



Attending Interviews – Advice On Getting That Job You’ve Always Wanted

The Interview – Now It Gets serious...

Introduction – Research the Company!

So you’ve been invited to interview and the job looks like one you would really be interested in. Well done! Now the work can really start and you’ll need to spend as much time preparing for it as attending it – perhaps more. We don’t mean buying a new suit and tie or a nice dress/outfit (although that may be required, depending on your wardrobe)...we mean researching the Company and rehearsing the types of questions that you are likely to be asked. Before the Internet it was extremely difficult to get information on Companies – their visions and aims, their performance and style of operation etc. You’d find yourself ‘phoning them up and asking for their annual report – which didn’t necessarily tell you much anyway. Nowadays their Website should provide you with a really clear picture of the Company and its intentions as well as its past performance, its products and services and its attitude as an Employer. You should study all of this carefully. Then do some boning up on their sector – so, if your interview is with Barclays look up Banking on Google and see what the pundits and soothsayers are predicting for that sector – refine it to retail banking and then technology in retail banking. If there is some big innovation coming along in the banking world then you need to have some broad understanding of it.

Establish early on who will interview you – is it one person or is it a panel – who are they – names, positions, titles, areas of responsibility. See if they are mentioned on the Company website – there might even be a photograph which is really helpful in assessing the person you will be meeting.

Your Recruitment Agency and the Consultant that you are dealing with should be able to give you lots of advice on the role, the people, the corporate style – have a long conversation with them about what they know of the job and Company.

You’ll probably be able to review the Company Accounts online and although you may not be a whiz at studying a Balance Sheet simply read the Chairman’s statement – that’ll tell you how the Company has done and how it’s likely to do (although he or she will have tried to gloss over any major issues). So also study the changes in the share price (if the Company is publicly listed). That’ll tell you if the shares are rising, falling or steady – see if you can find an industry analyst on the net who gives an opinion on the Company’s fortunes and future – that can be very illuminating. If the Company isn’t listed then take up a credit check on its financial stability – you can do this online for about a fiver – of course if their Credit Check is lousy then they may not be the Company for you anyway!

If it’s a public sector role then you will still find plenty of information on the Web – even the Inland Revenue and GCHQ have customer friendly websites and you should, again, be able to study up on the issues facing the Public Sector body by intelligent use of Google. There is simply masses of information to be perused before the interview.

Understand the Role and prepare:

So now you know a lot about the Company – what do you know about the job? Well you should have had a Job Description (JD) (also known as the person specification). If you haven't then ask for one – its entirely reasonable for you to know what the job is all about beyond the advert you might have applied through. Ask if there is an information pack with the JD – that will give you plenty of information on the Company and its benefits and how it cares for its employees.

Now you've done your research make sure you get the little things right. Do you know where the interview will be held? Check the address and the location – here the internet can help again – www.streetmap.co.uk is very good. Plan your journey – if by car, where will you park (don't assume the Company has a car park). If by public transport check times and connections and leave some time if possible for those inevitable delays which will totally stress you out even if you get to the interview on time. If time allows undertake a dummy run a few days before the appointment to plot the route.

Dress code should always be smart and formal unless you get advised otherwise. We know that there are media and marketing companies that want a casual look but unless you know that don't dress down! So suit (or jacket and smart trousers) and tie for men, smart suit for women – don't actively “power-dress” but look the part. So you might want to leave the Hugo Boss and Donna Karen in the wardrobe since you could look overdressed if they are sitting there in their Marks and Spencer's finest. Pay attention to the little things – polished/clean shoes – groomed hair – clean nails – grooming will be noticed. Remember that they may see ten or more people for the position – differentiate yourself by smart dress and grooming as well as a confident, assertive manner.

Try to get into the Company's reception area about ten minutes before the appointment. Longer than that is a bit over eager and later than that gives you little time to sign in and compose yourself before being collected for the interview. It is advisable to stand in the reception area until collected – this keeps you alert and enables you to meet the interviewer (or his or her very important secretary) by direct eye contact and a firm (but not too firm) handshake. Struggling up from a prone position, lounging in their comfy settee reading the FT is not the best way to meet your potential new employer.

Breathe deeply and slowly to manage any anxieties you may have and flex your hands and toes since, when you are nervous, these extremities of your body will become cold as your blood flows less effectively because of the stress. SWITCH OFF YOUR MOBILE 'PHONE!! We did hear of an interviewee who actually took a call in the middle of the interview and spent a few minutes in discussion with the caller – needless to say, he didn't get an offer!

First impressions:

So now you've been collected and are on the way to the interview room – let the person who collected you make the conversation – don't start gabbling about how difficult (or easy) the journey was – let them control the pace of conversation. If they offer you a drink then a glass of water is probably best – this is an interview, not elevenses or afternoon tea and you don't want to be struggling to carry your briefcase and a cup and saucer when you are introduced to the hiring manager. Now you're in front of the hirer (or hirers if there is a panel). They are forming an initial impression of you in this first minute or two – this is the first critical point in the interview. There are some significant do's and don'ts to be remembered throughout the interview:

- Do maintain eye contact
- Don't stare or gaze at the interviewer
- Do let the interviewer set the pace of the interview
- Don't feel you need to end their sentences if there is a pause
- Do listen to the question carefully and ask them to repeat it if it is unclear
- Don't try to be too clever by providing the answer that you think they are looking for – you can get yourself confused and be seen as insincere.
- Do take your time to consider your answers and provide them clearly and speak in an audible tone
- Don't whisper or speak too loudly,
- Don't gabble and try not to repeat yourself
- Do sit upright and lean forward in the chair showing interest and concentration
- Don't lean back and let your shoulders droop or appear too eager by leaning on the interviewer's desk.

One of the keys to a successful interview is staying relaxed – not easy but you may be surprised to learn that most interviewers have nerves themselves – they want you to impress them and they want to show their job off to you in a good light – don't assume that they have all the trump cards in their hand. Remember they are keen to find someone to do the job so they can stop looking – they are rooting for you to do well.

Let them control the interview, at least in the early and middle stages. Let them describe the process of the interview – how long it will last – when they will invite you to ask questions and the like. There is nothing worse than an interviewee who talks too much and tries to take over the interview – that'll scare them rigid that you'll be the sort of employee who wants to control everything. Unfortunately, in stressful times and because our adrenalin is up we tend to rush things – let the interview flow at his or her pace and speak a little more slowly than you normally would – we tend to speak rapidly when stressed so you need to slow down.

Remember, hiring managers will want to feel they are in control of proceedings and will want to hear nice things about their Company and their department – let them have control but don't be subservient.

If the Interviewer knows his or her stuff they will ask plenty of open questions that require more from you than a simple yes or no (even if they do, don't stop at yes, explain why you answered the question in such a way). Here are examples of what you might reasonably expect to be asked:

- Why are you interested in this role?
- What do you know about our Company?
- Can you describe yourself and your approach to your work?
- How do you deal with pressure?
- Why are you in the market for a new job?
- Can you tell me more about the technologies that you have used?
- What leadership/management responsibilities have you had?
- Where do you see yourself in five years time?
- How do you react to setbacks and failures?
- Can you describe a situation where you have disagreed with your manager or a colleague and how was that resolved?
- What would be the ideal position for you?

Try to rehearse these and others in your mind before the interview. If you have ordered your thoughts regarding these then the ones you haven't anticipated can be more clearly focussed upon. Always try to provide positive examples within your answer – don't simply say yes I have a lot of experience in Project Leading (for example) – say where and when that experience was and how those Projects were successful and helped your employer. Also anticipate tricky questions such as:

- Can you please explain why you seem to have moved around quite a lot in recent years?
- You had a spell of twelve months between jobs – can you tell us what you were doing?
- Can you please explain why you left that position?

Whilst you should answer each question fully don't overdo it – remember that you should talk about 40% of the time in an interview (less in a Panel) – listening is very important. Once you believe you have answered the question then stop – let the interviewer carry on. If there is a pause while he or she gathers their thoughts or makes a note don't feel pressured into adding anything – you may well contradict what you just said! This is easily done if you start thinking that the answer you have given hasn't gone down well – you begin to think you should give a different one – whatever you do resist the temptation! Sit silently and let the interviewer ask the next question or a supplementary to the last one. Don't be afraid to ask “has that covered the question fully”? That will politely hand the management of the interview back to the interviewer who may ask you to amplify your answer but is more likely to say “yes, thanks” and mentally and positively note your confidence.

Always remember never to destructively criticise a former Employer or Manager. You may say that they had reduced training and were not taking on new technologies and you wanted to stay up to date. You may say that the Department was stable and that opportunities for advancement were likely to be limited but that's about it – its better to talk about the positive reasons that you left – offered a role with more responsibility – offered a role with good career planning – these are good reasons for moving on and will be accepted.

By all means take some notes during the interview but only short jottings of key things that you don't think you'll retain mentally – not every word that he or she utters – it will stultify the interview and distract you from eye contact and proper concentration on the subject in hand.

It's not particularly usual, but if the interviewer asks you what salary you will accept sit calmly and say that you are prepared to consider any reasonable offer but you should already know the salary (or salary band) and they will know your present salary. Try to avoid answering this question by saying that you are looking for an increase on your present salary – they will realise that. Say that you are looking forward to the challenge that working for the Company can provide in terms of additional experience and, obviously it would be nice to have an increase for moving to them – ensure that you provide other reasons as being more important than money if this comes up.

Never say –“I hate that question” or “I knew you were going to ask that question” – and similarly don't be too conversational and informal – the interviewer is not your chum and, however relaxed they might appear to be, keep it professional. This is not the time to get on first name terms unless he introduces himself as Fred or herself as Edna and even then use their name sparingly.

If you are in front of a panel then make eye contact with all of them and don't assume anyone is more or less important than another. The MD could be sitting at the end of the table quietly

observing the interview but taking no active part – don't assume they are junior and of no significance.

So you've answered all the questions and now comes the bit you've been waiting for – your questions. If the first question that you come out with is “can you describe the benefits package again” then you might as well pack up and go home – you should know all that and it is only relevant if you get the offer anyway when you can consider it fully. This is the time to ask about the Company's general plans and the interviewer's plans for the Department – remember they want to know what you can do for them so keep probing for information which may enable you to add something positive. For instance if they say they plan to re-locate the Data Centre you might then be able to say that you have some experience of that which may not have come out within the interview previously.

Sample Questions include:

- Do you see the Department expanding in the future?
- Are you introducing new technologies in the near future?
- Do you have a Training programme?
- How would you describe a good employee of this Company?
- What is your staff turnover rate?

Some of these are quite tough questions for the interviewer – but that's okay – it's your interview as well and the only time you may have to get a real feeling about the Company before the job is offered to you – you must do what you can to establish if it is right for you.

One golden rule is to always give your best in an interview – even if you have decided early on that you don't think it is right for you. Remember there is no point in deciding afterwards that it is probably exactly what you do want if you've blown it through your negativity. The job of the interview is to get you the offer – that gives you the choice of accepting or not – exactly where you want to be.

So now the interview is being wrapped up and you've done your best – avoid trying to add anything to previous answers here – say simply that you have enjoyed the meeting and are impressed with their plans. That you look forward to hearing from them and smile sincerely – give the impression that you've enjoyed meeting them (even if you feel a wreck). Give a firm handshake, turn and walk away and don't look back – you've done your best the rest is up to them.

Don't be obsequious – for instance telling them how much you've always wanted to work for Nottingham City Council as you've always loved the low Council Tax they charge. People can sense over eagerness (or even desperation) and it never helps your cause as they generally hate compliments that are forced.

And remember – if you don't get an offer then it doesn't mean you couldn't do the job – it simply means that they didn't think it was right for you at this stage. You might like to send a nice message through your Recruitment Consultant saying how much you enjoyed meeting them and hoping how you might meet them again in the future – stay positive – it has been known for the candidate who was offered the job to withdraw and the second

placed candidate to be offered after initial rejection. In such cases don't be too proud to give the job every consideration.

We wish you the very best of luck in all of your interviews – may they all lead to offers. One final tip – if it's going wrong and you know it is in your heart – keep positive – don't let the shoulders droop or a grimace break through – body language is very important and a duff answer can often be ignored if you've overcome it by a good bearing and by staying confident.

Good Luck.....

This paper is the copyright of Primesourcing Ltd., and should not be re-produced, altered or otherwise adapted without the express permission of Primesourcing.