

Interviewing Tips

Be prepared.

Find out as much as possible about the company through newspapers, annual reports, and Web sites. Your preparation tells a prospective employer you are motivated, hardworking, and proactive. Practice for your interview the way you would for a major presentation to a large audience, such as a company's Board of Directors.

Answer key questions with confidence.

Practice your responses to questions like, "What are your strongest skills?", and "Why would you like to work for this company?" Well thought-out answers to these questions show confidence and competence. Don't be afraid to interject your own relevant ideas or insights. Successful interviews are the result of two-way conversations.

Ask good questions.

Prepare a few good questions from the research you've conducted. Two or three strategic questions will demonstrate your intelligence and analytical skills.

Sell your strengths.

Identify five or six of your main attributes/skills and be prepared to talk about them in very specific terms. For example, explain ways in which you saved a company money, increased its revenue, or trained a co-worker. This is often the defining reason one person gets the job over another. The strengths you focus on should also be aligned with traits the employer is seeking for the position.

Offer brief, focused responses.

Your ability to communicate is critical during an interview. Answer questions briefly, yet thoroughly. Provide specific examples about your experience, skills, etc. Stay on target with your answers, maintain eye contact with your interviewer, and offer enthusiastic responses whenever appropriate.

Dress according to the company's culture.

Check with your company contact prior to your interview to learn the company's dress code. If you're not certain, formal business attire is the safest choice.

Arrive early.

Arrive 15 minutes early to allow for parking and to find your way around the building. You should also give yourself a few minutes to relax before the interview. Remember, your punctuality tells a prospective employer that you're conscientious and dependable.

Be friendly and enthusiastic.

Smile and say hello to company employees. A positive impression goes a long way, especially when others, such as the support staff, often influence hiring decisions.

Keep a positive perspective.

Never talk negatively about prior employers or co-workers, regardless of your experience with them. Maintaining a positive attitude shows a perspective employer that you're a team player.

State your interest.

Let your interviewer know you are interested in the position, and inquire about the next steps in the process. Asking a question such as, "Do my qualifications match the needs of your company?" gets right to the point and lets the interviewer know you're serious about employment.

Don't forget the thank you letter.

A prompt thank you letter exhibits your professionalism and interest in the position. Send a letter to the company's key decision-makers as well as to the person with whom you've interviewed. It is also acceptable to send a letter via e-mail to your interviewer, which provides instant feedback regarding your interest, but determine whether this kind of response is acceptable. Some managers view the e-mail approach as "too easy." A short, handwritten note demonstrates you have taken the time to say thanks.

INTERVIEW PREP PACKET

Below is information that has been found to be helpful in achieving interview success. Please review this prep document prior to any interview.

General Interview Preparation

1. If you haven't already, visit the company Website and research the company: pay special attention to anything that interests you about the company, growth, competitors, organization structure, etc.
2. Review your résumé and be ready to provide a clear and succinct overview of your professional history, including accomplishments. Be ready to explain any gaps in employment, and reasons for leaving each position.
3. Review the position description and be sure to understand the scope of the job, how the role fits into the organization, and how your background/strengths make you a good candidate.

Most Commonly Asked Interview Questions

Following is a list of questions commonly asked in an interview. Take a look at this shortlist, and think about how you would answer. Highlight any you'd like to discuss further with your recruiter. For additional questions, refer to the Appendix on page 4.

1. "Tell me about yourself/your work history."

Answer: "I'd be happy to. Where would you like me to start?" – The response focuses the question so that you can tell the interviewer what they want to know SPECIFICALLY. Take about 2-3 minutes to provide a quick snapshot.

2. "Can you explain any Gaps/Multiple Jobs/Reasons for Leaving?"

Answer: Just be ready to discuss your professional journey and be ready to explain all of the above, if asked.

3. "What do you know about our company?"

Answer: Be ready to share what you find interesting about the company: history, specialties, latest news, etc.

4. "What are your strengths?"

Answer: Where possible discuss strengths and specific examples related to the job requirements. Then, strive to share what you M(made \$)/S(saved \$)/A(achieved). The goal is to quantify your contribution, if possible. Specific examples will relate you to the position for which you are interviewing and differentiate you from others.

5. "What are your weaknesses?"

Answer: Be ready to discuss tolerable faults that you are working to improve. Show by specific example how this has changed over time...or how the weakness can be turned into strength. For example, share how a concentration on details results in higher quality work, even though it may require overtime.

6. "What are your 3-5 year goals?"

Answer: "To do such a great job. To learn new skills so that I can advance in my career." OR... "To do such a great job that you will give me more responsibilities than what is listed in the job description."

7. "Tell me about a situation in which you had to make a quick decision."

8. "Describe a time when you were involved in a stressful situation, but still got the job done."

9. "Tell me about a time when you had to show leadership among your peers/team."

Additional questions you may be asked in an interview:

- ▶ What three key things are you seeking in your next position?
- ▶ Why did you select my organization for your next position?
- ▶ What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
- ▶ What management style works best for you?
- ▶ What are the most important rewards you expect from your career?
- ▶ What are your three biggest accomplishments in your present or last job? Your career?
- ▶ What references are you able to provide to us?
- ▶ What qualifications and experience do you possess that will make you successful in this role?
- ▶ In what ways do you think you can make a contribution?
- ▶ What initial challenges will you face if you are offered this role?
- ▶ What new career goals have you established recently? Why?
- ▶ What was the most difficult ethical decision you have had to make? What was the result?
- ▶ What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?
- ▶ How have you defined success in your previous/current roles?
- ▶ What is the most challenging situation you have faced in your professional life? How did you deal with it?
- ▶ What interests you most about this position? The least?
- ▶ Have you helped increase sales? Profits? Reduced costs? How? Give me an example.
- ▶ Where do you relate best – up one level, down one level, or with your peers?
- ▶ Would you rather be part of a group or an independent contributor? Why?
- ▶ What are the most important qualities you look for in a company, position and manager? Why are they important?
- ▶ What is your management style? How has your management style changed over the years?
- ▶ Tell me about a situation with a difficult customer and the outcome.

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

Usually, the interviewee will be asked if they have questions. This is good time to highlight your interest and investment by asking questions that are important to you. Take a look at the list and identify questions you would be interested in asking, if you don't already have questions for the interviewer.

1. Who are your major competitors, and how do they stack up against you in terms of product, market share, methods of marketing, and strengths and weaknesses?
2. Can you tell me a little more about the history/growth of the company?
3. In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance, and what has been the biggest setback?
4. What is your highest priority in the next six months, and how could someone like me help?
5. What does a typical day in this role look like?
6. What type of training program would be offered?
7. What are some of the characteristics of your top people?
8. Where do you see your company going in the next several years?
9. What are three main qualities you are looking for?
10. How do you see me fitting in with your company?
11. If I were to ask your top person what he/she likes most/least about the company, what type of responses would I get?
12. How do I compare with other qualified applicants?
13. Do you have any hesitations about me being successful in this role?
14. What made you take your position at the company? What makes you stay?
15. How is _____(recent event/state of the union) affecting the organization?
16. What are your personal satisfactions and disappointments since you have been with the Company?