

Interviewing Success

Chuck Reece

I. Preparing for a Job Interview - Advance Planning

- A. The key to reducing your anxiety during an interview is to be well-prepared for the interview. Give serious thought to the following: What are my priorities, interests, and goals?
- B. Why do you want this position or to work for this company? This topic is bound to arise so be ready for it. You must research the company or organization, industry, and the position prior to the interview. Ideally, you would have done much of this prior to making application, but you need to know as much as possible about their operations and the role you would play in the organization.
- C. Be prepared to answer questions about your skills and abilities - not just the dates and titles of your previous jobs. Give thought to specific skills and accomplishments.
- D. While you probably can't learn new technical skills before the interview, you can analyze your personality. Most employers can train you on the technical aspects of the job - they are looking for a compatible work ethic and personality.
- E. Practice answering sample interview questions with a friend. This will really help and can give you an edge over other candidates.

II. The Day of the Interview - Final Preparations

- A. What to wear? You should dress professionally. Avoid clothes that make a bold statement; conservative business dress is most appropriate. You want dress clothes that fit well and make you feel comfortable and confident. Don't forget to shine your shoes. Don't wear perfume or cologne. Make-up should be minimal.
- B. Where to go? Know the location of the interview - building, room or person to which to report, know with whom you will be interviewing.
- C. When to get there? Arrive with plenty of time to spare. Now is not the time to drive around lost. Not surprisingly, being late for an interview does not make a good first impression.
- D. Bring a few extra copies of your resume and references. Carry them in a small leather portfolio. Bring a nice pen and notepad in case you need to make notes.
- E. Come alone - bringing friends and family sends the impression you need hand-holding.
- F. Do not smoke immediately prior to the interviewer. If the interviewer doesn't care for cigarette smoke, they will most likely smell it on you and choose another candidate. Breath mints are a good idea while you are waiting for the interview, but not during the interview.

III. During the Interview

A. First impressions count!

1. Firm handshake, but not bone-crushingly firm. Call the interviewer by name (last name until told otherwise). Make appropriate eye contact, but don't stare him or her down.
2. Preparing for the first question is important. Many people talk way too much, as nervous people will do, and talk themselves out of contention for the job.
3. The Two Minute Drill - The interviewer asks that first question, usually something like "Tell us about yourself" or "Why are you here" or "Why do you think you want this job" and you want to be ready to clearly and concisely convince them that you are a strong candidate. Briefly describe your early years, your experience, your education, and your future. Now the tricky part - time yourself until you can do it in two minutes or less. Summarize your credentials for the job and explain why you want it in two minutes!

B. Be positive about your abilities and your past employment. Never criticize a former employer or supervisor - no matter how richly deserved! Do not discuss personal problems, financial problems, or jobs you failed to get. Minimize discussion of your family or personal life. If you describe yourself as "happily married with wonderful kids" that may not endear you to the interviewer recently divorced and involved in an ugly custody battle.

C. Be confident without appearing arrogant or cocky. Assert yourself using a clear voice. Avoid repeating annoying phrases such as "Uhhhhmm..."

D. Look for matches between the company's needs and what you have to offer. They are looking for someone compatible with their organization so tell them if you are a fit.

E. Be prepared to ask the interviewer appropriate questions. Salary and vacation are not appropriate topics - let the interviewer bring those up. Ask about the other departments with which you would work or about the customer or manufacturing processes, etc.

F. What about illegal questions from the interviewer? While you could respond "I'm not going to answer that illegal question" try to figure out what the interviewer is really asking and address the underlying concern.

IV. Post-Interview Wrap-up

A. Send a brief e-mail, thank you note, or letter describing your continued or heightened enthusiasm. This gives you an opportunity to perhaps improve upon a response you gave that you wish you had answered differently.

B. Telephone follow-up calls should be limited (or not at all) since the interviewer generally will call you to offer you a job or a follow-up interview. You might hurt your chances if you stalk the interviewer.