



Interview Preparation – Introduction

CareerFactor acknowledges when candidates go on interviews they need to have a good grasp of the skills needed to make a good impression and achieve the best possible outcome. These skills include communication, appearance, politeness, and a clear description of how you can help their organization.

Improve Your Interview Performance:

- 1. Look Sharp** - Select your outfit before the interview. Choose appropriate clothes for the business sector and position, and check them over for spots and wrinkles. Even if the company has a casual environment, you don't want to look like you slept in your clothes. Above all, dress for confidence. If you feel good, others will respond to you accordingly.
- 2. Be on Time** - Never arrive late to an interview. Allow extra time to arrive early in the vicinity, allowing for variables such as heavy traffic and getting lost. Enter the building 10 to 15 minutes before the interview.
- 3. Do Your Research** - Researching the company before the interview and learning as much as possible about its services, products, customers and competition will give you an edge in understanding and addressing the company's needs. The more you know about the company and what it stands for, the better chance you have of selling yourself. You should find out about the company's culture and gain insight into your potential happiness on the job.
- 4. Be Prepared** - Bring along a folder containing extra copies of your resume, a copy of your references and paper to take notes. You should also have pertinent questions prepared to ask at the end of the interview.
- 5. Show Enthusiasm** - A firm handshake and plenty of eye contact demonstrates confidence. Speak distinctly in a confident voice, even though you may feel a little nervous.
- 6. Listen** - One of the most neglected interviewing skills is listening. Make sure you are not only listening, but also reading between the lines. Sometimes what is *not* said is just as important as what is said.
- 7. Answer the Question Asked** - Candidates often don't think about whether they're actually answering the questions asked by interviewers. Make sure you understand what is being asked, and get further clarification if you're unsure.
- 8. Give Specific Examples** - One specific example of your background is worth 50 vague stories. Prepare your examples before the interview, and be sure to highlight your successes and unique skills. Your past behavior can indicate your future performance.
- 9. Ask Questions** - Many interviewees don't ask questions and miss the opportunity to find out valuable information. Good, well-thought questions indicate your interest in the position and the company.
- 10. Follow Up** - Whether it's through email or regular mail, the follow-up is one more chance to remind the interviewer of all the valuable traits you bring to the job and company. You don't want to miss this chance to market yourself.

It is important to appear confident and cool for the interview. One way to do that is to be prepared to the best of your ability. There is no way to predict what an interview holds, but by following these important rules you will feel less anxious and will be ready to positively present yourself.



Interview Preparation – Do's & Don'ts

10 Questions You Should Be Prepared to Answer:

These are general questions that you will be asked in one way or another. You should practice writing out your responses to feel comfortable communicating your thoughts clearly.

1. Why are you looking for a change?
2. What would your previous employer say about your work ethic?
3. What project are you most proud of?
4. How did you resolve a problem with a difficult client or co-worker?
5. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
6. Why do you want to work for our firm?
7. What do you need to improve professionally?
8. Explain an urgent situation that came up, and what you did to fix it, or prevent it from getting worse?
9. How do you approach a unique client or situation?
10. What motivates you?

10 Things Not to do During an Interview:

Here are 10 things that you can do to crash and burn during your interview. These are real life examples of how perfectly qualified candidates have ruined their own interview:

Don't...

1. Show up late, without a resume, or otherwise unprepared for the interview.
2. Dress in any way other than neat, clean, and professional.
3. If a Human Resources representative meets with you first, don't be rude to them.
4. Bad mouth your current/previous boss or employer.
5. Focus on future positions rather than the job you are interviewing for.
6. Think you are overqualified for the position, or know more about it than the interviewer.
7. Ask about vacation time, salary, or pay raises.
8. Joke or laugh excessively, or use inappropriate language.
9. Talk about your personal life excessively.
10. Above all, don't be dishonest about your education, salary, technical skills, or job responsibilities.



Interview Preparation – Presenting Yourself

1-3 Days Before Your Interview –

As a potential candidate for a position you should research the company using a variety of sources such as their company website, *Google*, *Dun & Bradstreet*, annual reports and other company-related documents, miscellaneous articles, etc. Being unfamiliar with the company will hurt you 95% of the time according to a 2000 survey of hiring managers.

The Day of the Interview –

Arrive at least 15 minutes early to fill out an employment application. Fill it out completely. Do not use the phrase "see resume", since most companies will rely on the application as part of your permanent record, and not the resume. Also, when you're filling out the box marked "salary desired" or a similar listing, simply fill it out with "open" or "negotiable". Do not list a specific dollar figure, (more on this later).

During the Interview –

The first 15 minutes of the interview are the most crucial. They will set the tone for the entire interview. As with any other interaction, first impressions are lasting ones; so make these first minutes count.

Perhaps the most important question you can ask of each individual you'll meet with is something along the following lines:

"I understand you're looking for a (job title). Can you tell me exactly what you need this person to accomplish for you?" If you ask each person you meet with this same question, you'll wind up getting each person's version of the position, and what exactly each of them is looking for. This benefits you, the candidate, in two ways: first, it focuses the presentation of your background only on the relevant skills that are critical to the particular opening. The second benefit is by asking each individual the same question you'll find that their answers will vary based on their relationship to the position ie (peer level, immediate supervisor, human resources, etc.). The benefit of these variances in answers is that you'll wind up with a more accurate and well rounded perspective of what the position actually involves. Otherwise, you can wind up with an assumed or partial description of the job.

Once you've established what the individual interviewer is looking for, tell him/her why you can do the job. If you just inform them that "yeah, I can do the job", or you simply tell them what you've done in the past, this will not be enough to separate you from your competition. Simply stated, you haven't shown the interviewer how you might accomplish the primary objectives of their position. It is generally acknowledged that a candidate who tells the company why he/she can do the job will have a much higher ratio of 2nd interviews (about 4:1) than the candidate who doesn't (about 10:1).

As the interview progresses, and both you and the company are establishing exactly what the position involves, gaps will inevitably occur between your skill set and the position's requirements. The good news is that rarely, if ever, is a candidate hired with 100% of the skill set listed in the job description. More often than not, the figure resides around 75%, since most quality placements are made with candidates who are hired for both their expertise and potential. This allows for a learning curve and career growth within the organization.

Most quality candidates feel an obligation to the interviewer and to themselves, to make sure that the company is aware of the skills that he/she *does not have* that the position requires. They might spend a lot of time talking about what experience or technical expertise they don't have, so that should they receive an offer, there will be no question on the company's part as to what the candidate can and cannot accomplish. The huge negative here is that instead of discussing their achievements, many top-flight candidates waste valuable interview time stressing what they don't know!

Obviously, as a candidate, you should be honest about what kind of on-the-job experience you have. However, make sure you spend the majority of the time on the positive, (what you do know), and not on the negative (what you don't know). Remember that no company is going to extend an offer to you if they don't feel you're capable of handling the position.



Once you've established that you're somebody who can get the job done for the company, hopefully a rapport or "chemistry" has developed between you and the interviewer. During this part of the interview, money and benefits will usually come up for discussion. Important: never ask for information on either of these subjects. Wait until the details have been offered to you. The interview is not the time or place to ask about medical benefits, vacation time, salary, etc. Your CareerFactor consultant will make sure that all your questions on these subjects are answered. These issues are usually addressed after the interview process is complete, but before or during the offer process.

The Placement Process as a 10-Rung Ladder

1. You're informed for the first time about the job.
2. You express some level of interest, and your resume is forwarded to the company.
3. The company expresses interest in your resume, and a first meeting is scheduled.
4. The first interview occurs.
5. The candidate expresses interest/disinterest in the company to the CareerFactor consultant.
6. The company expresses interest/disinterest in the candidate to CareerFactor.
7. If mutual interest exists, 2nd, 3rd, and sometimes 4th meetings are scheduled.
8. If mutual interest still exists, your CareerFactor consultant will discuss money and benefits with both parties.
9. An offer is extended to the candidate.
10. The candidate decides whether or not to take the offer.

One of the singular tragic, career errors made by candidates is skipping this logical sequence, (often from rung one to ten) based on a simple knee-jerk response to say, "No, I'm not interested". REMEMBER: The time to say no to a position is after you've received an offer! Until then, it's nothing but self-indulgent speculation to make a decision based on 25%, 40% or 70% knowledge of the total picture.

After all, when was last the time you purchased anything without knowing the price? What was the last significant life decision you made with forty or fifty per cent of the facts? There may be rare (1 to 5% of the time) situations where there is an obvious mismatch between you and the company, but these instances are extremely uncommon. Do not decide in the midst of an interview that this is not the job you want. Inevitably this disinterest will be evident in your presentation, and you will rule yourself out before the process even begins.

2 Rules to Observe When Asked About Money:

1. When asked about your current salary, or what you were making at your last job, tell the interviewer exactly and honestly what your base salary is/was, what bonuses/profit sharing you're entitled to, any stock options you may have had, and finally, any impending review dates (60 days or less).
2. When asked what kind of salary you might be interested in, NEVER cite a specific dollar amount. An answer along the lines of the following is far more productive: *"Although salary is one of my key priorities, it's not my number one priority. I'm interested in a position that will enhance my career path and where I can make a significant contribution to your company. Therefore, I would be willing to listen to any firm and reasonable offer that you'd care to make me."*

If you are pressed further on the issue, a good rule of thumb is a range that begins at what you're currently making and extends through an additional 20%.



Salary Question Scenarios:

Well into the interview –

The interviewer says *"What are you currently earning?"* You answer honestly: "I'm currently at a 95K base plus a 10% bonus." The interviewer then asks *"What are you looking for dollar-wise?"* Quickly, you respond: "105K." Suppose (as is often the case) the interviewer was thinking about at least 110K and was even prepared to go to 115K. Can you guess what your offer is going to be? There is no doubt that once that interviewer heard that you would be happy with 105K, that's exactly what you're going to be offered. Rest assured, your CareerFactor consultant will get you as much money as possible. (Remember the bigger your salary, the bigger our fee!)

Closing the interview –

As with any successful first date, there's usually a mildly awkward moment when all the necessary information that needed to be discussed has been, and the interview is concluding. Most candidates will leave it up to the company to handle this moment, but when used correctly, it can be a great opportunity to capitalize on a solid interview performance!

You might want to ask the interviewer one of the following questions:

If you feel the interview went well –

"I've really enjoyed our discussions and wanted to let you know how interested I am. Where do we go from here?" or simply *"I feel I have a good understanding of what the job entails, and I'm confident I can do it."*

Multiple interviews –

"What can you tell me about the next person I'm going to be meeting?"

Near the conclusion of any interview –

"I'm really interested in this job... do you have any concerns about me or my ability to do this job?"

Final interview –

"What's the next step in your process, and when might I expect to hear from you?"

These seemingly obvious questions are often overlooked. The interesting part is how effective they can be at providing a definitive idea of the company's interest in you, flexibility regarding skills and experience, their urgency/time frame for filling the position, and what you might do to prepare for your next interview. Again, this is another technique designed to separate you from the pack.

Interview Preparation – Handling Difficult Questions

Throughout the interview process there are some tough questions that can trip up unprepared candidates. The one common denominator that transcends all of the following situations is of course... to be POSITIVE!

Typical Questions Employers / Interviewers Might Ask:

- *Why are you looking for a new position?*
- *What do you like/dislike about your current/prior company?*
- *What are your long and short-term goals and objectives?*
- *When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?*
- *What do you see yourself doing five years from now?*
- *What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?*
- *What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?*
- *What qualifications do you possess that will make you a success in this organization?*
- *What do you know about this organization?*
- *What have you learned from your mistakes?*
- *What criteria are you using to evaluate various organizations?*
- *What will be the deciding factors behind your next career move?*
- *What do you look for in a good company/job?*

More Difficult Questions and Examples of Positive Responses:

Why do you want to work for this company?

If you've done your research, this question should pose no problem. However, frivolous answers like "It's convenient to my home" or "I hear the benefits are good" can really hurt you here.

Why are you leaving your present job?

Again, avoid negative responses such as "Although I'm not unhappy where I am now, I'm always on the lookout for greater challenges and increased responsibility that your situation appears to offer" or "*I'm interested in exploring the potential career opportunities that exist within your organization that simply are not available to me with my present organization*" are the way to go. This style of answer shows you bear no malice to your present organization, and therefore can keep you from being seen in a negative light.

Where do you see yourself in five years?

Somewhere along the line somebody thought that a good answer to this question is "in your chair". This is a very dangerous answer, and is generally perceived as being cocky and presumptuous. A significantly stronger answer would be along the lines of "I see myself spending a reasonable amount of time paying my dues and learning about your company's way of doing business, then gradually gaining increased responsibilities and skills".

What are some of your weaknesses?

The best answer here is to communicate your weaknesses as disguised strengths. For example "*I tend to view my users as my clients. Not that I practice the old saying that the customer is always right, but in my mind their needs are my priorities and I will often try to inform and accommodate the user community rather than just issue them system's doctrine.*" A lack of technical skills or experience can often be offset by referring to past situations where you've shown yourself to be a quick learner.



What are your most significant accomplishments and/or strengths?

You should be prepared to list at least three but no more than five accomplishments from your career. For example *"I was a key member of the team that researched new technology, developed our flagship product, made key recommendations to management, brought technology in-house, and helped develop a new cost accounting system that saved the company approximately \$750,000 annually."* As for strengths, individual personality traits such as high energy level, enthusiasm, assertiveness, focus, tough-mindedness, maturity, and social sensitivity are all good answers.

Whether it's discussing why you are looking for a new job, your relationship with your old boss or employer, or a perceived weakness, try to answer in positive tone. This can help prevent the interviewer from labeling you as a malcontent, troublemaker, or failure.

Some Good Questions to Ask Employers / Interviewers:

- *How will I be evaluated in my job? How often?*
- *How does your company encourage employees to keep pace with advancing technologies?*
- *What would distinguish one candidate from another for this job?*
- *How do I prove myself and my commitment to the company?*
- *When would you want me to start this position?*
- *What projects are in the development stages right now?*
- *Do you have plans for expansion?*
- *What is the financial stability of the company?*
- *Who do you see as competitors in this industry?*
- *What plans does the company have for becoming more competitive in this industry?*
- *What makes your company different from its competitors?*
- *What do you like most/least about your company?*
- *If I am hired, what will be my job responsibilities?*
- *What do you wish you knew about the company before you started?*
- *Will I be working on a team or independently?*
- *What is the company's philosophy toward its employees?*
- *What do you see as the biggest areas of needed improvement within the company?*
- *What are the short and long-term strategic directions of the company?*
- *What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?*

Conclusion –

This has been a lot of information to absorb so don't try to remember it word for word. Keep in mind that this interview preparation guide is more or less the "rules of the game". How you play the game and the keys to success are as individual as you are. If you can keep these relatively simple rules or tools in mind, your interview should be fun, enlightening, and productive. And don't forget to call your CareerFactor consultant as soon as possible after the interview to let us know how it went. *Good Luck!*