

TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

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There are a number of key steps related to preparing for an interview, going through the interview and what to do after the interview. Of course, there are a variety of interviews, from an initial telephone inquiry to an in-person interview, and from follow up interview sessions (either one-on-one or among a group) to the final, closing interview.

But the basics are all same for each of them.

The Interview Appointment

This may seem obvious to some, but failure to be prompt, knowledgeable and prepared normally results in a bad interview experience and often actually gets you disqualified from further consideration.

Confirm the date, time and location of the interview. If it's initially going to be by phone, ensure that you will have complete privacy and no disturbances of any kind, including distracting background noise. If it is slated to be in the employer's office, confirm the location with a map, driving directions, best route to use for the time of day and time of travel, and where to park. If it requires an out-of-town trip then confirm all of your travel arrangements, including air, hotel and ground transportation.

It's also important to find out the individual(s) conducting the interview, expected duration, and what might be expected of you. What would be the appropriate dress code? Will there be multiple interviews conducted separately? With whom? When/where? How many resumes and copies of other materials should you bring along?

Research the organization, key personnel, management, and interviewers. Visit the company website! You would be surprised to know that many individuals coming to an interview (likely 25 percent) have never even taken the time to review the interviewing company's website before their first get together or telephone call.

Research the Organization, Key Personnel and Interviewers

What kind of business is this? What are they specifically noted for? What's their stock price? Where are their offices located? Who are their clients? What is their reputation in the marketplace? How many employees? Annual revenue? Read the annual report from the past three years. Where do you expect to fit into their organization? Doing what, where? Especially read the job description so you can intelligently address the qualifications and requirements. What questions should you be prepared to ask them in the interview that would demonstrate your knowledge and interest in the organization?

You will find that this basic ground work and research will pay true dividends in the quality and substance of your interview.

Preparing for the Interview

Now that you know quite a bit about the organization and the individual(s) you will be meeting, prepare yourself for the typical questions that are likely to come your way. These include professional background/experience; job specific qualifications; credential verification; and career plan sort of questions. Of course, there are many, many types of interview questions too numerous to address here, but are easily found in an Internet search. But it's important for you to prepare answers.

Review the job description carefully. How do you match up to each duty and responsibility, as well as the required qualifications? Prepare a strong answer for each scenario. As you go through this exercise you are undoubtedly crafting perhaps the most important answer for the whole interview: your MVP statement. MVP is the acronym for "My Value Proposition." At Sequence, we have branded this Statement as your MVP (My Value Proposition) and have spent years perfecting the art of helping individuals develop and deliver them. These describe who you are, what you do, what you have achieved, and what your career plans entail. Practice it so when you meet new people you can recite it naturally and with ease.

Often interviews begin with a softball question like, "Tell me a little about yourself." This isn't intended for you to give your life history, but is the perfect opportunity to seize control of the interview session and define its direction. You do so by delivering your value proposition, that is, your MVP.

Remember that having the opportunity to give your MVP helps in that it works to personalize you to the group and lay the foundation for an interview.

To prepare an effective MVP statement, dissect the job description and specifically write out how you match up to the position and why you believe you would be a valuable addition to the team. Then merge this with your personal story and career experience and progression. Read it aloud so you can refine it; try to make it as short, clear and succinct as possible. Two minutes is sufficient. Practice it so you can easily and naturally recite it.

Now that you have confirmed the details about the upcoming interview, prepare to dress for success. Whether it is formal business or casual business attire make sure you are well suited. The formality of the business attire of course varies by the organization you are interviewing with, but a good rule of thumb is that whether formal or business casual, your presentation should be polished.

Pressed shirts/blouses and pants; clean, polished shoes; matching colors, ties and accessories; appropriate makeup and hair style; minimize cologne or perfume (best omitted); be well-groomed (clean nails and teeth); and carry appropriate professional notebook, handbag or briefcase.

Next, make sure your resume, project list, portfolio, and any other materials or work samples are ready to be presented and that you have enough copies, including extras that you may want to leave with the prospective employer.

The Interview

It's best to arrive just a few minutes prior to your scheduled appointment (but not overly so; 5 to 10 minutes is appropriate). This provides you a moment to relax and take a quick inventory. Double-check your appearance. Make sure you have all of your materials in order. Got your MVP down? Good. Upon greeting your host, offer a firm handshake and direct eye contact.

Offer your business card and resume to everyone in the room and be sure to provide each with a firm handshake and direct eye contact as you introduce yourself. And, of course, collect their business card or at least make sure you have everyone's name. This is important for two reasons: first, you will want to make sure you call each one by the correct name, and second, you will need this for your follow up.

When asked a question, respond directly to the person with firm eye contact. If more than one interviewer, direct primarily to the person that asked the question, but be sure to share eye contact with others. Be honest, forthright, and concise; avoid lengthy explanations and exaggerations. Point out problems and challenges you faced, how you addressed these and why, and how the outcome was successful. Never lie, exaggerate or speak ill of others. Remain upbeat and positive at all times. Smile and keep eye contact. If asked to explain negatives in your background, be positive and direct; often times what you don't say is more important than what you say and how you say it.

Upon conclusion, stand, thank your host or hosts, and offer a firm handshake and eye contact. If you haven't already addressed the next step, it's appropriate to inquire at this point. Also, when you get home, send a personal thank you note to everyone you met in the interview. This is an excellent time to sum up the highlights of the interview and to reiterate not only how you match up to the opportunity, but reinforces your desire and eagerness to join the team.

Post Interview

Remember to send a personal follow up note to the host interviewer. This is your chance to continue the interview after the interview. Reiterate what was discussed in the interview to remind them of your experience, knowledge, abilities, and skill set, and how these specifically match up to the requirements of the position.