



Management Recruiters
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Guide to Successful Interviewing



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Objective of the Interview

This booklet will help you prepare for and set you up to succeed at the interview. Take the time to review the material in this booklet. The tips and techniques outlined herein have been tested, and they work! They will improve your chances of receiving a job offer and making the best career decision.

Motivation for Change

Before you commit to the interview, understand what your motivation for change is. What is it about your current position that is driving you to contemplate a change? What are you looking for in your next career opportunity? What attributes, of both the company and the position, are most important to you? What is it about this position that is exciting to you? If you are honest in answering these questions, you will be prepared to intelligently evaluate the opportunity to be discussed in the interview.

Interviewers Objective

An interviewer has just one objective: *to decide whether or not to make you a job offer.* While the interviewer will examine your work history and educational background, your strengths and accomplishments will also be important criteria. He or she is also interested in evaluating your level of motivation, values, attitude and personality. In other words, to find out if you're the right person for the job, what your potential is for success, and whether or not you will fit into the company environment.

Your Objective

While it's true that an interview is an important screening tool for the company, it also allows you to learn those things you need to know about the position and the company, so you can make an intelligent decision about the job. Always approach an interview focused on your objective: getting the job offer. *Come out of the interview able to answer this question: Do I want this job?*

Based on what you learned in the interview (there likely will be a 2nd and possibly 3rd interview to follow), can you see yourself resigning your current job to take this position? What counteroffer could your current employer make to convince you to stay, and what changes to your current situation would make it satisfying enough to even consider it?

Thirteen Reasons for Candidate Rejection

1. Poor attitude. Many candidates come across as arrogant. Show interest and sincerity the moment you walk through the door.
2. Appearance. Many candidates do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are quickly made in the first three to five minutes.
3. Lack of research. It's obvious when candidates haven't learned about the job, company or industry prior to the interview.
4. Not having questions to ask. Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position.

5. Not readily knowing the answers to interviewers questions. Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as recent termination or an employment gap.
6. Relying too much on resumes. Employers hire people, not paper. It's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsible team player.
7. Too much humility. Many people are conditioned not to brag, so candidates are reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them.
8. Not relating skills to employers needs. Restate your skills and convince the employer that you can do the same for them.
9. Handling salary issues ineptly. Candidates often ask about salary and benefit packages too early. If they believe an employer is interested, they may demand inappropriate amounts and price themselves out of the jobs. Candidates who ask for too little undervalue themselves or appear desperate. If at all possible, keep all salary discussions between you and your recruiter.
10. Lack of career direction. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.
11. Lack of interest and enthusiasm. Don't play hard to get! If you like what you hear, say so and ask for the job!
12. Apathetic company/department tour. Ask questions, show interest, and interact.
13. Job shopping. Don't interview unless you can picture yourself resigning from your current position. It's a small world, and you don't want to leave a bad impression, which may be discussed with other associates in the industry.

The Ego Booster

Before going any further, it is necessary that you reflect on your career accomplishments. During either a telephone or face-to-face interview, it is important you discuss your accomplishments in addition to your skills. Potential employers don't want to know *what* you are able to do. Instead, they want to know what you've *accomplished* with what you know. Read through the following questions, and make notes on your accomplishments, and whenever possible, insert them into your responses to the interviewer's questions.

1. Did you help to increase sales, productivity, efficiency, etc.? What was the percentage or dollar contribution? How did you do this? Did you have a unique approach or different results from others?
2. Did you save money for the company? What were the circumstances? How much more (\$, %) than others? How were your results compared to others?
3. Did you institute any new systems or changes? What was the situation that led to the change? Who approved? Why was this system selected over others? Did it compete with others? What happened as a result?
4. Did you identify any problem that had been over looked? What was the problem? What was the solution? Why was it overlooked?
5. Were you ever promoted? Why were you promoted? How long between promotions? Did you do something outstanding? How much more responsibility? Did you get to

manage people? How many? Were you promoted by more than one party? Were you given significant salary increases or raises?

6. Did you train anyone? Did you develop training technique? Compare your results to others? Are others using your technique? Why is that?
7. Did you suggest any new programs? What were they about? What were the results? Did they increase efficiency or sales? Were they published or presented at any industry seminars?
8. Did you help to establish any new goals or objectives for your company? Did you convince management that they should adopt these goals or objectives? Why were they adopted?
9. Did you change the nature or scope of your job? Why or how did you redefine your position? Have others with similar positions had their positions redefined because of you? Were there responsibility changes because of this? What were they?
10. Did you ever undertake a project that was not part of your responsibility because you liked the problem? This is proof of job interest as well as the ability to take initiative.
11. Did you ever do anything to lighten your job or make it easier? (This could result in increased profits or productivity.)
12. What special problems were you hired for or brought in to solve? What did you do? How did you do it? What were the results?
13. Show any areas where you were creative (i.e., solutions, products, applications, markets, accounts, etc.)
14. What would you say are the most important qualities for the position you seek? Put yourself in the shoes of your prospective boss. Describe six qualities and look for examples you have for each of them. How do you stack up?

Telephone Interview Preparation

Phone interviewing is unique. You can't count on visual stimuli, such as body language, to help you give or read signals. Both strengths and weaknesses, as conveyed by voice, are magnified through the phone. Keep the interviewer's attention focused on your conversation by smiling during the discussion. A smile over the phone translates into animation sensed by the listener. You need to sound like a winner quickly to sustain the listener's interest in you. Follow these steps for a successful telephone interview:

1. Complete the Interview Questions Worksheet (see below).
2. Have the following tools handy:
 - A copy of the version of the resume sent to the interviewer;

- A note pad and pen;
- Carefully worded questions you want to ask;
- The completed Interview Questions Worksheet;
- The research you have done on the company; and
- A calendar.

Face-to-Face Interview Preparation

1. Complete the Interview Questions Worksheet (see below).
2. If you will be driving to the interview, try a test drive to determine roughly how long the trip will take, then leave at least 15 minutes earlier than necessary.
3. Research the company, using the following as sources:
 - Trade magazines and news paper articles;
 - The Internet;
 - Company employees; and
 - Customers of the company.
4. Remember that you are also interviewing your prospective employer. Prepare a list of questions regarding the goals and objectives of the position, the goals and objectives of the company, and any other information that is important for you to make an informed decision.
5. Plan in advance what to wear. Even if you know the office observes a casual or business casual dress code, dress in business attire.
6. Check these items off as you add them to your briefcase:

References

- The names, home and work phone numbers, company, and title of two former managers and two internal or external customers work well.
- Consult with the references for their approval prior to the interview.

Resume

Your Portfolio including samples of your work, if possible. Never discuss or show proprietary information. Also include copies of any newspaper articles in which you were mentioned or which you authored.

Research you have done on the company.

Your recruiter's phone number to give immediate feedback after the interview.

Arrival at the Interview

1. Allow adequate time for traffic, parking, and a last minute appearance check.
2. Review your notes, and go in with confidence.
3. If asked, complete an application in full, leaving no blanks. Do not write "see resume" as a response to any application question. Respond to "expected salary" questions as "open", and "current salary" questions truthfully. Your recruiter's name should be your response to any "referred by" questions.

The Interview Itself

1. Your recruiter will prepare you for the expected chain of events, but you'll need to be flexible.
2. Shake hands firmly and maintain eye contact with each interviewer.
3. Maintain a high energy level.
4. Do not smoke anywhere on company grounds.
5. Ask questions. This is where you can exhibit the research you have done. Lead the questions with a phrase similar to "I see your last quarter's revenues are up by 12%. How did you accomplish the change?"
6. Remember that everyone gives feedback. Be polite to secretaries, receptionists, and all administrative staff.
7. Sell yourself! Without being overbearing, blow your own horn.
8. Under no circumstances say anything that can be construed as derogatory or negative about prior jobs or employers.
9. Collect business cards from everyone. They will provide the information you need to send thank-you letters.

Typical Interview Questions & Responses

You should give complete but brief and relaxed answers to questions. Long-winded replies will only bore the interviewer. Use your answers to present qualities and achievements you want to highlight. Describe jobs in terms of duties, and give indicators of good performance such as raises, sales or production volume, and promotions. Include short stories involving problems or challenges and how you were able to solve or overcome them. Preparation is the key for a successful interview. The Interview Questions Worksheet is designed to prepare you for the most thought provoking questions you will be asked.

Interview Questions Worksheet

Typical Interviewer Questions

Tell me about yourself.

Prepare an approximate 60 second reply focusing on the qualifications required of the position. Be brief. Start with your education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative solutions, volume, increased profits, etc.).

Education:

Your Qualifications:

Your Accomplishments:

What are your greatest strengths?

Avoid simple generalizations. “I’m a people person” is not a good answer. Qualify your statements. Some examples are: “Using praise and acknowledgement, I am able to motivate my team”, or “I work so well with customers that only one dispute in the last year was kicked up the ladder for a decision.”

Strengths:

Qualifiers:

What are your greatest weaknesses?

This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won’t be a mistake. Present your weaknesses as professional strengths. An example is “I sometimes work too hard.”

Weakness:

Turned to Strength:

What do you do in your spare time?

Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Don’t go overboard leaving them wondering when you have time to work and sleep.

Hobbies:

How can you contribute to this company?

Be positive and sell! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

Why should I hire you for this position?

Explain how your qualifications fit the available position. Address your interest in the job, the field, and why it’s work that you enjoy.

Why do you want to work for our firm?

Compliment the company, it’s location, or it’s people. Other positive remarks might be about the company’s product or service, content of the position, or possibilities for growth or advancement.

Where do you hope to be in five years?

Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years, and that their investment in you will be rewarded. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you'll be more successful than they are, but do show a strong desire for promotions.

What interests you most about this position?

Demonstrate your knowledge about the company. Don't give vague answers such as "the challenge" or "the opportunity".

What are your career goals?

Be prepared with both short-term and long-term goals. Be as specific as possible, and fold elements of this position into your responses. Think about including products you want to learn, production or revenue goals you want to achieve, and career-related educational goals.

Short-term goals:

Long-term goals:

What are you doing to achieve your goals?

Include education, professional association membership, industry-related reading, and any projects in which you participate that steer you toward your goal.

What do you like most about your current job?

What do you like least about your current job?

An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you like most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, or attainable deadlines. What you like least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position, such as a specific computer system, travel which exceeds what is required of this position, etc.

What I like most:

What I like least:

Why are you looking for another job?

Again, be positive. Do not say you're looking for a higher salary or fewer hours. State that you've enjoyed your time with your employer. Perhaps this position interests you because of the challenge, opportunity to learn, team environment or company stability.

What do you think your employer's obligations are to you?

Interviewers are looking for employees who want a positive, enthusiastic, company atmosphere, with the opportunity to advance.

Are you applying for any other jobs?

In your answer, show that your search is geared for similar positions. Make it known you are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don't give an indication that you are just shopping.

What kind of decisions is most difficult for you?

Again, be truthful and admit that not everything comes easily. Be careful not to disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

What causes you to lose your temper?

Everybody has a low boiling point on some particular issue. Pick one of yours; something safe and reasonable. People who are late to meetings, blame shifting, broken appointments and office backstabbing are suitable responses. Don't say you never fly off the handle. You won't be believed.

What are your greatest accomplishments?

Be ready with a story or two that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered, cutting department expenses, excellent audit results, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

How do you feel about a younger male/female boss?

A question like this usually means that your boss will either be younger, or of the opposite sex, or both. Be certain that if you register any concern, you will probably not be hired. Explain you are only interested in their capability, and what you can learn from them.

What kind of worker are you?

Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talent is admirable, but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

What type of salary do you have in mind?

Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity, and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer."

What is your current salary?

Answer truthfully. Salary includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits, and vacations. If you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

Are you willing to relocate?

Once again, be truthful. If you are unfamiliar with the area, indicate that you need an opportunity to tour the area, investigate schools, etc.

How long do you plan to be with this company?

Most employers expect a till-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field" is a reasonable response.

Why do you feel you have management potential?

What is your leadership style?

How do you prefer to be managed?

How long would it take you to become productive in this position?

Tell me about your last experience with an unhappy customer, and how you handled it.

Tell me about your last experience with an unhappy co-worker, and how you handled it.

Questions You Should Ask

Nothing impresses a potential employer more than intelligent questions. They will convey your professional attitude, and that you need to understand the organization's expectations. Your questions will also exhibit your need to feel reasonably sure you will be challenged and excited by the position.

Why isn't the position being filled from within the company?

How many people have held this job in the last five years?

Were they promoted, or did they leave the company?

How did you get started in the company?

Please describe a typical day on the job.

What are the most difficult aspects of the position?

What is the expected growth of the department/company in the next 2 years?

What is the philosophy on training and development?

What are the goals and objectives of the position? The company?

Has there been downsizing in the company? How is it handled?

How do you think I'd fit into the job and into your organization?

Six months from now, how will you know you hired the right person? One year?

Two years?

The following three questions are some of the most important you will ask.

Do you have any concerns about my skills or me?

If the interviewer has misunderstood anything on your resume, or any of your responses, it is important you find out now. If the employer formulates an opinion, and you pass by the opportunity to correct it, it will be too late by the time your recruiter obtains feedback for you. If the interviewer indicates you are missing a skill, or lack experience in a certain area, be positive in your response. An example of a response is "No, I've never done X, but it is very similar to Y, and I feel I would be proficient in a short period of time."

Ask for the job.

If you want this position based on what you know so far, tell the interviewer. A typical conclusion might be "I like what I've heard, and (I'd like to come and learn more about the position and company) or (I'd like to join your team).

What is the next step?

Asking this question exhibits you have the ability to "close" a deal.

After the Interview

1. ***Call your recruiter immediately!*** It is important you call while the interview is fresh in your mind. Your recruiter will be speaking with the interviewer, and must know your feelings prior to having that discussion. Be prepared to answer two questions based on your knowledge of the position and the company:
 - Do you want this job?
 - What is appropriate compensation for this position?
2. Always SEND A THANK YOU letter to each person you interviewed with, that day if possible, but at least within 24 hours. Here a couple of web sites that contain tips on how to write a thank you letter or contain actual samples. We suggest that you study these sites BEFORE the interview because you will want to jot notes in the interview for inclusion in the thank you letter. It is very important to personalize each thank you letter with topics which were discussed during the interview.

How to:

<http://www.msstate.edu/dept/Coop/interview/thank.html>

Samples:

<http://content.monster.com/resume/samples/thankyou/>

The Next Step

If you and the prospective employer are in agreement regarding your fit for the position, then there are only two options for the next step: Schedule the 2nd (or 3rd) interview, or extend you an offer. At that point you will be faced with a couple of important issues:

1. What is fair compensation for the position, and what salary level would you accept?
2. How will you handle the counteroffer from your current employer when you resign?

At this point it is critically important to revisit your motivation for change. Does this position provide you with the opportunity and challenge you are seeking? Are you ready (and committed) to make the change? If the pieces all fit, then go ahead and accept the offer.

The Counteroffer

You should expect to receive a counteroffer from your current employer immediately upon your resignation. This is a common, knee-jerk reaction to the unanticipated loss of a valued employee. But be aware that it is considered very unprofessional (and many people would say highly unethical) to withdraw your acceptance based upon a counteroffer from your current employer.

To understand the gravity of accepting the counteroffer, consider if you will, that you have accepted the offer and resigned from your current position. The very next day your new prospective employer calls to inform you that they are withdrawing the offer because they have found a better, more qualified candidate! You would be angry beyond description, and consider the company to be the most unprofessional, unethical company that you had ever encountered. You would immediately initiate a smear campaign to insure that all your friends and associates in the industry are aware of their behavior and practices.

Now put yourself in the company's shoes – because that's how they will feel about you if you accept the counteroffer and withdraw your acceptance.

Other reasons for not accepting a counteroffer:

- 1) *What type of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they give you what you are worth.*
- 2) *Where is the money for the counter offer coming from? Is it your next raise early? All companies have strict wage and salary guidelines which must be followed.*
- 3) *Your company will immediately start looking for a new person at a cheaper price.*

- 4) *You have now made your employer aware that you are unhappy. From this day on your loyalty will always be in question.*
- 5) *When promotion time comes around your employer will remember who was loyal, and who wasn't.*
- 6) *When times get tough, your employer will begin the cutback with you.*
- 7) *The same circumstances that now cause you to consider a change will repeat themselves in the future; even if you accept a counter offer*
- 8) *Statistics show that if you accept a counter offer, the probability of voluntarily leaving in six months or being let go within one year is extremely high.*
- 9) *Accepting a counter offer is an insult to your intelligence and a blow to your personal pride; knowing that you were bought.*
- 10) *Once the word gets out the relationship that you now enjoy with your co-workers will never be the same. You will lose the personal satisfaction of peer group acceptance.*