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.

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.

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.

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 that 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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