

Personal Interview Tips

There are some easy steps that you can take that will increase your chances of success at interviews.

First, remember that job interviews should be a process of two-way communication. Not only are they a tool for employers to use to evaluate you, but they are also an opportunity for you to assess the job, the organization, and to see if there is a "fit."

Self-evaluation

It is important for you to think about yourself and your past experiences in order to be ready to articulate what you have to offer an employer. Consider the following topics:

- How your present and past experience relate to the position
- Your current and future career goals
- What skills and expertise you have to offer
- The skills that you would like to develop or improve
- Location, salary, and lifestyle priorities
- Kinds of people and environments you prefer
- Past experiences you want to highlight such as volunteer work, hobbies, travel

Before the Interview

1. Research the Company - A company's website is an excellent place to begin. It usually gives you information on whether it is international or domestic, what its revenues are, how many locations it has, and the nature of its major products. Most companies are very proud of their websites. Don't be surprised if one of the first questions interviewers ask when you arrive is, "Have you have had a chance to look at our website?"
2. Practice interviews - Write down a list of possible questions that you think may be asked, then have a friend act as an interviewer and direct them to you in a practice interview situation. Don't stop until you feel comfortable answering each question. Practicing beforehand will make you feel more comfortable and relaxed during the interview.

3. Dress Professionally - In today's environment, wearing a suit isn't always necessary. Contact the HR Manager of the company or your recruiter, and find out what the dress code is for the company at which you are going to interview. Then dress one level above. For instance, if it is business casual, men can wear dress pants, dress shirt, and sport coat. Women can wear a pantsuit or dress. Visual impressions are very important. Therefore, if in doubt, always dress on the conservative side.
4. Arrival - Try to arrive at the interview location a little early. This gives you time to determine where you need to go, and will give you a few minutes to collect your thoughts. DO NOT arrive late. Nothing destroys your chance at impressing an employer more than arriving late and offering no explanation. If you learn at the last minute that you are going to be arriving late at the interview, call and let the interviewer know. Interviewers understand that things can come up suddenly. You are never considered late if you call and make them aware of the fact.

During the Interview

1. First impressions - First impressions take only thirty seconds. Establishing rapport, direct and sustained eye contact, a firm handshake, a warm smile, good posture, and introducing yourself in a confident manner are important ingredients. A well-groomed, professional appearance is critical. Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, whether it is a woman or a man. (No one likes a weak handshake.) Always maintain eye contact while shaking hands.
2. Smile - A smile denotes confidence in a candidate. Try to smile often. Also, don't be afraid to use some hand animation while answering questions. This suggests enthusiasm in a candidate.
3. Body Language - Use good posture, and look the interviewer right in the eye. Sit up straight. Never slouch.
4. Speak Clearly - Don't mumble. It portrays a lack of confidence. Speak with assurance. This indicates confidence.
5. Listen Before Answering - Allow the employer to begin the interview, but be prepared with some opening statements or questions such as, "I understand that this position involves..." or "What are you looking for in a job candidate?" Make sure you understand the question. If not, ask the interviewer to clarify it. Don't be afraid to take some time to think before answering. Interviewers are impressed with someone who thinks out an answer before speaking.
6. Give Brief Answers - Make your answer concise and to the point. Rambling tends to suggest that you really don't have the answer to the question(s) asked.

7. Previous Employers - Never, ever say anything negative about your present or previous employers. No matter how much you may have disliked someone, find a way to give your experiences a positive spin.
8. Be Truthful - Don't lie when asked about something you haven't done. The next question will be "tell us about it."
9. Know Your Resume - Be prepared to talk about every fact that is on your resume. Many people embellish their accomplishments on their resumes. Avoid this, since the only point of reference an interviewer has about you is the resume you provide to him/her beforehand.
10. Keep things at a professional level - Sometimes near the end of an interview, the two parties start feeling comfortable with each other. Don't let this comfortable feeling lead you to telling them something about yourself that they really shouldn't know. Always keep things at a professional level.

Additional tips

1. Focus on presenting a positive, enthusiastic tone.
2. If you are asked to describe a weakness, mention lessons learned, and steer away from negative descriptions.
3. Think about three or four key points that you want to make about your personal characteristics, skills you have learned, and relevant experiences that demonstrate that you could perform the job well.
4. Find specific, rather than general, examples from your experience that illustrate important points about yourself.
5. When answering questions, focus on experiences that demonstrate flexibility, adaptability, responsibility, progress, achievement, creativity, initiative, and leadership.