

## Interview tips

Last month we covered job-hunting tips; let's assume you've heard from an interested company that wants to interview you in person. There are a number of steps you can take to increase the probability that a job interview will be successful. Being well prepared will increase your self-confidence and peace of mind, which will in turn improve your performance in the interview.

First, remember that in all likelihood an interviewer wants to find an outstanding candidate for the job as much as you want to find a fulfilling career. Think of the interview as a "win-win" situation where both parties are hoping for a positive outcome.

Throughout your professional life you will be interviewed by some people who are trained interviewers and by others who are not. There is no one "right" way to interview, and no matter what the format, it is your responsibility to do the best you can in each situation. Because interviewing is really an unrehearsed conversation between two strangers, the discussion can take many directions. For that reason, it's important to be comfortable as the interview unfolds. Comfort comes in large measure from your preparation. The only thing you can know for certain is that each interview is unique.

Beforehand: know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's full name and the correct pronunciation, and his/her title.

Learn pertinent facts about the company such as annual sales revenue, principal lines of business and locations. Go to [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) or [www.thomasregister.com](http://www.thomasregister.com) to find out what you need to know.

Find out why the hiring manager and/or client representative is interested in your qualifications (just ask them when on the phone; they're human and won't take offense).

An interview is a two-way street. Come prepared with your own list of questions to ask during the interview. Your questions allow the hiring manager to evaluate your professional and personal needs (avoid salary until it is raised by the Interviewer).

Insightful questions help you both determine how good the fit may be. Lastly, the better you understand the opportunity, the more you will be able to communicate your interest and your qualifications in the position. Re: your interest; it never ceases to amaze me how many candidates neglect to convey their interest level. If, at the end of the interview, you truly feel this is an opportunity you're suited for and want to pursue further, make sure the Interviewer knows that. It often may be the difference between two equally-qualified candidates.

Put your best foot forward. Always wear proper attire and greet your interviewer with a firm handshake and an enthusiastic smile. Bring a notepad and do take notes during the meeting; they'll be invaluable when you're called back for another meeting.

## Interview types

### **Structured Interviews**

Structured interviews consist of interview questions that have been prepared in advance. The questions are derived from the job requirements and asked in a specified order.

Structured interviews are typical for jobs involving a fairly straightforward list of duties and responsibilities.

### **Team/Panel Interviews**

Team interviews typically involve the members of the vacant position's work team in the job interview process. These can sometimes be used to try and induce stress, to see how the candidate reacts in this situation. In fairness, it is also used for time effectiveness for all of the Interviewers involved. In this situation, try to answer each question looking at each of the panel interviewers, not just one individual. Relax, remember they're all human too, and assume there are going to be times in your job where you are making group presentations such as this one.

### **Unstructured Interviews**

In this situation, the conversation free-flows and is probably best described as a getting-to-know-you session. You may cover the job duties but not get into specifics. Some Interviewers are more comfortable in this setting, and will then narrow their candidate list down to one or two finalists and meet with them again to discuss the position in more detail. Once again, there's no right or wrong way to interview—in this case, do be yourself. Just try to stay focused and don't let down your guard and say (as many have to me), "well, between you and me, I really didn't like my last Boss so I decided to quit and move on", or a similar story that probably ends your chances of being successful in this job competition.

### **Commonly Asked Questions—Consider your answers carefully**

1. Why are you looking to leave your current employer?
2. What do you know about this position and our company? Why are you interested?
3. What are your short-term and long-term goals?
4. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
5. What are you currently looking for in salary? Why?
6. What do you need to know from us to make a decision about whether this opportunity is right for you?
7. Who have you learned the most from? What was it? Why was it important?
8. What do you like about your current Boss? What could be improved in him/her? Who was your worst Boss and why?
9. When are you available to start?
10. From what I've described, what would you change here?

### **Behavioral Questions**

These are interview questions designed to determine if you possess the desired key competencies for the job. An example might be:

“It’s inevitable that conflict may arise on the job. Tell me about a time where this occurred with a fellow employee. What was it over? How did you propose to resolve it? What did they propose? What was the eventual solution? What is your relationship like today with that person?”

### **“The End”**

When the interviewer signals the interview is closing, there’s nothing wrong with asking, “What is the next step?” Tell the employer you are now even more intrigued by the company and the position (if this is the case). Emphasize your background and give a specific example to demonstrate this. Leave them with this positive thought, and hopefully you’ll have raised the bar to the point where they can’t resist calling you back. Don’t forget the old adage, “The harder I work, the luckier I get.” Good luck!

*Wolf is President, Wolf Gugler & Associates Limited, specializing in executive search and management appraisals for hardware and housewares Retailers and their Suppliers with offices in Canada and the U.S. He can be reached at (416) 386-1719 or via email to [wolf@wolfgugler.com](mailto:wolf@wolfgugler.com). Web site: [www.wolfgugler.com](http://www.wolfgugler.com)*