

Interviewing Techniques

An interview is a two-way process. The employer is provided an opportunity to assess how well you communicate, how well-qualified you are for the position and your level of motivation. As a candidate, you should be attempting to identify whether or not you would want to work for the particular organization.

Remember that an employer is using the interview to evaluate the total you. This includes your attitude, appearance, confidence, level of preparedness, knowledge of the position and organization, and your ability to successfully perform the duties of the position. It is important to be yourself and convey a positive attitude.

Preparation for the Interview

The key to successful interviewing is preparation. Thoroughly research the organization, career field, issues and trends related to the type of work you would be doing, and be prepared to "speak the language" of the professionals who work in the field.

You will want to learn as much as possible about:

- The size of the organization
- Its main products and services
- Its financial health
- Its potential for growth
- Who its competitors are
- Types of clients

Information about the organization can be obtained from people in the field, literature from the organization, libraries, trade journals, business magazines and directories.

Preparation also means knowing yourself. You will be expected to articulate your goals, values, interests and skills. Know what you can offer to the organization as well as your reasons for wanting to work for the particular employer. Prior to the interview, analyze your strengths and weaknesses related to the position and know exactly what you want to say. You are strongly encouraged to participate in a mock interview with a Career Development staff member so you can improve your interviewing techniques and become more familiar with the "feel" of an interview situation.

Appearance

The way you dress contributes to an employer's first impression of you and suggests the image you will present to other employers and to the public on the job. The type of dress that is appropriate varies according to the type of position and organization with which you interview. Dress as it appears others in this type of position/organization dress. Clothes should be clean, pressed and well-fitting.

For many positions such as banking, sales, management and insurance, a conservative navy or gray suit is appropriate. For interviews in such fields as retail, merchandising and advertising, a more colorful and stylish suit is acceptable. Less formal attire is suitable for social service, education and arts-related positions. For these types of jobs, men can wear dress pants, jacket and tie, women can wear a shirt, blouse and blazer. If you are unsure, follow the old saying that it's better to overdress than to be underdressed.

One final note on dress: keep jewelry functional, shoes polished, hair neatly combed and carry a good pen and professional-looking folder with extra copies of your resume in it.

Interview Basics

- Be certain of the time and place of the interview.
- Arrive for your appointment at least 10 minutes early.
- When introduced, use the interviewer's full name, preceded by Mr. or Ms.
- If the interviewer offers to shake hands, return the handshake with a firm and dry grip.
- Wait to be invited to sit down.
- Maintain eye contact without staring.
- Body language is important. Posture should be erect, relaxed and open.
- Lead the conversation to highlight your strengths.
- Never ask about salary or benefits until the interviewer brings this up first in the conversation.
- If you need clarification of a question, ask for it.
- Taking a moment or two to think of a response to a question is acceptable. Use specific, concrete examples and refer to your accomplishments and strengths.
- Be prepared with your own questions.
- Always be courteous, sincere and honest.
- Send a thank-you letter soon after the interview is over.

Develop an Interview Style

Smile, be friendly and be sure to participate actively in the interview. Be prepared by having intelligent and appropriate questions to ask. Be yourself and don't be afraid to show a sense of humor. Stay positive. Being negative about your last supervisor or position will reflect negatively on you. Above all, be enthusiastic!

Although the interviewer should take the initiative to end the discussion, you should watch for clues that indicate the interview is over. If the interviewer does not tell you what the next step in the process will be, ask. Finally, reaffirm your interest and make a strong summary statement that repeats your qualifications for the position.

Telephone Interviewing Tips

As employers try to cut cost and recruit more economically, the telephone is fast becoming a popular tool in recruiting. Keep in mind these tips if you have a telephone interview:

- Arrange a time and a place where you can have privacy.
- Stand up when you are talking on the phone -- your voice will be clearer.
- Talk slowly.

There are also some things you should have with you during the interview. These are:

- A copy of your resume
- A note pad and pen
- Five or six questions you want to ask
- Company information with highlighted sections
- A calendar or date book
- A watch or clock

During a telephone interview, you will not be able to rely on your good looks, clothes and eye contact. Therefore, you must make sure you convey enthusiasm in your voice. Voice reflects personality, be in control and set a steady pace.

Typical Interview Questions

- How would you describe yourself?
- What are your greatest strengths? Weaknesses?
- Do you think your grades are indicative of your academic achievement?
- What special qualifications do you have for this position?
- Why did you decide to attend Ripon College?
- What led you to choose your field of major study?
- Tell me about your part-time or summer jobs.
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
- What would you like to be doing five (10) years from now?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What salary do you expect?
- What interests you about our product or service?
- Do you prefer to work with others or by yourself?
- Will you be willing to relocate?
- Why should I hire you?
- Describe the relationship that exists between a supervisor and those reporting to him/her.
- What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
- How would you describe your leadership style?
- Do you see yourself as an extrovert or an introvert?
- Are you a risk-taker? Give an example.
- What is the last book you read? Did you enjoy it? Why?
- Do you have any heroes? Name one and how that person has influenced your life.
- Give an example of a recent conflict you faced and how you resolved it.
- What have you learned from your mistakes?

Questions to ask Employers

- What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
- What industry trends will occur in this company?
- What are your expectations of new hires?
- Describe the typical first year assignments.
- What makes your firm different from its competitors?
- How would you describe your organization's personality?
- Tell me about your training programs.
- How has this company fared during the recent recession?