Thank them for the interview
- Repeat the time they say they will be contacting you about their decision.
- Always ask when you can expect to hear from them.
- Ask for a business card.
- Shake hands if appropriate and say goodbye. Address them by name.

Body Language

- Ask if you may sit down
- Keep good posture, don't lean or slouch
- Feet flat on the floor, knees together. Don't cross your legs.
- Hands in your lap, don't cross your arms.
- Put your folder on the floor beside you, not on your lap or the interviewer's desk
- Your hands should never be on the interviewer's desk or table.

Following the Interview

- Review the interview mentally and ask yourself how you could have been better. Be objective.
- Write down all of the information about the company that you learned. Also jot down all the questions you were asked.
- Send a thank you note to the interviewer
- If you haven't heard anything by the time they said they would be making a decision, phone and ask when a decision will be made.
- If you don't get the job, ask for feedback from the Personnel Officer, this could be helpful on your next job interview.

Unacceptable Behaviours

- Arriving late
- Referring to yourself as Mr., Mrs., Miss or Ms.
- Using profane language
- Using slang
- Acting like someone besides yourself
- Emphasizing how much you need the job
- Bringing a friend or relative with you
- Interrupting the interviewer
- Indicating that you are restless by moving about in your chair
- Criticizing your former employers or co-workers
- Indicating you are nervous
- Being negative or critical about any subject
- Touching the interviewer's desk or anything on it
- Giving a sloppy handshake
- Acting friendlier than appropriate
- Giving false answers
- Giving unimportant excuses
- Expressing the idea that you are the most important
- Telling jokes
- Reading personal property on the interviewer's desk
- Having the odour of liquor on your breath
- Not wearing your prescription eyeglasses if you need them
- Asking unimportant questions
- Talking to anyone who enters the room
- Initiating a discussion about wages, work conditions, holiday or vacation policies.

Answers to Interview Questions

Anything you say in an interview can be used to ask another question. Only give positive answers. You control what information will be used.
Download some Common Interview Questions for practice

Question 1: TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

What are your qualifications for the position?
Describe your background for me
Why should I hire you?

Purpose:

To put you at ease

What do you have to offer that is needed in the organization

To learn from you why they should or shouldn't hire you

To see where your mind is, are you thinking about how you could benefit the company or are you thinking about personal problems

Touch On:

Your qualifications and experience related to the position. Because it is a general question, you could include examples from volunteer work experience and education and how it relates to the job for which you are applying.

Your attributes, including ability to get along with others

Find common ground between you and the employer

Mention personal stability

(If you say you are a single parent, it could cause the employer to worry about day care. You may want to add I have adult children, or assure them that childcare has been organized.)

Don't say anything you don't want to share, keep control.

If the interview heads in a direction you don't want to go, quickly bring it back to the issues you want to address.

You are not being asked for your life story; you are being requested to talk about yourself as a worker.

Question 2: HAVE YOU DONE THIS TYPE OF WORK BEFORE?

How do you think your previous jobs have prepared you for this position?

Which of your previous jobs did you like best? Least? Why?

Purpose: To find out if you can do the job, how easily?

To get specific information about your work history.

To see if you can relate your background to the job in question.

Answer: If you have done exactly the same work, state where, when and give examples of your achievements

If you have done related work, say so and list your transferable skills

If you have not done it before, mention transferable skills and attributes and how quickly you learn

If you are asked the job you liked the least, try to pick one that is the least like the one you are applying for

Question 3: WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?

Purpose:

To see what you know about the company

To see if your qualifications fit their requirements

To see if you are genuinely interested

Suggestions:

Let them know that you have researched their company

Show knowledge of products made and services provided by their company.

How this job and the company relate to what you are looking for

That you enjoy this type of work and that you can do a good job.

As well as showing that you know what the work consists of, you should also try to include information that indicates that you have the necessary skills.

Question 4: WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?

Why have you changed employment so often?

Purpose:

Are you reliable?
Was there a conflict in your last job?
Are there any problems that might arise?

Suggestions:

Find positive things to say about your past employer. Employers want loyal employees who will stay around for a while. If you indicate that you aren't loyal to your last employer, this will be seen as an indicator of your general attitude.

- The company went out of business
- Our department was moved to another province
- There was new ownership with a change in staff
- The company was downsized
- It was seasonal work
- The hours were reduced
- The contract ended
- There was a change in government municipal/company policy
- The company was taking a new direction and this offered me the opportunity to re-evaluate where I should be at this time

Question 5: WHAT KIND OF SALARY DO YOU NEED?

Purpose:

To get an idea of your sense of self worth
Are your expectations too high?

Suggestions:

"I'm really interested in finding out what salary range you are offering"
"I'm negotiable and ready to discuss an amount which is fair to both of us, and takes into consideration my responsibilities and qualification"

Question 6: WHY SHOULD WE HIRE YOU?

Purpose:

See what you think of yourself

Suggestions:

Tell them what you have to offer
List your qualifications
Highlight your strengths

Question 7: HOW MUCH WERE YOU ABSENT FROM YOUR LAST JOB?

Purpose:

Are you reliable?

Suggestions:

Assure the employer of your reliability, and if there was a problem in the past, how has it been taken care of?

Question 8: HOW IS YOUR HEALTH?

Purpose:

Can they count on you, are you reliable?

Suggestions:

DO NOT mention anything that will not affect your ability to do the job.

In excellent health.

Mention any positive points about your fitness.

If you have poor health or a disability, put the employer's doubts to rest by addressing them in a positive way. Emphasize how you will be able to do the job

Question 9: WHEN ARE YOU AVAILABLE TO START WORK?**Purpose:**

To see when you can start

To find out if you have other commitments

Suggestions:

If you say immediately, be ready to start right then

If you are working and need to give notice, let them know when you will be free to start

Question 10: WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST STRENGTH?

What do you consider to be your greatest achievement?

What accomplishments have given you the greatest satisfaction

What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?

Purpose:

To find out how well you know yourself

To see if you believe in yourself

To see if you produce results

To find out about your values

Suggestions:

Mention skills, abilities, attributes and use specific examples if possible

Try to describe achievements that will be related to your job

Everyone has accomplishments, they needn't be earth shattering but they should show that you have qualities that would make you a successful worker

Question 11: WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?**Purpose:**

How much will you reveal about yourself?

Suggestions:

Mention nothing negative

No weakness that would prevent you from being a reliable employee

A good weakness? Don't like leaving things undone; work until project is finished

Question 12: WHAT FIVE WORDS DESCRIBE YOU BEST?

Suggestions:

Only positive words, work related

Make sure you list all five

Example: conscientious, hard working, dependable, energetic, co-operative

Question 13: WHAT WAS YOUR LAST EMPLOYER'S OPINION OF YOU?**Purpose:**

To find out how you perceive your relationship with your former employer

Suggestions:

Show letters of recommendation

Mention some of the positive things that took place at your past employment

If you left on bad terms mention the positive aspects of the work you did there

Question 14: WHAT ARE YOUR LONG-TERM GOALS?

Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

What are your career goals?

Purpose:

To see if you will be staying with the company

To identify your career path

To see if your goals fit with the company goals

Suggestions:

Keep you answer work related

State your interest in and commitment to staying and growing in this field of work

If you want to advance, "In the long-term I'm hoping to advance as far as possible in the sales and marketing end of things"

If you don't want to advance, "I'm a good researcher and I like the work. My goal is to develop a solid reputation in my organization as a thorough and productive worker"

Question 15: WHAT KIND OF MACHINES HAVE YOU WORKED WITH?**Purpose:**

Can you do the job?

Suggestions:

Be specific in listing the machines and/or equipment - know their names

State your confidence in being able to learn new machines

Question 16: AGE? MARITAL STATUS?**Suggestions:**

Reassure that your age will not be a problem

Young - learn from the ground floor, no bad work habits, high energy level

Older - mature, reliable and experienced

Question 17: PERSONAL INFORMATION

It is illegal for employers to discriminate on the basis of age, sex, race or religion. If you feel you are being discriminated against you can refuse to answer the question. Try to deflect it by giving a general answer:

- "I'd prefer not to answer that"
- "I don't understand how that relates to the job in question"
- "I think I'll pass on that question"

Question 18: ARE YOU CONSIDERING RETURNING TO SCHOOL?

Purpose:

To find out if you will be staying long
To discover your career path

Suggestions:

Be honest - part time courses that will not interfere with work
Willing to take courses to make you a better worker

Question 19: ARE THERE ANY QUESTIONS THAT YOU HAVE?

ALWAYS ASK:

When will you be making your decision?
How will you be notifying the applicants?

Suggestions:

What would my schedule be?
Do you have plans for expansion?
Do you have a training programme
I'd be interested in learning more about .. could you please tell me more?
I did have a list, but you have been very thorough and I now know...

DON'T ASK ABOUT:

Salary, benefits, vacations, promotions, etc until you have been offered a job