

## Improving your Performance at Interviews

The short time you spend at an interview could have a dramatic effect on your career prospects. It is, therefore, important that you perform well, because no matter how good your career record is to date, the employment interview remains an important step towards achievement of your ambitions. These hints, combined with the guidance provided by our consultants, will equip you with valuable information on how to conduct yourself during interviews with prospective employers.

### Preparation for the Interview

Preparation is the essential first step towards a successful interview.

1. Know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's full name and its correct pronunciation, and his/her title.
2. Find out specific facts about the company: where its offices, plants or stores are located.
3. Refresh your memory on the facts and figures of your present and former employers. You will be expected to know a lot about a company for which you have previously worked.
4. Prepare the questions you will ask during the interview. Remember that an interview is a two-way street. The employer will try to determine through questioning if you have the qualifications/skills necessary to do the job. You must determine through questioning whether the company will give you the opportunity for the growth and development you seek.
5. Probing questions you might ask...
  - (a) Request a detailed description of the position
  - (b) Reason the position is available
  - (c) Culture of the company
  - (d) Anticipated induction and training programme
  - (e) The sort of people who have done well
  - (f) Advanced training programmes available for those who demonstrate outstanding ability
  - (g) Earning of those successful in their third to fifth years
  - (h) Company growth plans
6. Dress conservatively and preferably in darker colours. Pay attention to all facets of your dress and grooming.

**Females** – wear a dress (or skirt) with a jacket over the top, or a suit, and choose materials that don't crease too much. Stick to smart and comfortable shoes. Stiletto heels are unsuitable, and open toed sandals and flip-flops are too casual.

**Males** – aim to look businesslike. A white or blue shirt will make a better impression than a fluorescent green one. An unobtrusive tie is preferable. Make sure your shoes are polished.

### Negative Factors to Watch for

During the course of an interview, the employer will be evaluating your negative factors as well as your positive attributes. Listed below are negative factors frequently evaluated during the course of an interview and those that most often lead to rejection:

- Poor personal appearance
- Overbearing, aggressive, conceited, superiority complex, know-it-all behaviour
- Inability to express thoughts clearly; poor diction or grammar
- Lack of planning for career – no purpose or goals
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm – passive and indifferent
- Lack of confidence – nervousness
- Over – emphasis on money – interested only in remuneration
- Evasive – makes excuses for unfavourable factors in record
- Lack of tact/maturity/courtesy
- Condemnation of past employers
- Failure to look interviewer in the eye
- Limp handshake
- Lack of appreciation of the value of experience
- Failure to ask good questions about the job and company (this is most important!)
- Persistent attitude of 'What can you do for me?'
- Lack of preparation for interview – failure to get information about the company, resulting in inability to ask intelligent questions

## The Interview

You are being interviewed because the interviewer wants to hire somebody – not because he/she wants to trip you up or embarrass you. Through the interaction which takes place during the interview, he/she will be searching out your strong and weak points, evaluating you on your qualifications, skills and intellectual qualities and he/she will probably probe deeply to determine your attitudes, aptitudes, stability, motivation and maturity.

### Some DOs and DON'Ts Concerning the Interview:

- **DO** plan to arrive on time or a few minutes early. Late arrival for a job interview is never excusable.
- If presented with an application form, **DO** fill it out neatly and completely. If you have a CV, be sure the person you give it to is the person who will actually do the hiring.
- **DO** greet the interviewer by his/her surname if you are sure of the pronunciation. If you are not, ask him/her to repeat their name.
- **DO** shake hands firmly.
- **DO** wait until you are offered a chair before sitting. Sit upright in your chair. Look alert and interested at all times. Be a good listener as well as a good talker.

### Smile.

- **DON'T** smoke even if the interviewer smokes and offers you a cigarette.
- **DO** look a prospective employer in the eye while you talk to him/her.
- **DO** follow the interviewer's leads but try to get the interviewer to describe the position and the duties to you early in the interview so that you can relate your background and skills to the position.
- **DON'T** answer questions with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Explain whenever possible. Tell them those things about yourself that relate to the position.
- **DO** make sure that your good points get across to the interviewer in a factual, sincere manner. Keep in mind that you alone can sell yourself to an interviewer. Make him/her realise the need for you in his/her organisation.

### Smile.

- Do be prepared to answer typical questions such as:

What kind of jobs are you looking for?  
What are your strengths?  
What are you really good at?  
What are your weaknesses?  
What are you doing about addressing them?  
What do you know about our company?  
Why did you choose your particular career?  
What are your qualifications?

### Smile.

- **DON'T** lie. Answer questions truthfully, frankly and as much to the point as possible.
- **DON'T** ever make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies.
- **DON'T** 'over-answer' questions. The interviewer may steer the conversation into politics or economics. Since this can be ticklish, it is best to answer the questions honestly, trying not to say more than necessary.
- **DON'T** enquire about SALARY, HOLIDAYS, BONUSES etc at the initial first interview unless you are positive the employer is interested in hiring you and raises the issue first. However you should know your market value and be prepared to specify your required salary or range.
- **DO** always conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing. Never close the door on an opportunity. It is better to be in the position where you can choose from a number of jobs rather than only one.

### Closing the Interview

1. If you are interested in the position, ask for it. Ask for the next interview, if the situation demands. If he/she offers the position to you, and you want it, accept on the spot. If you need some time to think it over, be courteous and tactful in asking for that time. Set a definite date when you can provide an answer.
2. Don't be too discouraged if no definite offer is made or specific salary discussed. The interviewer will probably want to communicate with his/her office first or interview more applicants before making a decision.
3. If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected, don't let your disappointment show. Once in a while an interviewer who is genuinely interested in your possibilities may seem to discourage you in order to test your reaction.
4. Thank the interviewer for his/her time and consideration of you. You have done all you can if you have answered the two questions uppermost in his/her mind:
  - (a) Why are you interested in the job and company?
  - (b) What can you offer and can you do the job?

### Smile.

### After the Interview

Last and most importantly call you recruitment consultant after the interview and explain what happened. He/she will want to talk with you before the interviewer calls him/her back. If you are interested in progressing further it will assist if your feelings towards the position are known, together with your perception of what the client's reaction is likely to be.