

## Preparing for an Interview

It is highly likely that during your search for a new position you will be asked to attend an interview, either with a Search and Selection Consultancy or with a prospective employer.

The interview is a controlled discussion between you and the prospective employer, or the search consultant who is representing the employer. The interviewer is not there to trick you but to find out if you are suitable, that you have the skills that you mention on your CV and that you will fit well into the organisation and team. The meeting should be a two-way exchange of information and a fact finding exercise which will help the interviewer form an opinion about you, and conversely gives you an opportunity to find out about the organisation. Take the meeting seriously - your attitude will show respect.

Although in some quarters the interview has been criticised, it still remains one of the most common and popular ways of selecting personnel. So, are interviews effective? No!

- Most people over-estimate their ability to judge others
- Interviewers are deceived by good 'interpersonal' skills of candidates, thinking they will be good at everything
- Interviewers accept what candidates say without probing further
- Interviewers can treat different candidates inconsistently

Remember, the interviewer has only three key questions that need answering:

1. Can you do the job?
2. Can you get there?
3. Do you want to do the job?

The interview itself may take a number of different forms; it could be formal or informal, be conducted by one person, a panel or a committee and may follow a number of strategies and techniques. Some companies have standard selection formats and it is likely, particularly with senior appointments, that the selection process will involve a number of interviews, each having a slightly different format.

As well as the selection interview you may also be asked to undertake a number of selection tests, which could include psychometric assessment such as intelligence tests, aptitude and attainment tests and personality tests.

Typically though the format will be: introduction; information gathering-asking you questions; discussion of the role and company; summary and conclusion.

Whatever form the interview takes, every candidate should be offered the same opportunities to give the best presentation of themselves, to demonstrate their suitability and to ask questions of the interviewer.

Quite a number of interviews may appear haphazard - don't worry - the interviewer may be unaccustomed to interviewing and could be a little rusty!



A structured interview, designed to discover all relevant information and assess the competencies of the applicant, is an efficient method of focusing on the match between job and candidate. It also means that there is a consistent form to the interviews, particularly important if there are a number of candidates to be seen.

Conversely unstructured interviews are very poor for recruiting the right person.

Interviews need not be formal. The length and style of the interview will relate to the job and the organisation. Some vacancies may call for a formal interview panel, some for a less formal, one-to-one interview.

The interviewer will be put off by the following:

- Poor appearance
- Too aggressive, conceited, know it all
- Poor ability to express answers well
- No career focus
- Passive, uninterested attitude
- Lack of confidence
- Concentration on the salary
- Poor diplomacy
- Closed body language
- Not asking any questions
- Lack of preparation for the meeting

### **First Impressions**

Presentation is all important when you go to meet your prospective employer and you should dress accordingly.

A number of studies have concluded that up to 93% of our first-time impact on others is non-verbal. Others have shown that there is a direct link between what you wear and what you earn. A badly dressed man penalises his earning potential by 15% and a poorly dressed woman by 11%.

First impressions do count. A bad first impression with a client can take up to 15 subsequent meetings to correct - if ever. At an interview the wrong impression in the first few seconds could make or break a career.

At your interviews you need to appear organised and professional which means wearing clothes that fit properly and look neat and tidy. We assess physical appearance – age, sex, perceived status, attractiveness. Most people will behave more politely if they think the other person has a higher status.

So try to dress conservatively - it is a formal business interview and you want them to remember you for what you said not for what you wore! This means dressing in dark grey or navy; and for the ladies try not to be too upbeat or trendy - you want to be taken seriously!

If you pay attention to the details you can't go wrong: make sure your shoes are clean, your socks match and your tie isn't stained! If you are taking papers with you make sure you use a briefcase or similar bag, which is clean and tidy and looks professional.

Body language is very important in the first couple of minutes – we form a quick impression which is lasting. Pay attention to the small talk – tone, volume, pitch and quality. Posture, gesture, touch and facial expression complete the picture. Make sure that first impression counts!



## Interview Checklist

### Before the meeting:

- Make sure you know where you are going, who you are meeting and how long it will last. Take the company telephone number with you just in case you are lost or late
- Arrive ten minutes early at reception - this will give you a feel for the organisation and the people at 'front of house'. If you are going to be late telephone and explain. Always apologise to the interviewer in person if you are late- this is courteous and shows respect for their time
- Investigate the company you are seeing - products, services, size, location, reputation - use the internet, reference books, the company itself
- Prepare a set of questions to ask about the role and company
- Prepare your answers to difficult questions (why are you leaving; why do you want to work for us; tell me about a time when you failed and what you did to redeem the situation; why should we employ you etc)
- Remember what you put in your CV - take a copy with you as well as a pad and pen to make notes. Re-read your CV and covering letter - if there is a mistake tell them before the meeting begins to save any embarrassment later
- Know yourself - strengths/weaknesses, areas for further training
- Think carefully about the type of role you are seeking and the type of company you wish to work for

### On Arrival:

- Prepare your opening move - first impressions are crucial - smile and introduce yourself. Do not offer your hand to the other person - let them do this. That way you will not have to worry about the firmness of your hand shake nor your sweaty palms! (incidentally, if the other person has an injured hand an over-firm handshake will not go down well will it?)
- Wait to be asked to sit down
- If you are ill on the day of the interview - don't go - all reasonable employers will wait a day or two



#### In the Meeting:

- Be enthusiastic, show you are informed about the company and role. Try to create a positive impression
- Keep your body language positive - look the interviewer in the eye, don't fidget, cough, slump in your chair, don't use a flat monotonal speaking voice.
- Don't be over confident or arrogant.
- Take note of your own body language - are you alert?
- Make sure you answer the question - do not stray off the point or jump in. Above all do not make it up if you do not know
- Avoid yes/no answers
- Do not criticise current or previous employers
- When answering questions do not rush into it, keep calm and think about what you are saying
- If you do not understand the question ask for clarification
- Keep a balance between talking and listening
- Do not over rehearse the answers to expected questions - you may sound glib and canned
- Don't ask about salary unless the interviewer brings it up - this will normally be at the end. Money is a tricky subject - all roles have a target salary range and market rate which they will expect you fall within. If your employer pays differently to the norm/average (ie: you are under or over paid) explain this when asked. Be realistic.
- It is unlikely that expenses will be offered unless the interview required international travel.

#### Typical Questions you may be asked:

- What do you see as your strengths and areas of weakness
- What qualities can you bring to our organisation
- How would your colleagues/boss describe you and do you agree

