

Interviewing Skills



The WorkPlace

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How NOT to Get Hired!

Vice Presidents and personnel directors of the 100 largest corporations were asked to describe their most unusual experience interviewing prospective employees:

1. A job applicant challenged the interviewer to an arm wrestle.
2. Interviewee wore an iPod, explaining that she could listen to the interviewer and the music at the same time.
3. Candidate explained that her long-term goal was to replace the interviewer.
4. Candidate announced that she hadn't had lunch and proceeded to eat a hamburger and French Fries in the interviewer's office.
5. Candidate said he never finished high school because he was kidnapped and kept in a closet in Mexico.
6. Candidate fell and broke arm during interviewing.
7. Applicant said if he was hired he would demonstrate his loyalty by having the corporate logo tattooed on his forearm.
8. Applicant interrupted interview to phone her therapist for advice on how to answer specific interview questions.
9. Candidate brought a large dog to interview.
10. Applicant refused to sit down and insisted on being interviewed standing up.
11. Candidate dozed off during interview.

Top ten reasons applicants are not hired:

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Overbearing – too aggressive – “know-it-all”
3. Inability to communicate clearly – poor English Language
4. Lack of planning for career – no purpose or goals
5. Lack of interest and enthusiasm – passive (waits for things to happen), indifference (uncaring)
6. Lack of confidence and poise – nervous; ill-at-ease
7. Failure to participate in activities/lack of involvement
8. Overemphasis on money – interested only in best dollar offer
9. Poor school record
10. Unwilling to start at the bottom – expects too much too soon

What Employers Really Want to Know

Expectation #1: Do You Look Like the Right Person?

Appearance: First impressions do count! An interviewee's initial appearance, greeting and interview performance help determine if they're a good fit with their company.

- Personal appearance and grooming
- Manner and social skills
- Paperwork such as resume and job applications

Expectation #2: Can You Be Counted On?

Dependability: Employers want to know if you will get the job done. They will be asking questions to see what kind of worker you are.

- Do you come in on time?
- Can you be trusted?
- Will work be completed in a timely manner?
- How well do you communicate with others?
- Do you work better independently or collaboratively?

Expectation #3: Can You Do the Job?

Experience & Education: Employers need to clearly identify you have the experience and education necessary to complete the work according to company values and procedures.

- Does the candidate have enough work experience to qualify for the position?
- Does the candidate have the desired education or will additional training be needed?
- Is there outside hobbies or volunteer work that qualify the person for this position?
- Does the candidate have examples of completed work or achievements?
- Does the candidate clearly demonstrate knowledge, skills, and abilities for the position?

Phase 1: Interview Preparation

Rules for Dress and Grooming:

Here is a checklist to help you prepare for the interview:

- Get a good night's sleep
- Shower, shampoo & shave
- Brush your teeth & use mouthwash
- Use a deodorant
- Comb your hair; be sure hair is not in your eyes
- Clean and trim your nails
- Wear dress pants or skirt, with a suit jacket and closed toed dress shoes.
- Avoid flashy colors & loud fashions
- Avoid excessive jewelry & remove visible body piercings

Research Beforehand:

Before the interview you should research several topics. Use company websites, former clients, current employees, HR representative, company brochures, LinkedIn, etc. to help you research for the following topics:

- **The Organization:** What is the company size? What products or services are offered? Does the company have a good reputation? What are the company's values?
- **The Interviewer:** If you know who is interviewing you, what is their job title and responsibility? Do you share hobbies with or know any family members or business contacts of the interviewer?
- **The Position:** What are the primary duties of the position? What knowledge, skills and abilities do you have that will aid you in this position? Identify specific examples from your experience and education that will demonstrate your ability to do the job.

The Day of the Interview:

Arrive Early and Alone: Arrive at the interview a few minutes early. Be sure that if you had someone bring you, the individual waits in the vehicle

Final Grooming: Stop in the restroom or check your rearview mirror for a final perusal. Head into the waiting room when you're ready.

Waiting Room Behavior: Assume the interview starts in the waiting room. Be polite to the receptionist and greet in a friendly manner and with a smile. Interviewers have been known to ask the receptionist how you conducted yourself, how you treated the receptionist, and if you were on time. Do not play with your cell phone or other electronic devices.

Phase 2: Opening Moves

The first few minutes of an interview are very important. Remember first impressions count. Be aware of the following:

Initial Greeting:

Greet the interviewer in a friendly manner, smile and shake his/her hand in a firm, but not crushing, handshake.

Posture:

How you stand and sit can make a difference. You look more interested if you lean forward in your chair when talking or listening. If you lean back, you may look too relaxed. Avoid crossing your arms across your chest or placing hands in your pockets.

Voice:

You may be nervous, but try to sound enthusiastic and friendly. Your voice should be neither too soft nor too loud. Smile, enunciate and avoid speaking too fast. Practice sounding confident.

Eye Contact:

Direct eye contact is essential, you look more confident when you look at the interviewer's eyes while you listen or speak.

Distracting Habits:

Nervous habits can be distracting to the interviewer. What nervous habits do you have? Practice minimizing those habits before the actual interview.

Establishing the Relationship:

Almost all interviews begin with informal chitchat. Favorite subjects are the weather, whether you had any trouble getting there, and similar topics. These first few minutes allow an interviewer to develop a rapport and find out how you relate to others socially. Be sure to address the interviewer formally (i.e. Mr. Rogers or Ms. Evans), and you may want to compliment something in the interviewer's office.

Phase 3: The Interview

This is the most complicated part of the interview. It can last from 15 to 45 minutes or more while the interviewer tries to find your strengths and weaknesses. Interviewers may ask you almost anything. They are looking for problems you may have. They also want to be convinced that you have the skills, experience, and personality to do a good job. If you have made a good impression during the earlier phases of an interview, you can use this phase to talk about your qualifications.

Answering Problem Questions

In one survey, employers said that more than 90 percent of the people they interviewed for a job could not answer a problem question. More than 80 percent could not explain the skills they had for the job.

Step 1: Understand what is really being asked.

Step 2: Answer the question briefly and in a non-damaging way.

Step 3: Answer the real concern by presenting your skills.

Common Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself?

This question is the same as your 30 second commercial. It gives you an opportunity to market yourself to the employer. Your answer should be well rehearsed, delivered confidently, and between 30 to 60 seconds. Focus on job related achievements and experiences, and avoid personal information.

2. What would your previous supervisor say about you?

Focus on positive qualities such as being "a team player", "excellent communicator", or "have initiative" that would make you a good candidate for the upcoming position.

3. How have your education and experience prepared you for this position?

Describe how your education and/or experience have helped prepare you for the position.

Discuss relevant knowledge, skills and abilities from your work experience and education that will demonstrate to the employer how you will contribute to the company.

4. Why did you apply for this position?

Explain you are interested in obtaining position in your chosen area of expertise. Generalize your interests, skills and abilities that match the job posting. If you heard positive things about the company or found something attractive about their mission statement, services or products in your research, you may mention that as well.

5. What are your key skills/strengths?

Focus on skills or strengths the employer is looking for. The job description will give you information about their requirements. Highlight education, training, abilities or personal qualities such as honesty, or leadership that will be an asset for the employer and the position.

6. What are your weaknesses?

Choose a weakness that doesn't necessarily matter for the job. For example, "I like to make things happen and get frustrated if too long is spent sitting around discussing it without action" or mention a weakness that you have improved upon, such as making presentations.

7. Why did you leave your last job?

Your answer should be positive and upbeat even if the circumstances were difficult. If your job was eliminated because your skills were no longer necessary, talk about company restructuring rather than individual circumstance. Never criticize a previous employer no matter how tempting. Concentrate on positive traits the supervisor had rather than the negative. For example: Your previous manager may not have been well organized, but they may have been great at promoting from within and acknowledging hard work.

8. Why do you want this job?

Your answer should reinforce why you are a good fit for the position. Focus on skills that match their requirements or express your interest in the company's position. You may mention good things you researched or heard about the company as well. Never tell interviewer you are just looking for a job.

9. Tell me about a difficult situation at work and how you dealt with it.

Select an experience work or volunteer related and explain how you resolved or improved the situation, or a time you showed resilience or maintained a cool and collected attitude during a difficult situation. Be sure to follow the STAR method, and elaborate and clearly outline the steps taken to resolve the situation; include the outcome or result. Do not talk about emotionally sensitive issues.

10. Tell me about an achievement of which you are proud.

Choose a work-related example that shows a tangible benefit to the business. Personal achievements should only be included if they are impressive or prestigious and are relevant to the position. More experienced candidates looking for a specific role (i.e. sales director job) should focus on closely related areas: driving an increase in sales or building a successful sales team.

11. What are your career goals? How long are you planning on staying with the company?

Reassure the employer that you are applying because the position fits your career plan and your long-term commitment to the company. Elaborate if you'd like to eventually move up in the company.

12. What are your salary expectations?

Salary negotiations are best handled at the job offer stage so try to avoid this during the initial interview. Research the salary ranges ahead of time based on location and experience. If asked to name a price, give a realistic but wide salary range and say you are willing to negotiate. You may put it back on the interviewer as well in the form of a question, "What salary range does your company normally pay someone for this position with my skills and abilities?" Be sure to consider full package as well such as retirement, dental, medical, and promotion potential within the company.

13. What do you know about our organization?

Research the company via website, brochures, glassdoor.com or a current or past employee. You should know what products or services the company offers, as well as their customer market and competitors. Knowing this information shows the interviewer you are familiar with their business and interested in the job.

14. Describe a time you worked on a team project. Describe in detail how you managed it or the role you played. Be sure to use the STAR method. Elaborate on how you managed your time and divided the tasks. Be sure to include the purpose of the project and to highlight the project's outcome/result.**15. What other companies/positions are you considering?**

Be vague. Let them know you are considering other positions, but that this company is your first choice.

16. Why should I hire you for the position over another candidate?

Elaborate on your greatest strength for the hiring official, elaborate on a unique idea or project you might pursue when hired or focus on additional skills that could benefit the company, but might not have been a part of the original job announcement.

17. You seem to switch jobs a lot, why? (or) Why are you leaving your current position?

Seeking a new challenge, career advancement, looking for new educational opportunities, and company downsizing are all acceptable reasons. Be sure not to bad mouth former companies, employers or supervisors. Focus on something positive you took from the last location/supervisor even if the individual was a poor employer/leader.

18. Tell me about your current (or last) job?

List your duties and responsibilities. Explain your accomplishments.

19. Last year, how many days of work did you miss? How many times were you late?

This will indicate to the hiring official if you will show up for work. If you have missed more than a couple days, be sure to elaborate on how you resolved the issue.

20. Have you ever been convicted of a crime?

It is not illegal to ask this question if it has a bearing on the job you are seeking. For example, a bank may not be interested in hiring a convicted embezzler. If you have a conviction, admit it. Explain what happened and admit that you made a mistake. Tell what you've done to make amends. Ask for a chance to prove yourself. If you get hired and your employer finds you weren't honest about a prior conviction, you will probably lose your job.

21. Have you ever been fired from a job? Why?

If you have, explain the situation without placing blame. Tell the interviewer what you learned from the experience.

Illegal Interview Topics

Unless directly related to job performance, questions in the following areas are illegal to ask:

- Age
- Arrest Record
- Citizenship/Natural Origin
- Gender or Sexual Orientation
- Health/Disabilities
- Family Status
- Military/Veteran Status
- Race
- Religion

Answers to Illegal Questions

When illegal questions are asked, it can be difficult to answer, especially if you want the position. The best approach for answering an illegal question is to defer the question, direct it back to your skills or answer without directly answering the inquiry. Here are some sample answers.

Q. Are you married? What does your spouse do for a living?

A. Yes, I'm married and my spouse and I are supportive of each other's career goals.

Q. Do you have children?

A. My children are an important part of my life, so is my career. I can assure you I have adequate childcare arranged.

Q. I see you haven't worked recently, why?

A. Respond with, "Although I haven't worked, I have actively applied my professional skills in other areas." Elaborate on volunteer or household experiences that are relevant to the position and elaborate briefly on how they will be an asset for this new position.

Q. Why do you change jobs so often?

A. I have changed jobs for several reasons, including career transition and promotional opportunities. I feel my career experiences have ultimately made me a quick study and flexible for whatever position I pursue, and that my skills will be an asset to you and the company.

Q. Have you ever been arrested?

A. Be positive; explain the situation to the best of your ability emphasizing what you learned from the experience.

Q. Have you ever been fired?

A. Be honest, to the point and outline your answer in a positive way. Explain what you learned from the situation and highlight some key accomplishments since. Be sure not to talk negatively about former employers or employees.

Unusual, but Legal Questions

- Why did you decide to become a _____?
- What motivates you to do a good job?
- Why is customer service so important to business today?
- If you were a superhero, what would your superpowers be?
- What was the last rule you broke and why?
- If there was one person in history you could meet, who would it be and why?
- Who do you admire most and why?

These questions are designed to reveal character traits you might not usually share with the interviewer. They're designed to catch you off guard and to see how you might handle a stressful situation. Smile and respond with, "That's a great question, let me have a moment to think about it." Compose a response that is thoughtful and will expand on your credentials, character traits, and skills and/or abilities for the position if possible.

Questions to Ask During the Interview Process

Interviewing is a two-way street. Use the interview process to find out more about the company, position, promotional opportunities and the culture you may be entering. Ask questions throughout.

At the Beginning:

Is this a new position or was the person previously in this position promoted?

What are the primary job duties?

What skills do you feel are most important for a person in this position?

What is a typical day like?

What hours will I be working?

Mid-Interview:

What are the main objectives for this position?

What are the department's goals for the year?

What can you tell me about the team I'll be joining?

Do you promote from within?

What type of training will I receive being new to the position?

Towards the End:

Is there anything else you'd like to know about my qualifications?

When do you expect to make your hiring decision?

How would I get feedback on my performance, if hired?

If hired, would I report directly to you, or to someone else?

For Seasonal/Temporary Employment Offers:

How long will my position be necessary for your business?

At the end of the season, is it possible for my employment to be reviewed and extended?

How does your company schedule part-time hours?

Phase 4: Closing the Interview

Once you have received answers to your questions, the interviewer will bring the interview to a close. Closing the interview is just as important as answering and asking questions.

1. **Thank the interviewer by name.** It shows you appreciate the time the interviewer took to speak to you.
2. **Express interest in the job and organization.** This will remind the interviewer you want this job specifically, not just any job.
3. **Arrange a reason and time to call back.** This shows the interviewer you are serious about pursuing the job.
4. **Close with “Have a nice day,” or “Good luck with your remaining interviews”.** This will act as a closing to the interview, and emphasize you acknowledge the person conducting the interview as well.

Phase 5: Following Up

Follow up can make the difference between you getting the job and someone else getting it. The key to the follow up is getting the interviewer to consider you one more time. Here are some things you can do:

Send a Thank-You Note:

As soon as possible after the interview – no later than 24 hours – send a Thank-You Note. If the employer is making a quick hiring decision it is appropriate to send an email, thank you letter, or make a thank you phone call.

Things to include in an email or letter:

- Thank the person/committee you talked with, reinforcing the fact you want the job
- Address any issues and concerns that arose in the interview
- Restate why you want the job, what your qualifications are, how you might make significant contributions, etc.
- Discuss anything of importance that you neglected to answer as thoroughly or as well as you would have liked

Reminder: Be brief and to the point. A couple of paragraphs are sufficient. Proofread your messages. Check spelling, grammar, typos, etc. Keep a copy in your outbox if emailing or cc: yourself so you have a copy of each message you've sent.

Make Notes:

Write yourself notes about the interview while it is still fresh in your mind. You will not remember details in a week or so. This will help with the thank you note as well.

Follow Up as Promised:

If you said you are going to call, be sure to follow through. This will impress upon the interviewer your commitment to being hired for the position.

Sample Job Interview Thank You Letter

Jane Smith
123 Main Street
Anytown, NY, 10000
123-456-7890
Jane.Smith@email.com

September 1, 2018

John Doe
Human Resources Manager
ABC Business
456 Main Street
Anytown, NY, 10000

Dear Mr. Doe (or To Whom It May Concern):

I appreciate the opportunity you gave me to discuss my qualifications for the assistant account executive position at Smith Agency. The job, as you presented it, is a good match to my skills and interest. The creative approach to account management that you described confirmed my desire to work with you.

In addition to my enthusiasm, I will bring my creative writing skills, assertiveness and ability to work cooperatively to the department. My artistic background will aid me in partnering with the artists on staff and provide me with an understanding of the visual aspects of our work.

Once again, thank you for your time and consideration; I hope I can be a part of your team.

Sincerely,

Jane Smith

Jane Smith

Phase 6: Job Offer and Salary Negotiation

If the position is offered, you will need to decide on whether to accept or decline the job offer as well as if you are able to negotiate salary.

Consider Before Accepting or Declining the Job Offer:

- Did you leave the interview feeling like the position and company were a good fit for you?
- How will the job play into your future career goals?
- Is there another job offer to consider?
- Is the salary/pay what you want?

What to Say if the Position is Offered:

Yes, I'm excited at the opportunity to work for your company.

I greatly appreciate your offer. How soon do you need a decision?

How soon will I start if I accept the position?

What to Say if the Position is Not Offered:

What could I do to make myself a more marketable/qualified candidate for future positions?

Is there any feedback you could offer me about my interview performance?

What You Need to Know about Salary Negotiation

Salary negotiation is tricky. There are several things to consider when deciding if salary negotiation is right for you.

- **Be prepared for no:** Know ahead of time if you will take the job if they are unwilling to negotiate.
- **Remember it's not personal:** The interviewer's primary goal is to fill the position with a qualified candidate and save the company money.
- **If you have another job offer, ask for a counter offer:** Let the employer know that you are extremely interested in the position, but the other company is offering more money? Ask them to review the compensation package and make a counter offer if they are interested.
- **Consider whole compensation package:** The salary may be lower, but consider the cost of retirement, medical/dental insurance, 401k, vacation/sick. the employer is offering
- **Consider if it's worth it to the hiring official to provide a counter offer:** It must be worth it to the employer, if there is no added benefit for them, they will not make you a counter offer.
- **Identify what additional knowledge, skills and abilities are you bringing to the table:** Identify for the employer additional skills and abilities that you may bring to the position and clearly outline how they will benefit from those skills as they consider a counter offer.
- **Be prepared for difficult questions:** "I thought this was more than a job to you, are you saying you won't accept the position if we don't offer you more money?" Remember when you receive questions such as this, the interviewer's primary goal is to do what's best for the employer-land a qualified candidate and save the company money. Counter with, "According to my research candidates for this position should be making (salary range), I believe my qualifications and experience would put me in that salary range. What does your company view as fair compensation for this position?"

Negotiation Strategies:**If possible avoid discussing salary, until you have an offer.**

On applications put “open” or “negotiable” under salary requirements. If a salary requirement must be given, then give ranges between \$3,000 to \$5,000 dollars for salary or \$1.00 to \$2.00 for hourly.

Defer if asked for a salary figure.

Ask, “What would a person with my background and qualifications typically earn in this position with your company?” Or, “I’d rather discuss salary when the position is offered.”

Research your market value.

Before the interview, research the salary ranges for the position. Call Human Resources and ask their salary ranges for the position or go online to get salary ranges. Salary.com and glassdoor.com are both good places to start.

Examine the entire compensation package.

Be sure to consider health insurance, life insurance, retirement, stock options, 401 (K) plans, salary progression, and time off.

Advocate for yourself.

When a company makes you an offer, ask for a higher dollar amount, or additional vacation/sick days even if your satisfied with the offer. You may get your request.

If salary negotiation fails, ask for a performance review at an agreed upon date after the position has started. You may be able to negotiate a possible future raise if your performance is good.

If the offer is low.

Say, “I believe I’d be a good fit for this position and that we would both benefit if I accept the position, however the salary offer is lower than what I expected for someone with my qualifications. My research shows someone with my background should be making (\$ range). What else can you offer?”