

Your Interview

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1. Preparing Yourself for a Job Interview

1.1 General

It is important to be prepared for a job interview. Besides increasing your confidence, solid preparation helps you to give successful answers and ask successful questions. Your Talley Group recruiter will be with you every step of the way and will prepare you for each interview.

Think of the interviewer in a sense as a company auditor. (S)he checks what you can offer and what you can't. If there is a weak spot (s)he needs to know that something can be done about it. So, (s)he will try to find your strong and weak points. To prepare for this, you should do an accounting of your own self before the "audit." The idea is not to focus on your limitations but rather to prepare you to answer questions with sincerity, accuracy and poise.

Usually a number of interviews occur before a job offer is made. Frequently the first takes the form of a phone interview. From the company's perspective the purpose of a phone interview is to determine if your qualities and experience are worth the expense and management time to bring you in for an on-site interview. Your goal during the phone interview should be to obtain an invitation for that on-site interview. Job offers are only made after a successful on-site interview. Your objective during an on-site interview therefore is to get a job offer.

The first on-site interview usually lasts one to two hours. For larger organizations, a personnel officer spends time before the interview reviewing the job description and evaluating the skills necessary for the job. Once the list of skills is determined, the recruiter develops questions that should shed light on your potential for performing the job. Often the questions are designed to query about your past performances and skills. The rationale is that your successes in a past situation, whether directly related to the job or not, will probably be a good indicator of how you will respond to a situation in the future.

Not everyone interviewing you will be a human resources professional. Smaller organizations may leave the hiring of new employees to each department manager. Larger companies, if you make it through the screening interview, will invite you back to meet with several people for a second interview. Both instances could result in meeting with an interviewer who is uncomfortable with the process. Your preparation will become very important—you may have to take the lead and show how your abilities would help meet their needs. Focus on the principles listed in "Getting Ready" for an interview; they are key to a successful interview whether you are being interviewed by a human resources professional or not.

1.2 Research the Company

Some understanding of the company is an advantage. It creates a positive impression and also helps you to find out if this company is right for you. Your Talley Group recruiter is an excellent resource and will have briefed you about the company culture in preparing you for your interview. If you have further questions (s)he is available day or night to answer them.

These questions may be helpful when you are researching the company. You may want to write down and bring some of these questions with you to ask at the interview.

Career Opportunities

What are the different employment opportunities available in the company?

- Are there other positions for which you may qualify?
- Are there training programs available?
- Organizational Structure
- What are the different divisions and departments?
- Who is who in this company?

Does the organizational structure provide room for career growth?

- Major Business
- What is the company's primary business?
- What is its reputation in the industry?
 - What are the subsidiaries, their parent, type of ownership?
 - Products and Services
 - What are its products and/or services?
 - Who are its major clients?
 - Achievements in its field
- The company's reputation in its field and in the community
 - How profitable/stable?
 - Rank in the industry
 - Assets and revenues
 - Developmental projects
- Employees
 - What do the employees do at that site?
 - Future manpower plans, i.e. reductions, expansion, etc.
- The Position
 - How does the specific position for which you are interviewing fit into the overall organization?

Think about how the position contributes to the success of the company, and gear your comments to show how your background and talents would enable you to maximize that contribution.

1.3 Research Yourself

People often assume that they know themselves well and don't need to think about themselves when preparing for an interview.

Recognize These Things About Yourself

- Think of your strengths and weaknesses: in your overall background, in your education and in your work history.
 - What mistakes have you made and what have you learned from them?
 - How do your skills apply to the job position for which you are applying?
- What contributions can you uniquely make to the company?
 - How have your experiences prepared you for the prospective employer's setting?
 - What skills would you like to develop or improve? How would you do that?

How will you deal with questions relating to any problems in the past such as involuntary termination, employment gaps, unemployment, etc.?

- What activities and tasks would you prefer to avoid in a job setting?
 - What are your lifestyle, salary, benefits, location needs or preferences?
 - What kinds of co-workers, supervisor and environment do you prefer in a job?
- What are your current career and educational goals?
 - What past experiences would you highlight, and what you have learned from them?
- What are your plans and objectives, personal or career-oriented for now, for five to ten years from now, or even until you retire?

Understand What You Are Looking For

It is only fair to you and to your prospective employer to honestly think about what you really like, what motivates you most, and what will affect your decisions to accept a job. You will do yourself a favor if you go into your interview having established the matters on which you will decide. These might include: type of job you will accept, salary, benefits, work schedule, environment, geographical location and other factors which impact your career and personal life.

You can make a more intelligent decision as a prospective employee if you have carefully thought about what you want to be not only today but also in the future.

Set Up Your Selling Points

Think of your work-related achievements. This may include your contribution to profits and efficiency, simplifying procedures, pioneering projects, and any other measurable skills or projects that are relevant to the prospective position. Doing this exercise will prepare you to conduct yourself in a more persuasive manner. The key word here is relevance. Be prepared also to outline the skills that you have which relate to the position you are aiming for.

Be prepared to discuss your employment history. Consistency is important among what you say in the interview and what you placed on your resume or on the application form. Reviewing every detail about yourself including employment dates, position titles, salary history, names and telephone numbers of your

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previous supervisors will save you from tension caused by fumbling for facts during the interview. The more prepared you are, the better you will feel during this part of the interview process.

Consider your professional weaknesses. While this is one aspect which most of us hate to tackle, it is to your advantage to give this some thought ahead of time. The ability to realistically pinpoint your weak spots will give you a better outlook of the areas you need to improve. It will also give you an idea of what jobs you should target seriously and what jobs you should avoid. Analyzing yourself objectively and maturely can help you turn the negative into the positive. And be ready to make them into positives: how have you grown professionally from earlier, negative experiences?

Create, Rehearse, Learn, and Deliver 60-second Infomercial About Yourself

The interview is the time to bring out the best about yourself. What do you do particularly well or what strong points make you stand out from other applicants? Effectively presenting a memorable example of your strengths or skills will make an impression which can lead to an offer.

As you perform the self-assessment described above, identify your greatest strengths. You will probably discover that you have more talent than you may have thought before. The interview is the time to sell your strengths. Don't be embarrassed to describe your strengths vividly and with confidence!

Practice Presenting Yourself

- It is important to be able to talk about yourself even if you are not used to it.
- Don't be shy about discussing your talents and accomplishments.
- Practice if necessary in order to sound confident but not arrogant.
- If you tend to be humble, practice to avoid sounding uninterested or unconvinced of your worth.

1.4 Plan Ahead: What Will You Wear?

Regardless of how effective your resume, final screening and selection decisions are done during or after the interview. A well-groomed, professional appearance is essential. Anything else will detract from the best possible presentation you can make. Think ahead about dressing for your interview. You don't want to give your clothes a second thought as you go to the interview. You do want to feel comfortable and confident in whatever you choose to wear.

A good way to determine suitable attire is to look at what people in your particular field are wearing. Wear a fairly conservative suit in a fairly conservative color. Long hair should be kept in place with barrettes, a headband, or a ponytail unless your style is one that stays put. Very long hair should be pulled back. In any case, leave at home the wild ties, cigarettes, attention-grabbing jewelry, strong scents, and gum.

1.5 Bring Along:

- Resume, several extra copies
- Something to write on, and remember to bring something to write with
- This does not have to be impressive: a clean folder with a pad of paper is fine

You may also want to consider bringing additional items that you have produced and that support your presentation. These might include published articles, spreadsheets, software programs, photos, and videos. Writing samples are the most common item for people to bring to an interview. You should be prepared to leave anything you bring.

Remember that behind the puzzles and surprises that go with an interview, there is really nothing to be nervous about. You and your interviewer are finding out about whether you and the company look like a good fit. Interviewing for a job is centering on the subject you know best: YOURSELF.

1.6 Your Interview Checklist:

- Do I have...?
 - Notes/questions I wish to have with me during the interview.
 - Several good copies of my resume.
 - My list of references.
 - Best references are: a supervisor, a co-worker, someone you have supervised, a client, as appropriate.
 - Mix the gender of references if possible.
 - Letters of recommendation, if appropriate.
 - Do I know where to go?
 - Do I know how to get there?
 - Do I have the phone no. to call if I'm running late?
 - Do I have the home and office phone nos. of my Talley Group Recruiter?
- Do I know who to ask for?
 - When should I leave to allow enough time to be at least 10 minutes early?
 - Do I have a positive attitude about the interview and about myself?
- Am I neatly and properly dressed? Check these Out:
 - Not too many accessories
 - Perfume/shaving lotion not too strong? If you're not sure, skip them altogether
 - Clean teeth? Nails? Don't forget deodorant!
 - Are your shoes in good shape? Shined? Look at the soles before answering.

2. The Company On-Site Interview

The company on-site interview is your moment of truth. It's most frequently what determines your getting an offer. Although the interview often feels like a contest, or an obstacle to be overcome, it is really an opportunity for you to communicate your abilities and to evaluate the job that you are seeking.

Start the Interview Day Right

Get a good night's sleep, eat a good breakfast, and allow plenty of travel time. The goal is to be as comfortable as you can in the interview. If you can relax, you will be self-assured and positive.

Make the Right Impression

Interviewers largely make up their minds about a candidate within the first five minutes of meeting him or her. Important in the first impression:

- Firm handshake (practice!)
- Ability to sustain eye contact
- A warm smile
- Good posture and presentation
- A relaxed and confident manner

It's critical to that first impression that you **arrive on time**. If it means getting somewhere an hour early because you are uncertain about the traffic, parking availability, or public transportation connections, do it! Plan to arrive at the location of your interview about 10 minutes ahead of your scheduled appointment.

Prepare Your Voice

Often candidates find that their throats tighten up before an interview, due to feeling nervous. You may want to loosen up your vocal chords before you arrive. Singing along with the radio on your drive to the interview can be helpful, and can also relax and focus you.

Your ability to communicate is measured not only by the tone of your voice, but in clarity and cohesiveness. Your ability to speak in a language simple enough to understand is important. Don't use highly technical terms in an interview. Interviewers are not necessarily a master of your field and if you use words that (s)he hardly understands, you may weaken your chances.

Be Enthusiastic

A prospective employer is more likely to be impressed with you if your responses radiate enthusiasm and energy. If you are competing against a group of candidates who all have little or no direct experience in the field, enthusiasm might be the deciding factor. If you are not enthusiastic about a position, it will be difficult to feign interest in the interview. If you are sincerely enthusiastic, don't be afraid to communicate it!

Be Genuine

The age-old advice to “be yourself” is still the best. It’s not wise to try to be someone you are not. If you obtain a job offer through impersonation, it will be a shock for both you and your employer when the real you becomes evident.

Concentrate on being your “best self,” though. An interview is a brief period of time in which to make an impression, and you want yours to be a positive one. Present the highs and not the lows, the enthusiasm and not the doubt. By focusing on positive elements, you will help to make the tone of the entire interview a positive one.

Accentuate the Positive

Have a few key points prepared to discuss in the interview. Personal characteristics, skills you have learned, or your experiences can demonstrate that you could perform well in the job.

You will also want to have in mind specific examples and anecdotes from your past to illustrate important points about yourself. Generalities are weaker than specifics in trying to prove a point. For example, instead of saying only that you can see a project through from start to finish, elaborate by describing how you had an idea for a particular magazine and led the effort to have it published.

Communicating information about yourself is your responsibility. It is not up to the interviewer to drag it out of you. The interviewer will often signal the end of the interview by asking if you have any questions. If you feel you haven’t discussed some key points, take the initiative and say, “Before I ask my first question, there are a couple of points I would like to mention.”

Take Time to Answer

It is perfectly acceptable to take time to think before you answer, particularly when asked a thoughtful question. Taking five or ten seconds is preferable to beginning an aimless answer or blurting out something you will later wish you hadn’t said. If you are unsure about the meaning of a question, repeat it aloud or ask a clarifying question. When you have answered stop talking and wait for the next question.

Touching on the Negatives

If you are asked to describe a failure, a weakness, or a negative experience, try to finish your response on an upbeat note, mentioning a lesson learned, how you have grown from a difficult experience, or what you are doing to improve a weakness. You can also discuss a failure that you later turned into a success or a weakness that sometimes works as a strength for you. This approach will communicate that you are a positive and forward-thinking person. If you must bring up something negative, be brief, and return the conversation to a positive subject as soon as you are able. Avoid future generalities such as “I plan to go to school to overcome that deficiency.” These are weak compared to current realities.

Among the most tempting negative subjects are previous bosses and boring tasks. While your assessment may be quite true and perfectly justified, choose something else to talk about. You don’t want to give the impression that you are a negative person, or that you do not take responsibility for problems.

Questions Which Take You By Surprise

If you have prepared for your interview, there is only a slight chance that you will be completely surprised by a question posed to you. If that happens, try to remain calm and poised; it may just be a test of your composure.

Questions You Can't Answer

You may have to say “I don't know” in an interview, if you don't have the information requested at hand or if you simply don't know the answer to a question. If appropriate, offer to find out and get back to the interviewer later in the day or early the next day. Be honest; some questions are designed to stump you, and it is much riskier to make up an answer than to tell the truth.

2.1 Questions Frequently Asked by Interviewers

- Tell me about yourself.
 - What makes you different from the other candidates for this position?
 - Describe the accomplishment of which you are the most proud.
- Why should we hire you?
 - What strengths and attributes could you bring to this position?
- What are your career goals?
- What would you like to be doing five/ten years from now?
- What interests/impresses you about this company?
 - What do you believe are the key issues and problems in our industry today?
- What do you think it takes to be successful in this field?
- What other jobs/fields are you considering?
 - In what kind of work environment do you do your best work?
- With what kind of people do you like to work?
 - What kinds of tasks and responsibilities motivate you the most?
- What is your ideal job?
- Do you have a geographical preference?
- Tell me about what you learned from your previous jobs.
- What did you dislike most about your last job?
 - What do you think you would like least about this job/company/field?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- Have you ever failed at anything?
- What has been your greatest challenge?
 - What do you enjoy doing outside of work in your free time?
 - What would you like me to know about you that is not on your resume?
- Do you have a final statement?
- Do you have any questions you'd like to ask of me?

Here are a few additional types of questions which may be asked of you:

Behavioral or Situational Questions

Interviewers may ask about experiences from your past. Examples:

- “Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.”
- “Describe an example of your leadership ability.”
- “Tell me about d working with a poorly functioning team. How did you respond? What role did you play on the team?”

Current Events Questions

Sometimes, an interviewer will ask for your opinion on an upcoming election or a current event of interest. Be wary of expressing strong political opinions in an interview. Be brief and nonpartisan.

Questions about Salary

It is best to discuss salary requirements as late as possible in the interview process. If you broach the subject too early your interviewer may believe you are more interested in money than a career. If you respond to early attempts to draw you out on this issue without fully understanding the position and its responsibilities you may limit your chances of obtaining a fair offer. Premature salary probes by the interviewer are best countered by a response along the lines of “I’m sure my salary requirements will be within your budget and, if I may, I would like to learn more about the company, the job and its responsibilities”

You should also consider using your Talley Group recruiter as compensation package negotiator. Use of a third party in this way will help minimize the lingering effects of any contentious issues on the relationship between candidate and future supervisor.

Illegal Questions

It is illegal to ask about age, ethnic background, national origin, marital status, family planning, or sexual, religious, or political preference. Try to think why the question was really asked and respond directly to that concern without answering the question. For example, if you are asked if you plan to marry or how many children you plan to have, you may choose to answer, “If you are concerned about my ability to travel, I can assure you that my family responsibilities will not interfere with my ability to do the traveling that is necessary for this position.” If you think that your answer will help you, you may choose to answer the question directly. You should take the incident into account when evaluating the organization.

2.2 Your Questions for the Interviewer

You should always have a couple of questions to ask. Asking if you have questions is another way for the interviewer to assess your interest in the organization, knowledge of the field, maturity, professionalism, and communication skills. An interviewer may answer some of your questions during the conversation. Write out a list of at least five to bring with you to the interview. Be sure to list the most important (to you) questions first.

Sample Interviewee Questions

Select or alter to make germane to the position and company:

- Does the company have plans to expand internationally?
- Can you tell me which new markets the company is currently considering entering?
- How is the department structured?
- How are projects obtained in this department?
- How many projects does a person work on simultaneously?
- Does this company have many strategic partnerships?
- What are the potential career paths for those in _____ roles?
- Can you tell me more about the training program for new hires?

Refer to Research the Company)

2.3 About Meals During the Interview

Remember that you are being interviewed in every contact you have with the hiring company until such time as an offer is made and accepted. You won't have any "down time" with them, no matter what they may tell you. So, if you go out for a meal with representatives of your interviewing company, keep in mind the following:

- **Do Not Drink** (alcohol) even if your host does. Don't make an issue of it, but if drinks are being ordered, quietly order something non-alcoholic. Alcohol puts people off guard.
- **Avoid Smoking** unless your host is smoking, then use your discretion.
- **Do Not Order Food Which Requires Special Concentration to Eat** no matter how wonderful it might be. Your meal is part of the interview, and the food should not be a distraction. This is not a good time for stringy cheese dishes like French onion soup or any other food which might take up residence on your shirt or tie. Simple "knife and fork" food such as steak, boneless chicken breast, fish fillet, meat or vegetable cutlets, baked or mashed potatoes are the safest for interviews.
- **Don't tell risqué stories** at lunch. You don't know your hosts well enough to judge if they will be offended or not.

Most importantly, don't forget that you are still being interviewed!

2.4 About Testing

Many companies now use standardized or other forms of tests to assess a candidate's suitability. These tests can show up at any point in the interview process, or not at all. Don't let the presence, absence or timing of tests startle you. Often the introduction of tests or the absence of tests in the interview process has to do more with the availability of the person who usually administers the tests or their plans regarding further interviews than how well you are doing.

We have all taken many standardized tests before. Just move calmly through the test, periodically checking that you are in the same place in the question book and the answer sheet. Don't try to second-guess the tests: it doesn't work. Just do your best and don't worry.

2.5 Closing the Interview

Before leaving an interview you should be clear as to the next step. Your interviewer will usually tell you when you can expect to hear from them. If he or she says nothing, you may ask, “How should we proceed from here?” or “When might I expect to hear from you?” As soon as possible, take notes about what happened. If you are going to another interview in the same day, this is particularly important, because you don’t want to confuse any details. This information will become crucial if you are invited back for a second interview. Be sure to note what you learned about the company or the field, impressions of the people with whom you met, what you would like to find out more about, your responsibilities as far as any follow-up call, and when you can expect to hear from them. If you did not receive business cards from the people you met (or see their names on a diploma on the wall), you may call the company directly when you get home and ask the receptionist for the correct spellings of their names and titles.

Post Interview Debrief

Always call your Talley Group Recruiter as soon as possible after the interview. (S)he can then debrief you and help you prepare for the next step in the process. (S)he may already be able to share with you the company’s reactions to your interview. If you subsequently receive a call from the company call your recruiter right away.

Remember: Keep your recruiter in the picture every step of the way

Thank You Notes

Writing a prompt thank you note is a must. The note should be handwritten, can be brief and should not exceed one page. Your correspondence should express your appreciation, reconfirm your interest in the job and underline how you think your background and skills would fulfill the responsibilities of the position.

2.6 The Second Interview...the Third interview...the Fourth interview, and the Fifth...

In the follow-up interviews, you should observe the same courtesies and processes as in the first, adding into your awareness the notes and recollections from the first. You will probably be meeting some different people, perhaps interview at central offices. You will, of course, be expected to have more understanding of the company. Stay flexible and open in your interviews: the higher up the organizational chain your interviewer is, the more likely there will be scheduling hitches.

During the second or subsequent interviews you will probably have the chance to speak with more people at different levels in the company. This can give you excellent perspective.

In preparing for these interviews, always refer back to your notes and memories from prior contacts. You can get your follow-up questions answered and also demonstrate that you paid attention in the earlier contacts! You can use what you have learned about the position and the company to demonstrate your suitability.

You may not have a lot of questions left if you have several interviews, but should always come up with a few new questions with you. Your best bet is to use this chance to obtain more in-depth information on areas such as: the position's responsibilities and the nature of special projects, the planned growth and direction of the company, and the strategic role of your prospective department.

And—Don't forget those thank-you notes!

3. How to Resign On The Best of Terms

Once you have reached an agreement with your new employer it is important to cut ties with your present employer in the most professional and courteous way possible. You do not want to burn bridges but you do want to make your intentions clear. Your objective should be to have complete closure and to arrive at your new employer without any “baggage” and full of energy and enthusiasm.

3.1 How much notice should I give

In general terms you are not obliged to give any notice of your intention to leave and your new employer would probably like you to start tomorrow. On the other hand a hasty departure from your present employer will generate lasting animosity and prevent you from getting the closure you need to start your new job with a clear conscience. Typically one offers two weeks notice.

3.2 Your resignation letter

Your resignation should be in writing and made up of two documents - a Task List and a Resignation Letter. The Task List, in bullet format, consists of all the tasks you are currently working on that you need to finish or hand over in the two-week period left at your present job.

The Task List is invaluable in that it makes it clear to management that you are serious about leaving and that you have thought through your decision and the process of leaving. It also shows that you are a conscientious employee which is how you want them to remember you in case you need a reference or favor in the future.

The Task List also serves to diffuse your manager’s automatic response in making you a counter offer. Usually an immediate counter offer is not thought out and is probably not yet approved by higher management. It is an emotional response by your managers who are more worried about themselves and the impact on their deadlines etc.

The second document is the Resignation Letter itself. This should be short, unambiguous and polite. The following is a good shell to use for this purpose:

Dear (your supervisor)

Effective (date at the end of your two-week notice period) I am resigning my position with (Company). I have made a final decision in this matter and thank you sincerely for the opportunity you have provided me in the past. I would especially appreciate your respect for my decision which in no way reflects the regard I hold for you and (Company)

Sincerely

Hand deliver the Task List and Resignation Letter together to your supervisor.

4. How to Handle Counter-Offers

When you tender your resignation there is a strong possibility that your employer will make a counter offer - particularly if you possess unique skills. You should be prepared to objectively assess and respond to this eventuality. A counter offer can consist of a salary increase, a promotion, promises of future projects, new technology etc. It can be cloaked in flattery such as an extremely friendly lunch with the President.

4.1 Are You Ready to Accept a Bribe?

Before you are swept off your feet by the flattery apparent in a counter offer consider what a counter offer really is and what you stand to lose by accepting it.

If your employer thinks you are really worthy of these rewards and wants you to have them why have they not given them to you already?

Your supervisor is trying to buy you back or buying time until he or she can replace you on a schedule that is decided by the company. That process is likely to have started the day your letter was received. Your days are numbered. A recent survey by Martin Varnier Research, a leading Midwest research firm found that 90% of all candidates who accepted a counter offer were no longer employed with the company that extended the offer nine months later.

The candidate who accepts a counter offer generally comes to the conclusion that all the reasons for originally planning to leave the company are still valid and that the only way to receive a raise is to threaten to quit.

No matter how professionally you handled your resignation if you then decide to accept the counter offer your loyalty will always be questioned. Are you the type of employee with whom they are prepared to share business secrets?

4.2 How valuable is your word?

In business, as well as private life, your word is your most valuable asset. When you accepted the new company's offer and agreed to a start date you made a commitment. If you walk away from that commitment the value of your word is bound to be questioned in the future.