

# Handling The Job Interview With Confidence

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Applying and presenting for the job interview can be a daunting process – but there are some proven practices that can help. Remember that the purpose of the job interview is to determine whether your skills, qualifications and personal style fit the requirements of the position you are seeking. It is up to you to prepare thoroughly, so that you can present yourself in the best possible light to the interview panel and convince them that you are the best candidate.

- **Prepare, Prepare, Prepare !**

If you have obtained an interview, then congratulate yourself. Your resume and covering letter have done their job. Now is the time to try to undertake even more comprehensive research about both the position and the organisation prior to the interview. For example in terms of the objectives of the work-unit, where the position fits in within the broader organisational context, the type of technology used in the role, the reporting relationships, the business plan, etc.

- **Anticipate likely questions**

Prepare for possible questions that will likely be derived from the Key Selection Criteria. The simplest method is to turn each criterion or prerequisite into a question. If for example, “Proven ability to effectively lead and co-ordinate the work of others” is a selection criterion, one of the likely questions may be, “Can you give us some examples of where you have successfully provided leadership to others?” Do this with each individual Key Selection Criteria.

- **Rehearse your answers**

Rehearse your responses to the questions you anticipate as likely to be asked, yet without over-scripting these answers. Practice this in front of the mirror or with a tape recorder – listen to yourself and critically evaluate both the content and style of your answers. Better still, ask a friend or family member to role play and listen to their suggestions. The idea is not to memorise your answers, but to become more comfortable in talking about yourself and your accomplishments

- **At the interview, create a positive first impression**

*“Within the first three minutes, some interviewers will have decided whether or not you are a likely choice for the job. You must manage this period well”*

This is not so different to what you do when you first meet someone new. You gain a first impression of that person. You can often sense whether or not you’re going to hit it off with them. It may not seem fair, but interviewers do the very same thing. That important first impression comes from a combination of three key things - your initial greeting, posture and your appearance / clothing.

Based upon these three things, interviewers will often form an initial impression about whether or not you are likely to be the right person for the job. You can then unfortunately be interviewed in a way that supports that decision. If the interviewer likes your look and feels comfortable with you, he or she may well ask questions that bring out your strong points and help highlight reasons to hire you. So, whilst you are waiting to go into the interview room, try to relax and foster a positive attitude towards meeting the interviewers. View them as potential allies and greet them confidently but politely - with a smile, eye contact and a clear, audible voice.

- **Introductions**

You will often be expected to shake hands with interviewers. A moderately firm handshake is desirable. Try to focus upon the names of the panel as introductions occur. Follow the

interviewers lead as to whether christian or surnames are used, and try to refer to their names during the interview:

- **Maintain eye contact during the interview**

Maintain eye contact with all members of the panel by using eye sweep. Address the person who first asks the question, then vary your eye contact. Of course, when you are being interviewed by a single person this is easy. When being interviewed by a panel however, be careful not to address all your answers to the one person who is smiling and nodding at you. Remember that lack of eye contact by some can be interpreted as a lack of confidence (although there are of course cultural considerations here).

- **Small talk**

It is the job of a good interviewer or panel to put you at ease. However, not all are so skilled. They usually understand that you will be nervous - most people are. There is often a period of a few minutes at the beginning of the interview where some small talk occurs – take this time to allow yourself to settle into the situation and the environment, gradually becoming more at ease. They may talk with you about your hobbies, the weather, or even the traffic. Simply talk in a cordial, conversational tone of voice when responding to the interviewer's questions.

- **Be positive**

Never criticise or talk badly about your previous employer. If there were any difficulties, accept your share of the responsibility and try to put the experience in as positive a light as possible. Remember, you are there to sell yourself and if you don't project a quiet confidence and enthusiasm in your ability to do the job, how can the interviewers ever believe that you have what it takes to succeed.

- **Be concise**

Verbosity helps no one and many people tend to go on and on ... and on. This is usually because they are not confident enough to state their strengths clearly and hence tend to waffle. This also goes for use of watered down language such as, 'Well, I think I can sort of do it.' The next person won't be as modest as that. Be prepared to be clear, positive and concise when describing your abilities and contributions.

- **Be truthful**

You must certainly emphasise the positive, however always remain honest and truthful – exaggeration or embellishment can come back to haunt you. When it is discovered, perhaps through some type of verification check, it throws into doubt the credibility of everything else you have presented.

- **Ask sensible questions**

Although you are being interviewed, it should not be a one-way process. You should be speaking for perhaps 80 % of the time. To encourage a good balance, occasionally ask reflective questions such as, 'Is that what you mean?' or 'How would that work in this work area?'

- **Difficult questions**

If you are stumped or confused by a question, don't rattle off any answer that pops into your head. Don't be afraid to ask for clarification. Strategies include asking,....'Can you rephrase that for me please?' or 'Can I come back to that later?' or the frank 'I have not yet any experience of that ... can you outline your approach for me?'

- **Be concise - observe your interviewers.**

Observe your interviewers. If you have been too brief there will be a look of expectation for you to continue. If you are being too verbose and going into too much detail, the interviewers may often be studying the next question.

- **Hypothetical questions**

You will often be asked a hypothetical question. Don't get bogged down in technicalities - hypothetical questions are usually problem-solving questions. Think about *process* - how have you solved similar problems in the past? It is likely that the same process can be applied in this hypothetical situation. If you have concrete relevant examples that serve to demonstrate your proficiency and which resemble the given scenario, it is best to offer these.

- **“Tell us a little about yourself”**

If you are asked this question early on, it is not the time to offer a detailed autobiographical history of yourself, but rather a summary of the key elements of your background that equip you with the capabilities that will benefit the position. It is time to confidently sell yourself, and not be modest

*“All other things being equal .... an employer will usually choose the person who projects the strongest desire and enthusiasm for the job”*

- **Wait for the interviewers to bring up salary or benefits**

Generally, salary is not discussed until the second or “last” interview. Remember, your main focus must be on what you have to contribute to the position, it is very off-putting to interviewers when a candidate prematurely starts seeking what the organisation has to offer them!. However, once salary is mentioned by the interviewer it is okay to explore this – but, try and wait for the interviewer to make you an

offer before giving an indication of what you are expecting. If you are pressed for a figure, perhaps give a range to allow you both scope for some constructive negotiation.

- **When the interview is about to draw to a close**

Re-state your interest in the job. You might check if they have any outstanding concerns about your capabilities to do the job - this could give you a second chance to address any issues. Thank the interviewers for their time, and use their names as you shake hands when you depart.

- **Seek feedback**

In the event that your application for the job proves to be unsuccessful, do not become dejected! The experience can prove to be extremely valuable if you are prepared to reflect upon it with the right perspective. Contact the chairperson of the interview panel and request some feedback. As unpalatable as this may seem to you at first, it may very well help you to gain the critical edge you need for your next application to succeed. .

Avoid putting the person on the defensive by making them feel that you are challenging or disputing their decision - explain you want to know where the gaps are, to help you for your next interview, and then they will be far more candid with you.

Remain positive and persistent; believing that you will eventually find the job that is right for you.

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