



THE JOB INTERVIEW

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

Introduction - Understanding the Interview Process

When you make the commitment to seek a job interview, you are entering a process which will test you, a process which requires you to focus on your career, your achievements, your preferences at work and your behaviours. Most importantly it will require you to be objective about your skills; abilities achievements and personality, what you really enjoy and prefer to do at work and in what company and team culture you will be successful.

Again, we stress that you read the book, [‘What Color is Your Parachute?’](#)

What will you be asked at the interview?

Many good candidates let themselves down by not thinking through the interview process. In broad terms the interviewer wants to understand:

- ⊙ How and why your career has developed the way it has.
- ⊙ In concise, accurate terms the scope of your key responsibilities in your recent roles (particularly over the last ten years).
- ⊙ The depth of your industry and technical knowledge.
- ⊙ Details of your key achievements in each role.
- ⊙ The skills and knowledge you would bring to a role.
- ⊙ What you seek in your next company and position.
- ⊙ Who you are.
- ⊙ The way you operate at work (for example, detailed, analytical, a finisher, cares for and supports the team, problem solver, entrepreneurial, leader, driver of customer service).
- ⊙ How you like to be managed.
- ⊙ How you manage others.
- ⊙ How you want your career to develop.
- ⊙ The details of your remuneration package and the package you will accept if offered the position.



TYPICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How and why your career has developed the way it has

- ☉ Why did you leave your last position? (This question can be asked about each position)
- ☉ Why do you want to leave this position?
- ☉ If given the opportunity to have the last ten years of your career over again, what would you do differently?

In concise, accurate terms the scope of your key responsibilities in your recent roles (particularly over the last ten years)

- ☉ What is the scope of your revenue, margin, cost control, staff number etc responsibilities?
- ☉ To whom did you report in that role?
- ☉ How are you measured in your current role? (what are your key performance indicators?) How are you performing against those measures?
- ☉ What kinds of financial reports do you prepare in your job? What do they contain? How often do you have to prepare them ?
- ☉ Take me step by step through how you prepared the budget for your unit? What information did you use in preparing the budget? What information was lacking ?
- ☉ What were your objectives for last year? Were they achieved? How? Why not?

The depth of your industry and technical knowledge

- ☉ Describe your experience with environmental law ?
- ☉ Hazardous substances ?

Details of your key achievements in each role

- ☉ How did you increase (sales, productivity, staff retention rates) by 20% last year?
- ☉ Who else worked with you to achieve the goal?
- ☉ Was the (market, raw materials supply, employment market) environment favourable or difficult?
- ☉ Describe your best ever career achievement.
- ☉ Why did you not achieve more in your last job?
- ☉ What's been the biggest disappointment in your career to date?

The skills and knowledge you would bring to a role

- ☉ What are the 3 main skills you are using in your current role?
- ☉ How effective are you in persuading others to your point of view?
- ☉ For what assistance or advice do your colleagues turn to you?



What you seek in your next company and position

- ⊙ Any preference for permanent contract/temporary work?
- ⊙ What type of work are you targeting?
- ⊙ What locations would you consider or prefer working in?

Who you are

- ⊙ Describe you as a person. How would others (managers/peers/subordinates) describe you?
- ⊙ What special qualities do you have that set you aside from your peers in your area of specialisation (for example, sales, marketing, production, human resources management)?
- ⊙ Give me three things to remember you by?
- ⊙ Give me an example of a time in your past or present roles when you had to make a decision you would not normally make on your own?
- ⊙ What conditions at work frustrate you the most?
- ⊙ To what extent do you set an example for others in your business life? Your personal life?
- ⊙ Think about the roles you have played in teams (sport or work) in the past. How would you describe the typical role you play in team activities?

The way you operate at work (for example, detailed, analytical, a finisher, cares for and supports the team, problem solver, entrepreneurial, leader, driver of customer service)

- ⊙ Have you ever recognised a problem before your boss or others in the organisation? Describe the problem? How did you recognise it? How did you communicate it? What was the outcome?
- ⊙ What sources of information do you use to keep aware of problems within your department?
- ⊙ How well informed are you about what is going on in other departments of the organisation? How do you keep informed?
- ⊙ How do you go about setting goals?
- ⊙ How do you schedule your time? Set priorities? Are you able to schedule your time? How far ahead can you schedule?
- ⊙ Can you walk me through last week and tell me how you planned the week's activities and how the schedule worked out?
- ⊙ How often is your schedule upset by unforeseen circumstances? What do you do then? Give me a recent example?
- ⊙ How do you plan your daily activities?
- ⊙ What kinds of project planning and administration do you do in your current job?
- ⊙ What systems do you utilise to allow you to multi task?
- ⊙ What is your procedure for keeping track of items requiring your attention?
- ⊙ Are there any procedures which you find helpful for keeping track of things which require your attention? What are they?



- ⊙ What are your long and short term plans for your department? Are they in writing?
- ⊙ How do you decide what to delegate and to whom to delegate?
- ⊙ How do you familiarise yourself with the current situation in your organisation after being away for several days?
- ⊙ All of us have been in situations where we assigned work to other people and they didn't do what we intended. Can you tell me about some of those? Why did it happen?
- ⊙ Do you have any systems for keeping track of reports you submit to management? What is that system?
- ⊙ Do you use any methods to keep informed of what is going on in your areas of supervision? What are they?
- ⊙ Tell me about a difficult situation when you failed to meet a particular target or deadline?

How you like to be managed

- ⊙ How would you describe your ideal manager?
- ⊙ How do you like to be managed?
- ⊙ Describe the management style of the manager for whom you have worked best. Where and when was this?

How you manage others

- ⊙ Describe your management style?
- ⊙ What systems do you use to manage staff?
- ⊙ What procedures do you use for monitoring / evaluating your subordinates' performance?
- ⊙ What do you do when you find that your techniques for regulating activities are loosely adhered to by your subordinates? Give a specific example?
- ⊙ Describe the basic content of your staff meetings. How are action items assigned? How often are these meetings held?
- ⊙ What kind of system do you have for keeping track of assignments made to subordinates?
- ⊙ How do you keep track of what your subordinates are doing?
- ⊙ Tell me about some of the people who have become successful as a result of your management. What was your role in their development?
- ⊙ How do you keep your employees informed of what is going on in the organisation?
- ⊙ Give me an example of an unpopular decision you had to make and how you made it?
- ⊙ How do you find out what people are really thinking or feeling?

How you want your career to develop

- ⊙ What would your next ideal role be?
- ⊙ What are your career goals in five years? In ten years?



The details of your remuneration package and the package you will accept if offered the position

- ☉ What are your expectations in terms of base salary or hourly/daily rate ?

Unusual Or ‘Killer’ Questions

Some interviewers ask questions to put candidates off balance and under pressure. While such questions may seem irrelevant, they will relate to the job in some way. They are often asked to gauge personality, assess whether you are up with current issues or to gauge whether you will fit into a company or team culture.

When confronted with a “killer” question, stay calm, take a few seconds to absorb the question, remain diplomatic and as much as possible, remain positive in your response. No matter how personal the question may appear, acting shocked or irritated is not a good idea.

Examples of ‘Killer’ questions:

- ☉ Tell me something about yourself that you’ve never told anyone before?
- ☉ Have you ever lied to get a job?
- ☉ What would you do if I told you I thought you weren’t interviewing very well?
- ☉ Sell me this pen (for sales people).
- ☉ Do you think you’re intelligent?
- ☉ What’s the biggest political issue facing Australia? NSW?
- ☉ Name me five members of state parliament.
- ☉ Which famous person would you ask to a dinner party and why?
- ☉ How do you handle a boss you don’t like?



WHAT TO DO BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

When you know the name of the potential employer

When you attend the first interview for a position you may know the name of the employer either because the company has placed the advertisement itself or the recruitment company has placed its client's logo in the advertisement. In this case you need to research the company on the internet and in the marketplace (if you have the contacts) and if it is a public company, through its annual reports. You should have a clear idea of its products, ownership, structure (state, national, multinational or global), markets and customers. However, it is important not to swamp yourself with detail, as you won't have the opportunity in an initial interview to go into depth.

Just as important is for you to have a clear idea of what you want to know about the company and its people by the time you complete the first interview so that you can make a decision about whether you want to proceed to the next interview if you have the opportunity.

When you don't know the name of the potential employer

Often your first interview for a position will be with a recruitment consultant who will be working to a set procedure. The larger the recruitment company and the more inexperienced the recruiter, the more obvious will be the procedure. Generally the more experienced recruiters offer more information about companies and markets and industry sectors. In these circumstances you need to have a clear picture of the job and company before you leave the interview. Therefore you need to leave the interview with the a similar amount of information as if you had researched the company beforehand.

On rare occasions you may leave the first interview without knowing the name of the potential employer. This can occur for one of two reasons, namely:

- ⊗ The company, for reasons of confidentiality may not want its name disclosed.
- ⊗ A position does not exist. While advertising positions which do not exist is unethical, the practice does occur. If you are certain this is the case, we advise that you let the interviewer know how you feel and not to deal with that company again.

Personal presentation and grooming

People in the business of recruiting, whether they are consultants or employers; really want their interview of you to be successful. They want to know that potentially they have found the solution to their position vacancy in you. Therefore it is important for you not to give them any reason to knock you out of the process before the interview starts.



Key points about presentation and personal grooming:

- ☉ Make every effort to attend the interview in full business attire (suit and tie for males and business suit for females). If you are a tradesperson or have to wear a corporate uniform, at the time of arranging the appointment, let the interviewer know that you will be coming straight from a production floor, construction site etc and won't be able to change clothes. Wherever possible, make enough time to change to present yourself at your best.
- ☉ Call into the bathroom first to check that your grooming is at its best.
- ☉ Choose an interview time when you will be most relaxed and able to focus on your preparation.
- ☉ Present yourself in a professional and warm manner to reception. Receptionists can be asked for their opinion at times. They may give their opinion unasked for at times if they feel particularly good about their interaction with you, or if their interaction was particularly negative.
- ☉ Don't sit while waiting in reception. Getting out of a chair can look ungainly.
- ☉ If the weather is cold and your hands are cold, warm them while you are waiting in reception.
- ☉ Ensure your hands are not clammy. This can be taken as excessive nervousness whether it is or not the case.
- ☉ Shake hands firmly enough. A limp handshake implies timidity. An excessively firm power handshake suggests insecurity and/or a desire to dominate.
- ☉ Make eye contact when you meet and shake hands with the interviewer.

Don't be late for the interview

If you are not five minutes early, you are late. If for some reason, you are late, phone ahead and advise what time you think you will arrive, ascertain whether your time of arrival is acceptable and will not further disadvantage you by shortening the interview. If you believe that you will be disadvantaged by the limited time remaining for your interview, reschedule if that is possible.

Don't be too early for the interview

If you are half an hour early, this may be seen as excessive anxiety or poor time management. If you are half an hour early, don't present yourself at reception until ten minutes before the agreed interview time.



WHAT TO DO DURING THE INTERVIEW

- ☉ Usually advisable NOT to accept the offer of a coffee or tea. Water is OK.
- ☉ Take some notes – don't overdo it.
- ☉ Use the interviewers name a few times but don't overdo it.
- ☉ Keep level of eye contact up without staring them into submission!!
- ☉ Smile.
- ☉ Have a prepared list of questions to show you have undertaken research on the company. These should not take too long and should not delve into the nitty gritty of the company's performance – rather, they should have relevance to the position you are applying for plus some general overview stuff.
- ☉ If you want the job – let the interviewer know this at interview. “Mr. Interviewer, I like what I have heard about the company and this position and hope you consider my application favourably as I would be very keen to be offered the position.”
- ☉ See if you can get a time frame for the rest of their process.
- ☉ The Thank You Letter.

WHAT TO DO AFTER THE INTERVIEW

While we acknowledge that there are different opinions about what you should do after an interview; there is little disagreement about what you should NOT do. You should NOT do what most people do, and that is nothing.

Sample Thank You Letter

Consider writing a very brief letter to the person(s) who interviewed you to thank them for their time. If you are interested in pursuing the opportunity, tell them in the letter. This letter should not exceed more than one page.

Dear Mr. Interviewer,

I write to thank you for the opportunity to meet with you and discuss the ABC position.

Having met with you and heard more about the company and the ABC position, I would like to confirm my interest in the position.

I will you call on (you pick the day) to see if you require any further information from me.

Yours sincerely



Name and signature.

Review the interview and:

- ⊙ Consider the questions you had difficulty with.
 - Why?
 - What could you have said better?
 - What will you say next time?

- ⊙ Consider the position carefully.
 - Is it a position that suits your objectives as far as:
 - Career prospects
 - Company style
 - Growth potential
 - Personal values and ethics

- ⊙ If you are keen to be considered further for the position, carry out further research;
 - On the company (locally, regionally, globally).
 - The industry it is in
 - Its competitors
 - Its customers
 - Its suppliers

- ⊙ If you have been told that you will be interviewed again and/or have been asked for your referees:
 - Alert your referees and tell them about the company and the position you are being considered for
 - Ensure your referees have a current copy of your resume

- ⊙ If you have been told that you will not be considered any further for the position and it is still a company that you would like to work for still thank the company for the opportunity in writing – they may consider you for a future position that may suit you. The person they offer the position to may change their mind and you may yet be reconsidered for the position.



FOLLOWING UP AN APPLICATION

It is understandable that with the extensive use of the internet to advertise positions and to reply to those advertisements by email, that protocol has changed. Many job applications do not receive a response and many candidates do not follow up their applications to assess why they were not called for an interview. To some extent this can be attributed to the ease with which an application can be submitted and the vastly increased volumes of applications received.

However we believe that you should never submit an application for a position unless you are so interested in the position that you will follow the application up.

When you follow an application up:

- ☉ Allow three or four working days before calling. This allows time for the bulk of responses to reach the advertiser.
- ☉ If a position has a closing date, make your call one or two days after the closing date.
- ☉ Where you find that the advertiser has read your resume, ask whether you will be interviewed and if the answer is negative, ask why.
- ☉ If you feel that certain aspects of your experience have not been understood or have been overlooked (it happens occasionally), provide details and explain why you answered the advertisement initially. State your case without being argumentative.
- ☉ If you are not going to be interviewed, accept the decision and finish the conversation on a positive note, having clarified your skills and experience and what type of company and role you are seeking. If you have called a recruiter, you may be laying the foundation for a future call about your ideal job.