



## **Interview Tips**

### **Interview Preparation**

1. Know why you're interested in the job.
2. Assess, compose and practice stating your strengths and weaknesses
3. Assess, compose and practice stating your major accomplishments
4. Be prepared to discuss your current job responsibilities
5. Evaluate your skills and experience as they relate to the position requirements, be prepared to state this evaluation
6. Prepare 5-6 questions about the position, write them down and have them with you during the interview as a reminder
7. Research the company – know what you're walking into. Do you want to work there?
8. Make sure you are ready to make a professional presentation – both in appearance and in verbiage
9. Write a good resume that accurately reflects your education and work experience. It should be neat and should not have typing or spelling errors. Bring copies of your resume and any other items that may be applicable to the position (writing samples, portfolios, etc.)
10. Compose a thank-you letter. Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to interview and ask for the job. Be certain to re-evaluate after the interview, review the sample thank you, and obtain your recruiters approval prior to sending.
11. Show up 10-15 minutes early; 20 minutes early if there is an application you can complete while waiting

### **During the Interview**

1. Make sure you understand the questions, ask for clarification if needed
2. Respond concisely – don't ramble
3. Avoid "yes" or "no" answers
4. Do not bring up salary or benefits unless the interviewer brings them up. Know what an appropriate salary range should be
5. If you want the job, ask for it
6. As you answer questions, avoid use of negative terms always answer in the affirmative



7. Take advantage of the opportunity to sell yourself
8. Answer questions with specific examples – avoid generalities
9. Evaluate the position for which you are interviewing. If the company is hiring for a light level position, don't market management level intentions

### **Why Candidates are Rejected**

1. Lack of proper career planning – purposes and goals are ill defined – needs direction. Has no idea why they pursued this field.
2. Inability to express thoughts clearly and concisely – rambles
3. Not prepared for the interview – no research on position or the company
4. Inability to discuss achievements
5. Unable to explain interest in the position
6. Little interest and enthusiasm – indifferent – bland personality
7. Overbearing – overaggressive – conceited – cocky – aloof – assuming
8. Interested only in a higher grade level or more money
9. Asks few or poor questions about the job – little depth and meaning to questions. Does not talk...
10. Makes excuses – evasiveness – hedges on unfavorable factors in record
11. No confidence and poise – fails to look interview in the eye – immature... weak handshake
12. Poor personal appearance – sloppy dress – lacks sophistication. Needs haircut or hair is not clean. Fingernails are dirty. Shoes do not match suit. Too much jewelry or cologne

### **Potential Questions to Ask During the Interview (Prioritize at Least 6 to Write Down and Bring with You)**

1. What can I do to be of most benefit to your company?
2. What responsibilities would you like this position to take over?
3. What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished in this job?
4. Would you like me to work overtime – I am willing to do so.
5. Is there any further education you would like me to acquire? I am willing to do so.
6. What other departments does this position interact with?
7. Will I be working with a team or on my own?
8. How much orientation and training will be provided?



9. How do you determine work objectives and deadlines?
10. What do you consider the five most important day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
11. Is the job repetitive or is there variety?
12. Once I am trained, what additional responsibilities would you like me to take on?
13. What are the first projects to be addressed?
14. What do you see as the strengths of this department? What do you see as weaknesses that you are looking to turn into strengths?
15. What does the company hope to achieve in the next two to three years? How will that help the company? How will these achievements be recognized by the company?
16. What informal/formal benchmarks will you use to measure my effectiveness and contributions?
17. What are my potential career paths within the company?
18. What is the company's mission? Goals?
19. What is the best thing you know about this company?
20. What do you and the company consider important in my fitting into the corporate culture – the way of doing things around here?
21. Will I be encouraged or discouraged from learning about the company beyond my own department?
22. Currently, what new endeavors is the company actively pursuing?
23. How do market trends affect company growth and progress? What is being done about them?

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**Questions Interviewers May Ask/Insight on Those Questions**

**“What are the reasons for your success in this profession?”**

The interviewer is not so much interested in examples of your success - he or she wants to know what makes you tick. Keep your answers short, general, and to the point. Using your work experience, personalize and use value keys from your personal, professional and business profiles. For example: “I attribute my success to three things: the support I’ve always received from co-workers, which always encourages me to be cooperative and look at my specific job in terms of what we as a department are trying to achieve. That gives me great pride in my work and its contribution to the department’s efforts, which is the second factor. Finally, I find that every job has its problems that need solutions, and there’s always a costly solution, there’s usually an economical one as well, whether it’s in terms of time or money.” Then give an example from your experience that illustrates those points.



**“What is your energy level like? Describe a typical day?”**

You must demonstrate good use of your time; that you believe in planning your day beforehand, and that when it's over, you review your own performance to make sure you are reaching the desired goals. No one wants a part-time employee, so you should sell your energy level. For example, your answer might end with: “At the end of the day when I'm ready to go home, I make a rule always to type one more letter [make one more call, etc.] and clear my desk for the next day.”

**“Why do you want to work here?”**

To answer this question, you must have researched the company and built a folder of information. Reply with the company's attributes as you see them. Cap your answer with reference to your belief that the company can provide you with a stable and happy work environment- the company has that reputation- and that such an atmosphere would encourage your best work. “ I'm not looking for just another paycheck. Your company produces a superior product/ provides a superior service. I share the values that make this possible, which should enable me to fit and complement the team.”

**“What kind of experience do you have for this job?”**

This is a golden opportunity to sell yourself, but before you do, be sure you know what is most critical to the interviewer. The interviewer is not just looking for a competent engineer, typist, etc. she is looking for someone who can contribute to the specific projects in the first six months. If you do not know the projects you will be involved with in the first six months, you must ask. The information you get will naturally let you answer the question more appropriately. For example, a company experiencing shipping problems might appreciate this answer: “My high-speed machining background and familiarity with your equipment will allow me to contribute quickly. I understand deadlines, delivery schedules, and the importance of getting the product shipped. Finally my awareness of economy and profit has always kept reject parts to a bare minimum.”

**“What are the broad responsibilities of a [i.e.] systems analyst?”**

This is suddenly becoming a very popular question with interviewers, and rightly so. There are three layers to it. First, it acknowledges that all employees nowadays are required to be more efficiency- and profit- conscious, and need to know how individual responsibilities fit into the big picture. Second, the answer provides some idea of how much you will have to be taught or reoriented if and when you join the company. Third, it is a very effective knock- out question- if you lack a comprehensive understanding of your job, that's it! You'll be knocked out then and there. You may wish to preface your answer with, “While the responsibilities of my job title vary somewhat from company to company, at my current/ last job, my responsibilities included...” Then, in case your background isn't an exact match, ask, “Which areas of relevant expertise haven't I covered?” That will give you the opportunity to recoup.

**“Describe how your current job relates to the overall goals of your department and company.”** This not only probes your understanding of department and corporate missions but also obliquely checks into your ability to function as a team member to get the work done. Consequently, whatever the specifics of your answer, include word to this effect: “The quality of my work directly affects the ability of others to do their work properly. As a team member, one has to be aware of the other players.”



**“What aspects of your current job do you consider most crucial?”**

The question is designed to determine time management, prioritization skills, and any inclination for task avoidance.

**“Are you willing to go where the company sends you?”**

Play for time and ask, “Are you talking about business travel, or is the company relocating?” In the final analysis, your answer should be “yes.” You don’t have to accept the job, but without the offer you have no decision to make. Your single goal at an interview is to sell yourself and win a job offer. Never forget, only when you have the offer is there a decision to make about that particular job.

**“What did you like/dislike about your last job?”**

The interview is looking for incompatibilities. If a trial lawyer says he or she dislikes arguing a point with colleagues, such a statement will destroy his or her candidacy.

Most interviewers start with a preamble by the interviewer about the company. Pay attention: That information will help you answer the question. In fact, any statement the interviewer makes about the job or corporation can be used to your advantage.

So, in answer, you liked everything about your last job. You might even say your company taught you the importance of certain keys from the business, achievement, or professional profile. Criticizing a prior employer is a warning flag that you could be a problem employee. Keep your answer short and positive.

The only thing your past employer could not offer might be something like “the ability to contribute more in different areas in the smaller environment you have here will, as I said, allow me to contribute far more in different areas.” Of course, if you interview with a large company, turn it around. “I work for a small company and don’t get the time to specialize in one or two major areas.”

**“What are your biggest accomplishments?”**

Keep your answer job related; from earlier exercises, a number of achievements should spring to mind. Do not exaggerate your contributions to major projects. You might begin your reply with: “Although I feel my biggest achievements are still ahead of me, I am proud of my involvement with... I made my contribution as part of the team and learned a lot from the process. We did it with hard work, concentration, and an eye for the bottom line.”

**“How do you organize and plan for major projects?”**

Effective planning requires both forward thinking (“Who and what am I going to need to get this job done?”) and backward thinking (“If this job must be completed by the twentieth, what steps must be made, and at what time, to achieve it?”). Effective planning also includes contingencies and budgets for time and cost overruns.

**“How many hours a week do you find it necessary to work to get your job done?”**

No absolutely correct answer here, so again, you have to cover all the bases. You must pick the best of both worlds: “I try to plan my time effectively and usually can. Our business always has its rushes, though, so I put in whatever effort it takes to get the job finished.” It is rare that the interviewer will then come back and ask for a specific



number of hours. If that does happen, turn the question around: "It depends on the projects. What is typical in your department?" The answer will give you the right cue, of course.

**"Can you work under pressure?"**

Actually, this common question often comes from an unskilled interviewer, because it is close-ended. The question does not give you the chance to elaborate. For example, you could say: "Yes, I usually find it stimulating. However, I believe in planning and proper management of my time to reduce panic deadlines within my area of responsibility."

**"What are your greatest strengths?"**

Isolate high points from your background and build in a couple of the key value profiles from different categories. You will want to demonstrate pride, reliability and the ability to stick with a difficult task yet change course rapidly when required.

**"What interests you most about this job?"**

Be straightforward, unless you haven't been given adequate information to determine an answer, in which case you should ask a question of your own to clarify. Perhaps you could say, "Before answering, could I ask you to tell me a little more about the role this job plays in the departmental goals?" or, "Where is the biggest vacuum in your department at the moment?" or,

"Could you describe a typical day for me?" The additional information you gather with those questions provide the appropriate slant to your answer- that is, what is the greatest benefit to the department and to the company. Your answer in part might include, "I'm looking for a challenge and an opportunity to make a contribution, so if you feel the biggest challenge in the department is \_\_\_\_\_, I'm the one for the job." Then include the personality traits and experience that support your statements. Perhaps: "I like a challenge, my background demonstrates excellent problem-solving abilities [give some examples], and I always see a project through to the finish."

**"What are you looking for in your next job?"**

Avoid saying what you want the company to give you; you must say what you want in terms of what you can give to your employer. The key word in the following example is "contribution": "My experience at the XYZ Corporation has shown me I have a talent for motivating people. That is demonstrated by my team's absenteeism dropping 20 percent, turnover steadying at 10 percent, and production increasing 12 percent. I am looking for an opportunity to continue that kind of contribution, and a company and supervisor who will help me develop in a professional manner."

**"Why should I hire you?"**

Your answer will be short and to the point. It will highlight areas from your background that relate to current needs and problems. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, meeting it point by point with your skills. Finish your answer with: "I have the qualifications you need [itemize them], I'm a team player, I take direction and I have the desire to make a thorough success."

**"What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?"**

This question will come only after a full explanation of the job has been given. If not, qualify the question with: "What voids are you trying to eradicate when you fill this



position?” Then recap the interviewer’s job description, followed with: “I can bring to this job a determination to see projects through to a proper conclusion. I listen and take direction well. I am analytical and don’t jump to conclusions. And finally, I understand we are in business to make a profit, so I keep an eye on cost and return.” End with: “How do these qualifications fit your needs?” or, “What else are you looking for?”

**“Describe a difficult problem you’ve had to deal with.”**

This is a favorite tough question. It is not so much the difficult problem that’s important- it’s the approach you take to solving problems in general. It is designed to probe your professional profile; specifically, your analytical skills.

“Well, I always follow a five- step format with a difficult problem. One, I stand back and examine the problem. Two, I recognize the problem as the symptom of other, perhaps hidden, factors. Three, I make a list of possible solutions to the problem. Four, I weigh both the consequences and cost of each solution, and determine the best solution. And five, I go to my boss, outline the problem, make my recommendation, and ask for my supervisor’s advice and approval.”

Then give an example of a problem and your solution. Here is a thorough example: “When I joined my present company, I filled the shoes of a manager who has been fired. Turnover was very high. My job was to reduce turnover and increase performance. Sales of our new copier had slumped for the fourth quarter in a row, partly due to ineffective customer service. The new employer was very concerned, and he even gave me permission to clean my house. The cause of the problem? The customer- service team never had any training. All my people needed were some intensive training. My boss gave me permission to join the American Society for Training and Development, which cost \$120. With what I learned there, I turned the department around. Sales continued to slump in my first quarter. Then they skyrocketed. Management was pleased with the sales and felt my job in customer service had played a real part in the turnaround; my boss was pleased because the solution was effective and cheap. I only had to replace two customer- service people.”

**“What would your references say?”**

You have nothing to lose by being positive. If you demonstrate how well you and your boss got along, the interviewer does not have to ask, “What do you dislike about your current manager?”

It is a good idea to ask past employers to give you a letter of recommendation. That way, you know what is being said. It reduces the chances of the company representative checking up on you, and if you are asked this question, you can pull out a sheaf of rousing accolades and hand them over. If the company checks your references, it must by law have your written permission. That permission is usually included in the application form you sign. All that said never offer references or written recommendations unless they are requested.

**After the Interview**

- After the interview, as soon as possible, do a written recap of the interview while it is still fresh in your mind. Answer these questions:
- Whom did you meet (names and titles)?



- What did the job entail?
- What are the first projects/biggest challenges?
- Why can you do the job?
- What aspects of the interview went poorly? Why? (Many people get new jobs based on their relative lack of negatives as compared to the other applicants. So it is mandatory that you look for and recognize any negatives from your performance. That is the only way you will have an opportunity to package and overcome those negatives in your follow-up procedure and subsequent interviews.)
- What is the agreed-upon next step?
- What was said during the last few minutes of the interview?
- Write your thank you note. Have your recruiter review it first. This should reflect that you:
  - Paid attention to what was being said.
  - Understood the importance of the interviewer's comments.
  - Are excited about the job, can do it and want it.
  - Can contribute to those first major projects.
  - Use the right words/phrases in your thank you note. Here are some suggestions:
    - "Upon reflection," or "Having thought about the meeting..."
    - Recognize – "I recognize the importance of..."
    - Listen – "Listening to the points you made..."
    - Impressed – let the interviewer know you were impressed with the people / product / service / facility / market / position, but do not overdo it.
    - Confidence – there is a job to be done and a challenge to be met. Let the interviewer know you are confident of doing both well.
    - Interest – if you want the job (or next interview) say so. At this stage, the company is buying and you are selling. Ask for the job in a positive and enthusiastic manner.
    - Appreciation – As a courtesy and mark of professional manners, you must express appreciation for the time the interviewer took out of his or her busy schedule.
  - In the thank you note, when appropriate, mention the names of the people you met at the interview. Draw attention to one of the topics of general interest to the interviewers. Keep it short – less than one page. Send the letter (preferably via e-mail) within 24 hours of the interview.