

INTERVIEWING & SALARY NEGOTIATION

When going into an interview **KNOW what you want and what you have to offer**. This is the first opportunity the employer has to meet and speak with you so your **FIRST IMPRESSION** is critical. Your goal is to show the employer that you can not only do the job but you will also be a valuable member to their team. You're not just choosing a career-you're making a choice about your life. Interviewing is a step to getting that perfect job or finding out where and how you will fit in with that organization.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- **Research Yourself:** Analyze how your strengths, personal and academic experience, as well as your interests can be transferred to the position for which you are applying. It is not easy to articulate your strong points to an interviewer if you are unable to articulate them to yourself. If you need assistance with researching yourself, set up an appointment with a Career Advisor.
- **Research the Employer:** Find out about the company's services, products, growth and future prospects. You will be in a better position to ask intelligent questions that will impress the interviewer with your initiative and your knowledge of the organization. You can obtain this information from sources such as:
 - Company literature available in the CRC filing cabinets or from the company directly.
 - Newspaper business sections, particularly those in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The South Florida Business Journal*, and the local newspapers of the company's sites.
 - Employer directories such as *The Directory of Business Information Resources*, *Hoover's Handbook*, *Job Binders*, etc..
 - Magazines such as *Business Week*, *Fortune*, and *Forbes*.
 - WWW sites.
- **Know the Specific Job:** It is important that you be prepared to discuss with the employer why you are qualified for the position. Make sure you have a clear description of the job and the required skills before going into an interview. Employers often list more qualifications in the job posting than can realistically be met by most potential candidates. Don't allow this to discourage you from pursuing the position; just be sure to be able to elaborate on the many qualifications you do have.
- **Review Potential Questions:** By preparing ideas in advance, you'll avoid fumbling for answers during the interview. Instead, you'll come across as poised, focused, and confident. Also, **prepare questions you would like to ask the employer**. For example, "How do you evaluate job performance?"
- **Dress Professionally:** Your interview attire should be appropriate for the position for which you are applying. If you are unsure what to wear, opt for conservative dress. If you dress like you don't care, the organization will reciprocate. Remember, an interview is an important place to make a good first impression.
- **Be Punctual:** Ask in advance the exact location of your interview, including the building and room number. Plan to arrive *10-15 minutes* early. Use the waiting time to check your appearance and go over questions and answers. Double-check the date, time, and location of the interview. Make sure you give yourself enough time to arrive.
- **Bring Extra Copies of Your Resume:** Employers do lose things too so bring extra copies of your resume. Also there may be other employers sitting in the interview so make sure to have enough copies for them.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Arrive at least 10 to 15 minutes early:** This gives you a chance to relax, think about questions you will be asked, and to get a last minute glance at your resume.
- **Greet the Interviewer:** It is important to greet your interviewer by name, with a firm handshake and a smile.
- **Be Self-confident, Alert and Interested:** Speak clearly and confidently about your skills and qualifications. Confidence without arrogance is important!
- **Do Not Smoke or Chew Gum**
- **Pay attention to the employer and LISTEN carefully:** It is easiest to answer effectively if you listen effectively.
- **Be Aware of Body Language:** Sit comfortably, maintain good body posture and good eye contact.
- **Be Positive in Your Responses:** Interviewers don't want to hear why they should **not** hire you. Concentrate on your positive attributes. Negative statements may reflect poorly on you!
- **Always use Examples:** "I have a lot of initiative" sounds nice, but it is not as powerful as: "I have a lot of initiative. For example, I thought it would be beneficial to my school to get ramps for individuals who use wheelchairs, so I recruited interested students and went to the administration with a proposal. Now we have ramps at every building."
- **Be Articulate:** Do not use slang. Avoid rambling; think before answering.
- **Don't Fear Silence:** Those uncomfortable pauses always seem longer to you than the interviewer. A pause before answering a question not only gives you a chance to formulate your thoughts; it lets the employer know you are thinking.
- **Ascertain Needed Follow-up Action:** At the end of the interview, find out what happens next. Will the interviewer get in touch with you? If so, when?
- **Express Thanks:** Thank the interviewer for his/her time and ask for his/her business card so you can follow up.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **First-Evaluate the Interview:** Consider where you did well as well as questions with which you had difficulty. Make notes to yourself
- **Second-Send a Thank You Letter:** Send a Thank You letter within one day of the interview. Be sure to use the correct name and title of the person who interviewed you. This will be easy if you still have the business card. Emphasize your interest in the position. Mention any facts you may have omitted in the interview. If you are turning down the position, you can do so in the letter also. (See Thank You Letter Handout)

- **Follow Up:** If you do not get a response soon after the date, which the interviewer indicated, it is a good idea to telephone and inquire about the position.
- **Accepting, Stalling and Rejecting Offers:** Never accept a job offer until you have obtained a clear explanation of your responsibilities.

After accepting a job offer:

- Do not interview for any other position.
- Reject all other offers by telephone and with a short letter.
- Never renege on an offer that you have accepted.

Declining a job offer should also be done with care.

- Be as diplomatic as possible. In addition to common courtesy, you want to leave the door open for future career possibilities.
- Say something positive about the employer. Even if you do not feel positively about the company leaving a positive impression will not hurt.
- Express appreciation for the offer and for their confidence in you.

SAMPLE QUESTIONS POSED BY INTERVIEWERS

- How do you work under pressure?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?
- Why did you choose to become a _____?
- How do you spend your spare time?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Tell me about your extra-curricular activities and interests.
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Why do you feel you will be successful in this field?
- Tell me about yourself (in two minutes).
- Why did you decide to interview with our organization?
- What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing work experiences?
- Why should we hire you?
- How would your last supervisor describe you?
- What qualifications do you think a person would need to be successful in this position?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

- What skills are valuable or most useful for success in the job I'm applying for?
- What are the career paths and opportunities in this department?
- What personality traits do you consider critical to success in this job?
- To whom would I report?
- Describe typical first year assignments on the job.
- What is the timetable for filling this position?

HANDLING TOUGH QUESTIONS

Here it is: that time during the interview when you are asked those dreaded questions. You know, the ones like “Why should we hire you”, “What is your greatest weakness”, “Where do you see yourself in five years” or “Why do you want to work here?” These are all questions that the interviewer wants to know about you. An interview is a chance for you to sell yourself; if you have done enough research on **you** it will be easier to answer the questions.

Here are some hints for handling difficult questions.

“What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

This is the chance for you to sell yourself by revealing your strengths and a not too serious weakness. The employer may be evaluating how well you know yourself and how honest you are. When disclosing your weakness it is best to reveal that you are working on improving it. For example, you might say, “Because I tend to work too hard I don’t have a lot of time for recreation. However, I am currently trying to balance my time more evenly.”

“Tell me about yourself.”

A common opener, this broad question can “throw” many interviewees. It is in fact a “sell-me” invitation. Develop a brief summation of your background leading into your interest and desire to work for the organization as well as your qualifications for the position. Leave out personal information such as age, marital status, health, and

“Where do you see yourself in five years?”

This question gathers a lot of useful information: maturity, foresight, ambition, degree of preparation in career planning, and commitment to the organization and profession. If you find it hard to look five years out, you can try this: “Five years seems like a long time. I can see myself as a Career Advisor in two years. Five years from now, I might have enough experience to be an Assistant Director of Career Services.”

“Why should I hire you?”

From your research, you should have gathered information on entry level opportunities within the organization and the qualifications for those positions. Here is an example of an answer: “I think you should hire me because I have the skills you need in this position. My student services skills match the requirements as I experienced advising students as a Graduate Assistant during graduate school.”

Though these questions are asked of nearly every individual who interviews, there may be some questions that are more specifically geared towards your resume. For example, if *your resume doesn’t show continuous employment*, you should expect to be asked for an explanation. A positive way to respond may be, “I didn’t work in 1995 because I was nearing the end of my degree program at Nova Southeastern University. I realized that if I attended school full time I could complete my degree in one year, rather than working and taking three years to finish.”

If you were laid off last year, you may be asked why you left your last job. Don’t answer in a way that dispels any shameful or guilty feelings. “I was one of 150 people laid off last year when the corporation went through a major downsizing.”

If you were fired for some reason you may be very worried about responding to a question on this matter. “To be honest with you, I just didn’t fit into the organization. My supervisor and I decided it was best for me to leave. While this was a devastating experience, I feel I am ready to begin again.”

These are honest and straightforward responses that will be acceptable to an employer. It is important, however, for you to come to terms with the issue and move on in your career.

LEGAL ISSUES

Many interviewers have had little training and don't realize that they are asking improper questions; other interviewers know and ask anyway to see how you handle uncomfortable situations.

You may be asked and should answer the questions:

- Where have you worked before?
- Are you willing to travel, relocate?
- What is your social security number?
- What education have you completed?
- What is your address and phone number?

You may be asked and need not answer these questions:

- Are you married?
- With whom do you live?
- What does your spouse do?
- Were your parents born in this country?
- How old are you?
- Have you ever been arrested?
- How tall are you?

If you feel uncomfortable answering an interview question which may be personal and/or irrelevant to the position, there are ways to avoid giving the interviewer an answer that is inappropriate for the occasion. You may wish to ask the interviewer if the question is in fact relevant to the position and how s/he thinks your job performance might be affected. It is your right to give no response to an inappropriate question, but if you feel comfortable in doing so you may choose to answer.

SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

One of the trickiest parts of interviewing that often makes candidates uncomfortable is salary negotiation. Concerns range from not knowing appropriate salary ranges to pricing yourself out of a job.

Salaries depend mainly on two things: the work and the location. Most companies share salary data with each other: the typical big-company personnel department will have breakdowns on the distribution of salaries for their types of work and locales. So they generally know what your job is worth.

To save money on the cost of labor many companies try to trick you by asking how much you want. Sometimes there is a slot on your application with an innocent name such as “desired salary range.” Because most people automatically fill in all blanks on a form, they will put down a figure.

Unfortunately, many people underestimate their worth, so they will put down a low figure. Most likely a company will not offer you what you are worth in this situation and some will even bargain down your already undervalued amount. So, the bottom line is: **Don’t tell them how much you’ll take.**

Negotiation

Before you begin negotiating, you need to have a minimum figure in mind. Researching your field and talking to people who are doing similar work in an area with similar living costs is very helpful. Just remember, people from rural Indiana, for example, have no idea how expensive it is to live in Boston. Some resources you can use to help you in your salary research are SIGI-Plus, a computerized career-guidance program, the Occupational Outlook Handbook, and the NACE Salary Survey, which are all available in the Career Resource Center.

During the interview

If the topic comes up too early in the interview, it is advisable to postpone the discussion. For example, you could say, “I would be happy to discuss my salary requirements, but I feel I need to know more about the position first. Could you tell me about...” The more you know about the job, the better you will be able to pinpoint what it is worth in today’s market. It also helps to be prepared for this question and do research on typical salary ranges for this position.

If you are in the final round of interviewing and you are asked about your salary expectations, it is appropriate to clarify, “Are you prepared to make me an offer?” Try to get the interviewer to commit to you as the preferred candidate.

Finally, the inevitability of the **salary negotiation** arises. You may be able to ask what they have in mind or what they have budgeted. If they give you a salary range, you can say why you think you deserve to receive the higher end of the scale, based on your knowledge and experience.

RESOURCES

Job Interview Almanac. Adams Media Corporation, 1996

Dynamite Answers to Interview Questions. Ronald L. Krannich & Caryl Rae Krannich, Ph.Ds; Impact Publications, 1994.

Interview For Success: A Practical Guide to Increasing Job Interviews, Offers, and Salaries. Ronald Krannich; Impact Publications, 1995.