

## Steps for a Successful Personal Interview

### Informal / Formal Interviews

- An interview is not just a casual meeting between two parties with a common interest and it is also never an informal “heart to heart” conversation. It represents an opportunity for you to “sell” yourself and an opportunity for the employer to evaluate you:
  - Qualifications
  - Enthusiasm
  - Attitude
  - Maturity
  - Communications
  - Stability
  - Energy level
  - Confidence
  - Intelligence
  - Analytical skills

### Sell Your Successes

- Since your objective is to get an offer, you must show why you are the best candidate for the position. Before you get there, know what you can do for the company and be able to explain how your past career accomplishments are relevant to this position.
- The interviewer will probably ask “Tell me about yourself.” Have a concise, informative, upbeat answer for this question and wrap up with “I’d like to tell you more and tailor it to this opportunity. What are the key responsibilities in this position?” This puts the interview right on track and you can spend time explaining the value that you would bring to the company.
- Showcase your value by detailing your accomplishments, focusing on the problems you have encountered and your solutions (preferably expressed in dollars).
- Be careful here—don’t make yourself sound like the sports star taking all the credit as if there was no team support. Use terms like accountable, responsible, team, directed, coordinated, and managed. Companies are looking for “can-do” employees and being negative about past employers or managers reflects poorly on you.
- Highlight career experiences that closely relate to the opportunity. Learn everything you can about the company from every available source. Invest plenty of time becoming familiar with the company’s website.

### Have Questions Prepared

- An organized list of well thought out questions will make you much more efficient as well as show your interest and intellect. They are equally as important as the questions you answer and will positively influence the interviewer’s assessment of you. This will also give the interviewer openings to sell you on the company and the opportunity.
- It also ensures you won’t overlook needed information.
- Your list of questions should be carried in your portfolio or folder. Make a list of all the data you need to gather. From that list, you need to develop 10–15 strong questions. These questions should include: “Why do you feel this position would be attractive to someone with my background and skills?,” “What things make it attractive to be an employee of your company?” or “What qualities do you appreciate most in a member of your staff?” (Often followed by “What do you appreciate least?”)
- Having 10–15 questions is very important because most of the data you want will be given to you in various ways throughout the interview. At one or several points in the interview, the interviewers will ask if you have any other questions. At this point a very shrewd thing to do is to pull out your questions list, scan it and ask a couple of questions. This will make it crystal clear to the interviewers that you took the interview seriously and were prepared.
- Preparation and execution are the keys to showing why you are the top candidate.

## What to Bring

- Before your interview, make certain you have directions, a map if needed, and the contact information of the person with whom you are meeting.
- Limit yourself to one hand-held item (briefcase, purse, or portfolio). Carry it in your left hand so you are prepared to shake hands during introductions.
- The best choice is a thin folder or portfolio that holds a legal pad. It looks professional and gives you a place to carry cards, resumes, pens, and references. For quick access organize everything in your portfolio before the interview.

## During Interview

- Remembering names from introductions and using them in conversation during the interview will help you make a stronger connection with the interviewer.
- Early in the interview, ascertain the skills, experience and objective being sought by the company and the interviewer. This will help you calibrate both your questions and answers throughout the interview. One way to accomplish this is to say, “The recruiter gave me enough information to get me excited about your opportunity, but I would like for you to review more of the details about your needs. Could you describe the position and what is involved?”
- Once you know the employer’s needs, you can provide examples of previous accomplishments that are relevant to the position. Interviewers interpret past results as being a predictor of future behavior.
- Remember the interviewer’s interest in you is driven purely by company need, and they want to hire the person who can do the most for them. Your attention should be focused on company needs, while your agenda temporarily takes a backseat. Once you have created a strong interest from the company, you can discuss your needs, and if they are within the realm of reason, you have an excellent chance of achieving them.
- Be prepared to discuss why you want to change employers and have reasonably detailed explanations for each past job change. Having accurate and well thought out answers to these questions beforehand will provide a level of comfort to interviewer.
- If the hiring manager(s) believes you will accomplish the company’s objectives, you will be considered for employment. Being capable and liked will get you an offer.

## Interview Questions

- To determine your accomplishments, personality, desires and habits, the company will ask a variety of questions. While there are entire books devoted to listing hundreds of interview questions, here are a few that you should be prepared to answer:
  - Q - Why should we hire you? Why do you want to change jobs?
  - Q - What training or qualifications do you have for the job?
  - Q - How have you helped your company’s bottom-line?
  - Q – How does your past experience relate to this opening?
  - Q - What has made you successful?
  - Q - How many and what type of people have you managed?
  - Q - Have you ever hired or terminated anyone?
  - Q - How does your family feel about this possible move?
- There are also some very sophisticated behavioral interviewing techniques in use today. The idea is to examine your past behavior patterns in specific situations. Sometimes it only takes one situation to establish a pattern. The interviewer assumes that behavior repeats itself.
- An example of a behavioral interview question is “Have you ever made a mistake at work?” The answer should be yes since everyone makes mistakes. Next the interviewer asks probing follow-up questions about the mistake. The agenda is to find out if you learn from mistakes.

## Interview Questions

- Another example is “Tell me about a time when you were frustrated” with a follow-up question of “What happened?” Again, the interviewer is looking for patterns either positive or negative.
  - Is this person a quitter?
  - How aggressive is this person?
  - How determined is this person?
  - Did this person come up with creative solutions?
  - What are this person’s human relations skills on the job?
- When answering open ended questions, be brief. If the interviewer wants elaboration, he or she will ask.
- If by the end of the interview you are interested in the position, ask for the job. This does not commit you to anything and may be the difference between getting an offer or a rejection letter. Tell the key interviewer (probably also your manager-to-be) that you are interested in the opportunity and working directly with them. If you feel the “chemistry” is good, they need to know it so they’ll go to bat for you. Interviewers like to hear positive things too.
- Close with these words: “I am very interested in what I have learned here today and the opportunity presented. Is there anything more you need to know about my background to ensure we go to the next step of the process?”

## Interview Wrap-up

- Immediately after the interview, call your recruiter. Be prepared to discuss what you liked about the opportunity as well as any concerns you may have. Also discuss the answers you gave to the difficult questions they asked. If the recruiter is made aware of any miscommunications in the interview, they can often rectify the situation. Most likely you will have unanswered questions and your recruiter can help gather additional information.
- As soon as possible after the interview, write or e-mail a brief “thank you” note to everyone with whom you interviewed.
  - The first sentence thanks the recipient and staff for their time and courtesy.
  - The second sentence pays a sincere compliment, something along the lines of “I was impressed with...”
  - The third sentence communicates why you are qualified for the job. You might say, “I am confident I can meet or exceed your expectations in the position.”
  - The fourth sentence tells the prospective employer that you are interested in the position. It is important the hiring manager knows you have a strong interest.
  - The last sentence asks for the job in a positive and enthusiastic way.
- In this letter you have not said you will accept an offer and no compensation has been established. You are merely continuing to build interest in you as a candidate and foster the relationship you began in the interview.
- For thank you notes to the other members of the interview team, you might use this format:
  - The first sentence thanks the interviewer for his or her time and courtesy.
  - The second sentence references something specific about the interview. Again, good notes help. An example would be, “I really enjoyed our discussion of...”
  - The last sentence says something like, “I really hope we get the opportunity to work together.” The main feature about this thank you note is its brevity.