

INTERVIEWING FOR SUCCESS

Goals of the Interview

Today's employers are committing considerable time and resources to recruiting and interviewing. They need to quickly identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities candidates have to help them be successful on the job.

As a candidate, your goal is to demonstrate how your knowledge and experiences can benefit the employer. You can do so by describing times when you've been successful in using the knowledge, skills, or abilities required for the job. If you've been successful using these skills in the past, you're likely to be successful in the future as well. Examples of past performance may come from work experience, internships, hobbies, volunteer work, family life, and other activities.

Typical Interview

Most one-on-one interviews follow a standard outline:

- Greeting and small talk to put you at ease and break the ice. (The interviewer may give you a preview of what will occur during the interview.)
- The employer may give you a brief overview of the position or additional information about the organization.
- You respond to questions. (If it's a good interview, this is the longest segment and you should do most of the talking.)
- You ask questions of the interviewer. Have at least five or ten questions prepared.
- The interviewer closes the interview and explains the next steps in the process. Be sure to thank the interviewer for his or her time and consideration.

Type of Interviews

Phone Screen- This is usually with the Human Resources contact or a staffing professional.

One-on-one site interview- You may interview with the Human Resources contact and the hiring manager.

Group Interview- You will be interviewed by a number of individuals. This may range from the supervisor, colleagues, support staff and other.

Off-site interview- This may include dining with the employer and touring the facilities.

If you must travel to participate in the on-site interview, you will incur travel, lodging and dining expenses. Be sure to inquire beforehand how the expenses are to be handled to eliminate any misunderstanding. If you are to be reimbursed, you must save all receipts to document your expenditures.

Tips for On-Site Interviews

- Be prepared to answer many of the same questions
- Expect little, if any, free time
- Express your appreciation for the interview
- Don't expect a job offer at that time
- Ask what the next steps in the process are

What Employers Evaluate

Employers usually evaluate three skill sets:

Content skills are related to performing a job in a particular field, profession, or occupation and are acquired through reading, specialized training, internships, academic degrees, and on-the-job training. Examples include programming computers, word processing, teaching, and bookkeeping.

Functional skills are characteristic ways of working with people, information (data), or things. They are often referred to as transferable skills. These skills are applicable to a wide variety of jobs or situations and may be acquired almost anywhere. Examples include managing, operating, calculating, coordinating, building, and reading.

Adaptive skills are rooted in temperament and personality and are acquired during one's early years among family, friends, and peers. They're often referred to as self-management skills since they describe how you operate as a person. Examples include being assertive, careful, dependable, honest, introspective, industrious, open-minded, punctual, and tolerant.

Pre-interview Activities

Research the Organization – *you are not expected to know every detail about the organization, but you should know about:*

- The organization's product or services
- The size of the organization
- Where its major offices are
- The name and title of its top officers
- It's growth potential
- It's major competitors
- What the organization culture is like
- What it's mission, vision, and value statements are

Recent developments in the organization

Source of Information – *identify sources to learn more about an organization:*

- Internet – including the company site
- Business and industry directories
- Annual reports and other company literature
- Computer databases and periodicals
- Trade journals and professional associations
- Networking with faculty, family and friends
- Informational interviewing and job shadowing
- Employees and former employees of the organization

Preparing for the Interview

- Analyze the type of positions for which you're applying. What skills are required by the employer?
- Analyze your own background. What skills do you have (content, functional, and adaptive) that relate to your job objective?
- Identify examples from your experience where you demonstrated these skills. What stories can you tell about your use of particular skills or knowledge?
- Whenever possible, quantify your results. Numbers illustrate your level of authority and responsibility.
- Before starting the interview process, identify two or three of your top selling points and determine how you can illustrate them during the interview.
- Think about how you can describe your experiences and skills to an employer in the form of a story. Explain the situation you were in (or the problem you were facing), tell what action you took, and list the results. Successful candidates can demonstrate "hands-on" action with results. Prepare three or four stories about how you've used each of the key skills you have identified. For example, if an employer asks about your marketing or promotional skills, you might say,

Advertising revenue was falling off for the student paper; many long-term advertisers were not renewing contracts. I designed a new promotional packet to go with the rate sheet comparing the benefits of the paper's circulation with other ad media in the area. I also set up a training session for the account executives with a professor who discussed competitive selling strategies. We signed contracts with 15 former advertisers for daily ads and 5 for special supplements. We increased our new advertisers by 20 percent over the previous year.

Stories during Interview

Describe your experience and skill areas to an employer in the form of a story. Behavioral based interviewing is built on the premise that past behavior predicts future behavior. Using the S.T.A.R. method in your interview allow you to focus on examples of how you applied your skills and the outcome to your actions.

Situation- Describe the situation you were given

Task- Explain the task you had to accomplish

Action- Describe what you did

Result- Describe the outcome of the action

Questions to Ask

Be prepared to ask the interviewer questions. Never go to an interview without preparing questions beforehand. The following are examples of the types of questions you may ask in an interview:

- What's the philosophy of the organization?
- What do you consider to be the organization's strengths and weaknesses?
- What are the organization's plans and goals?
- Describe the work environment?
- What attracted you to this organization?
- Why do you enjoy working for this organization?
- Describe the typical responsibilities of the position.
- What are the challenging facets of the position?
- Describe the opportunities for training and professional development.
- Are there opportunities for advancement within the organization?

Predictors of Success

Employers list these as important candidate characteristics:

- Ability to communicate clearly and concisely. Avoid using slang like, *um, uh, like, and you know*
- Don't ramble
- Beware of using too much industry jargon
- Answer the question asked and volunteer relevant information
- Demonstrated teamwork skills
- Demonstrated leadership skills
- Demonstrated problem-solving skills
- Career- related work experience
- Involvement in campus and community activities
- Ability to identify and give good examples of transferable skills
- Knowledge of the organization
- Asking good questions
- Flexibility
- Enthusiasm
- Ambition and motivation
- People skills
- Good grades
- Professional appearance

Knock-out Factors

The following traits, according to employers, will seriously hurt a candidate's chance:

- Poor career planning
- Lack of qualifications
- Inability to clearly express oneself
- Insufficient evidence of achievement
- Failure to research the organization
- Showing a lack of interest in the organization
- Unwillingness to relocate
- Appearing overbearing, overaggressive, conceited
- Seeming to be interested in money and benefits
- Failure to follow up after the interview

Post-interview Activities

- At the end of your interview, thank your interviewer as well as others you've been in contact with, such as an assistant or a receptionist.
- Send a thank you letter to your interviewer as quickly as possible.
- If the hiring decision is a month or more away, it might wise for you to follow up twice – once immediately after the interview and one just before the decision is made.

Dining Etiquette

Table manners play an important part in making a favorable impression. They are visible signals of the state of our manners and therefore are essential to professional success. Regardless of whether we are having lunch with a prospective employer or dinner with a business associate, our manners can speak volumes about us as professionals.

Basic Table Manners

- Don't ask for a doggy bag
- Avoid finger food
- Do not order alcoholic beverages
- Do not smoke while dining
- Don't order more than you can eat
- Do not order the most expensive item
- Sit up straight at the table
- Keep your elbows off the table
- Never chew with your mouth full of food
- If food gets caught between your teeth and you can't remove it with your tongue, excuse yourself and go to the bathroom to remove it in private
- Eat rolls or bread by tearing off small pieces.
- Engage in table conversation that is not controversial
- If you need something that you cannot reach easily, politely ask the person closest to pass the item
- Don't blow your nose at the table

Remember, the interview is your opportunity to say to an employer- I have the necessary qualifications and I will be an asset to your organization. **You are your own personal calling card!**

Resources:

- Knock 'Em Dead: The Ultimate Job Seeker's Handbook
- Sweaty Palms: The Neglected Art of Being Interviewed
- What Color Is Your Parachute?
- You've Graduated, What Now?
- 101 Greatest Answers to the Toughest Interview Questions
- Interview for Success
- Interview Power: Selling Yourself Face to Face
- Preparing for the Behavior-Based Interview
- The Quick Interview & Salary Negotiation Book
- Savvy Interviewing: The Nonverbal Advantage
- www.bsu.edu/careers