

Interview Tips A crucial element of any career change is inevitably the interview. First impressions are invariably the most important so it is important to make the very best of the opportunity. You've got to live up to your CV (see our CV tips!) and you have to ensure that your prospective new colleagues make the right decision based on meeting you in person.

Before the interview

So, congratulations, you have got yourself an interview. In many ways the hard work is over. Your CV has successfully sold you as a potential new employee. If the company did not think you were suitable for the position, you would not have been invited for an interview. Now they want to find out more about the type of person you are, and whether you will fit in to the company's working environment. Your success from this stage forward depends on how you present yourself in the interview, and that depends on preparation.

First of all find out as much as possible about the company. You may know someone who works there, or someone who is engaged in business with the company. If so, pick their brains. Always ask the company to send you information when they arrange the interview. Annual reports are great, and most have promotional material that can also be helpful. Visit their website if they have one. By having a good knowledge of the company, you will appear more serious about the position when interviewed.

Re-read the advertisement for the position, your application letter and CV. Then consider what questions you might expect to be asked on the day. Prepare articulate and honest answers that will promote yourself in a good light. There is a list of commonly asked interview questions below which you should prepare answers to.

To do well on the day you need to show you are:

- Technically qualified to do the job;
- Sufficiently motivated to get the job done well; and
- Able to fit in with the company's structure and the team that you will be working with.

Ensure that your answers cover all these criteria.

Don't leave it until the day to find out how to get to the interview. If possible try a dry run a few days before at approximately the same time of day as which you will be travelling, and find a suitable place to park if you are driving. On the day leave additional time just in case you get caught in traffic or the public transport is running late. You should aim to arrive a bare minimum of 15 minutes before your interview time – if you can't be bothered / aren't organised enough to get there on time for an interview, what are you going to be like in a normal working week ?????? Make sure you have the clients main switchboard number with you and in the eventuality that you are delayed at least have the courtesy to let them know, imagine the Manager sitting twiddling his thumbs not knowing whether to start doing something else or not, at least if you let them have a new ETA he can get on with something else within the given time and if he's been busy rather than blankly staring at a wall not knowing what to do they're far more likely to be forgiving.

Body language

Body language can say it all... and, during an interview it can be especially revealing! It is important that you are aware of the signals, both positive and negative, which you are giving off to your prospective employer. One way of finding out what signals you are revealing unconsciously is to practice a mock interview with someone, and ask what impressions they received. You could be surprised. Use this information to practice your body language before the interview.

Presentation

Think carefully about the position you are applying for when to decide what to wear to the interview. Select clothing in which you feel comfortable but remember you seldom get a second chance to make a good first impression !!!!! Generally I'd choose smart / suit rather than casual dress you almost can't be over dressed for an interview but can easily be under dressed. If the role involves client client facing they'll also be assessing how your dress code reflects on the company. A number of people will go so far as to check to see if you've polished your shoes and being inappropriately presented, taking their environment into consideration, may be an immediate knock out. Avoid strong perfume or aftershave, as it can be extremely off putting for the interviewer - especially if they do not like your choice.

Be confident

On the day, walk into the room with confidence and introduce yourself. A firm handshake is important, because a weak handshake can lead to a perception of a weak person. Look your interviewer fully in the eye, and greet them in a polite and friendly manner. Your body language during the first few moments of the meeting is crucial in presenting an open and honest image of yourself. First impressions are vital as interviewers will be judging your integrity and professionalism from the moment you meet. However, beware of staring or holding direct eye contact for too long, as it can appear aggressive or confrontational.

Sit when asked to do so with your arms in an open posture, perhaps resting by your sides, on your lap or on the table in front of you. Don't cross your arms or shift around uncomfortably. Try to control any nervous habits such as pulling, your ear, scratching your nose, fiddling with rings or your ties as these are very off putting for the interviewer and make your look extremely nervous.

Practice giving an aura of confidence, even if you are shaking inside. And, look for the same in your interviewer. You want to work for an employer that you can respect and be proud of. Remember to smile when appropriate. This will help prevent your nerves from putting a frown on your face.

Listen to the language being used by the interviewer and phrase your responses in a similar way. e.g. if the question is 'how do you feel about...?' respond in the same vein. Watch the tone and volume of your voice throughout the interview. It's easy to whisper if you are very nervous, but equally don't over compensate and shout! Always think before you respond, rather than babble incoherently.

Asking questions

It is important to remember that an interview is a two-way process. While the interviewer is deciding whether you are the right candidate, you should be using the opportunity to find out as much information about the position and the company to decide if this is the right job for you.

In between responding to questions during the interview, take time to listen to the way in which the interviewer presents themselves and the company. Most employers will give you an opportunity to ask questions, giving you an opportunity to discuss the position in more detail. Take advantage of this time. You should have some questions already prepared and you may have other queries that have arisen during the discussion. Phrase these sensitively to avoid looking like a potentially problematic employee, but make sure anything you are unsure about is resolved.

Be aware of how the interviewer responds to your questions. Do they adopt an open, friendly stance or are they defensive and 'closed'? The way in which they respond is important, particularly if they are the person you will be working under. Clarify any parts of your package that are unclear, such as benefits in kind, bonuses or private medical health.

Other questions you might want to ask include:

- Career prospects - Do they demonstrate internal promotion? Can they illustrate an example?
- Appraisals - Will you be appraised regularly? How often? Who does the appraisal? What will the key criteria be?
- Training policy - What training policy does the company offer? Is it external or on the job?
- Reviews - How often will your package be reviewed? Is it a graded system or based on merit and performance?
- Staff - How does the company view its employees? Is there a high turnover of staff?
- Induction - Does the company have an induction process?

Psychometric Tests

Do not panic if you are asked to undertake aptitude or psychometric tests as part of the selection process. These tests are not win or lose tests, they are merely indicators of the type of person you are and how you are likely to behave in different circumstances or with different people. These tests are used by employers to try and match a candidates skills or personality traits with the position and team. You cannot cheat them, so honesty is definitely the best policy. Answer as truthfully and accurately as you can to ensure everyone is satisfied with the end result.

Sample interview questions

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are you good at?
- How important is success to you?
- Why do you want this job?
- What qualities do you think are required by this job?
- What will you be able to bring/contribute to the company?
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- What do you know about this company?
- What can we offer that your previous/present employer cannot?
- You have not done this job before. How do you think you will cope/succeed?
- Why should we employ you?
- How long do you think it would be before you were making a significant contribution to the company?
- What do you like/dislike about the position?
- Why did you choose a career in ... (whatever the appropriate career is) ?
- Why are you changing careers?
- What are your career objectives?
- What do you see yourself doing in five years time?
- What do you think of your present employer?
- How long have you been looking for a new job?
- Do you prefer to work in a small, medium or large company?
- What would your ideal job be?
- Are you considering any other positions at the moment?
- How would you/others describe you?
- What was your greatest success? How did you achieve it?
- What has been your biggest failure?
- How could you improve yourself?
- How do you handle criticism?
- Can you act on your own initiative?

- What motivates you?
- Can you work under pressure?
- If you won the lottery and did not need to work, what would you do?
- What is the hardest decision you have ever had to make? How did you go about making it?
- How would you describe your approach to work?
- How do you balance the needs of home and work?
- Some people live to work, others work to live. Which category do you fall into?
- What do you do to relax?
- Describe to me the perfect boss.
- What were your main responsibilities in your last job?
- What aspects of the job did you enjoy the most?
- What aspects of the job did you enjoy the least?
- Why are you leaving your present position?
- What is your biggest regret in your career to date?
- What has been the high point of your career to date?

This is just a selection of questions you might be asked. Prepare for all eventualities and you are less likely to be caught on the hop. If you are asked a question for which you are unprepared or which you do not understand then buy some time by clarifying what was asked. "Do you mean?" However, do not use this repeatedly!

In Summary

Possible immediate knockouts are:

Presentation and 1st impressions has to come top of the list and almost can't put enough emphasis on this !!!!!!!

DO NOT be late, a number of interviewers will also consider this a potential immediate knock out !!!!

DO NOT criticise any Company, Manager or Colleague, yes the boss may have been an idiot but it'll be seen as conflictionary and are you going to be critical of your new boss (the person who's currently interviewing you) and bad mouth the company – nobody wants bad press.

General

When preparing your answers, always remember to be positive, tailoring your answers specifically to the job you are applying for, do not be vague... Be honest at all times without being detrimental to your application and do not say unfavourable things about previous employers. Don't forget most of what you say can be checked out... especially outrageous claims about This preparation will enable you to communicate clearly and effectively, which will help you to remain calm.