



PREPARING FOR AND SUCCEEDING IN THE INTERVIEW

There are a number of key steps related to preparing for an interview, going through the interview, and what to do after the interview. Of course, there are different types of interviews, from an initial telephone inquiry to an in-person interview, and from follow-up interview sessions (either one-on-one or with a group) to the final, closing interview. But the basics remain the same.

The Interview Appointment

It may seem obvious to some, but failure to be prompt, knowledgeable, and prepared normally results in a bad interview experience and can actually get you disqualified from further consideration.

Confirm the date, time, and location of the interview. If it's initially going to be by phone, ensure that you will have complete privacy and no disturbances of any kind, including distracting background noise. If it's slated to be in the employer's office, confirm the location with a map, driving directions, best route to use for the time of day and time of travel, and where to park. If it requires an out-of-town trip, confirm all of your travel arrangements, including air, hotel, and ground transportation.

It's also important to find out who will conduct the interview, its expected duration, and what might be expected of you. What is the appropriate dress code? Will there be multiple interviews conducted separately? With whom? When and where? How many resumes and copies of other materials should you bring?

Research the organization, key personnel, management, and interviewers. You would be surprised to know that many individuals coming to an interview (likely 25 percent) have never even taken the time to review the interviewing company's website before their first get-together or telephone call.

Research the Organization, Key Personnel, Management, and Interviewers

What kind of business is this? What are they specifically noted for? What's their stock price? Where are their offices located? Who are their clients? What is their reputation in the marketplace? How many employees do they have? What is their annual revenue? Read the annual report from the past three years. Where do you expect to fit into their organization? Doing what, and where? Read the job description closely so you can intelligently address the qualifications and requirements. What questions should you be prepared to ask them in the interview that would demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the organization?

You will find that this basic groundwork and research will pay true dividends in the quality and substance of your interview.

Preparing for the Interview

Now that you know quite a bit about the organization and the individual(s) you will be meeting, prepare yourself for the questions

that are likely to come your way. These include professional background and experience, job-specific qualifications, credential verification, and career-plan sorts of questions. Look online for sample questions so you can prepare answers in advance.

Review the job description carefully. How do you match up to each duty and responsibility, as well as the required qualifications? Prepare a strong answer for each scenario. As you go through this exercise you are undoubtedly crafting perhaps the most important answer for the whole interview: the "elevator pitch," a short, prepared statement about you and your background. Interviews often begin with a softball question like, "Tell me a little about yourself." This isn't intended for you to give your life history, but is the perfect opportunity to seize control of the interview session and define its direction. Remember that having the opportunity to give a short elevator pitch helps personalize you to the group and lay the foundation for an interview.

To prepare an effective elevator pitch, dissect the job description and specifically write out how you match up to the position and why you believe you would be a valuable addition to the team. Then merge this with your personal story and career experience and progression. Read it aloud so you can refine it; try to make it as short, clear, and succinct as possible. Two minutes is sufficient. Practice it so it comes easily and naturally.

Now that you have confirmed the details about the upcoming interview, prepare to dress for success. Whether it's formal business or casual business attire, make sure your interview clothing will fit in. The formality of the business attire of course varies by the organization you are interviewing with, but you should always look polished.

Make sure your shirt, blouse, and pants are pressed; that your shoes are clean and polished; that your ties and accessories match or coordinate with your outfit and that you carry a professional-looking handbag or briefcase; that you are wearing the appropriate makeup and hairstyle; and that your teeth and nails are well-groomed. Minimize the use of cologne or perfume—as a matter of fact, it's best not to wear any at all.

Make sure your resume, project list, portfolio, and any other materials or work samples are ready to be presented and that you have enough copies, including extras.

The Interview

It's best to arrive just a few minutes prior to your scheduled appointment (but not too early; five to 10 minutes is appropriate). This provides you a moment to relax and take a quick inventory. Double-check your appearance. Make sure you have all of your materials in order. Got the elevator pitch down? Good.

Upon greeting your host, offer a firm handshake and direct eye contact. When you are asked a question, respond directly to the person with good eye contact. If there is more than one interviewer, di-

rect your response primarily to the person who asked the question, but be sure to share eye contact with others. Be honest, forthright, and concise; avoid lengthy explanations and exaggerations. Point out problems and challenges you faced, how you addressed these and why, and how the outcome was successful. Never lie, exaggerate, or speak ill of others. Remain upbeat and positive at all times. Smile and keep eye contact. If you are asked to explain negatives in your background, be positive and direct; oftentimes what you don't say is more important than what you say and how you say it.

When the interview is done, stand, thank your host or hosts, and offer a firm handshake and eye contact. If you haven't already addressed the next step, it's appropriate to inquire at this point. Also, when you get home, send a personal thank-you note to everyone you met in the interview. This is an excellent time to sum up the highlights of the interview and to reiterate not only how you match up to the opportunity, but to reinforce your desire and eagerness to join the team.

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