



# PREPARE TO SUCCEED AT INTERVIEW



## INTRODUCTION

Employers are busy people and in a market where there are more candidates than positions to fill, they can afford to be selective. You have done well to obtain an interview. Now you have to demonstrate you are better than the best to secure the position. Interviews can be frightening and many people become nervous. However, nerves can be controlled by careful planning and preparation. Successful interviews do not just happen. A first class candidate prepares to succeed, with a few planned actions which leave nothing to chance.

## PREPARATION

Ensure you know the company name, address and directions of how to get there, together with the names, job titles and telephone numbers of your interviewers, likely length of interview and any tests or paperwork required. From this information you can gain some insight into the type of questions you may be asked and how detailed the interview may be. Your future manager may ask more job specific questions than a personnel manager and for example the shorter the interview is, less detail can be covered.

Write the details down in a professional A4 pad. This pad will hold your research, expected questions, actions needed for first class presentation and abilities related to company requirements. You can use this during the interview.

If your CV has been submitted by an agency, ensure you have been given a job description preferably with the skills set required. You should be aware of the salary package on offer and decide if that package is sufficient taking into account travel costs.

Plan the journey to arrive at least 15 minutes early, longer in the peak travel periods. It pays to have plenty of spare time to cope with unexpected delays and collect your thoughts before meeting people. All employers are required to make reasonable adjustments for candidates with a disability to be interviewed so if you need an employer to make specific arrangements, contact them before your interview or make enquiries through your recruitment agency to ensure necessary arrangements can be made. Use the following steps to succeed in becoming the preferred candidate and secure your desired position.

# RESEARCH

Time spent examining the company you intend to work for is always profitable. The information you find during your research will give you confidence in your ability to both ask and answer questions about the organisation. At the interview you will be able to give specific examples of how your skills would add value to the company and contribute to their goals. Employers will be impressed by your thoroughness, dedication, organisation, knowledge and professional approach. They will also be relieved that they do not need to spend time repeating readily available information about the company.

## HOW TO RESEARCH

- Log on to the internet and visit the company website. Study the sections listed. If there is no press section, log on to a media site, such as The Financial Times website and run a search on the company.
- Follow the company's social media pages and the social media profiles of the recruitment team.
- Use your personal connections or members of your chosen recruitment company, if you are using one.
- Sample a product or service supplied by the company enabling you to talk specifically about their content and design.

## WHAT TO RESEARCH

- When the company was formed
- What sector the company serves
- What the company does within this sector
- The reputation of the company
- The customers of the company
- The history & culture of the company
- The mission statement and values of the company
- The work environment and benefits
- The management structure including the names of senior management
- The profiles of those conducting the interview
- Recent press releases & publications involving the company
- The company's competitors

## QUESTIONS TO ASK YOURSELF

Why do the company's products or services interest you?

How can you add value to the products or services?

What developments exist within the company's industry or sector?

To what extent and why do you share the company's vision and values?

What is the direction of the company?

What would be your short, medium and long term plans within the company?

# EXPLAIN

## QUESTIONS YOU CAN EXPECT

### Q. “Tell me something about yourself”

A. Job focused brief history (leave the family and personal details out). Highlight your achievements and link these to abilities required by the company.

### Q. “How would you describe yourself?”

A. The employer wants you to describe your character traits to see how you would fit with job requirements, so look at what the company requires. Friendly, enthusiastic, talkative, quiet, studious could all be positive attributes depending on the job.

### Q. “Tell me about your job?”

A. Describe three things that you do which would transfer or add value to the job you are applying for.

### Q. “What do you not like about your job?”

A. You need to give positive answers on a neutral subject such as resources and then say how you got around your dislike. Avoid the trap of discussing problems with people.

### Q. “Why are you leaving your present job?”

A. Give only positive reasons and speak constructively about your employer. Career advancement or a change of direction is valid provided you can justify why your skills will be of use to this company.

### Q. “Why do you want to work for this company (Why should we hire you?)”

A. Think about why this company stands out from its competitors. What can the company do for you and what can you do for the com-

pany. What skills and interests made you want to apply for this job? List them and then work them into the main abilities required on the job description. Look also at your company research – pick something the company does well and link your skills to this. Prepare and write down an answer in your A4 pad.

### Q. “What are your strengths and weaknesses?”

Sometimes disguised as---

### Q. “How might other people (your manager or colleagues) see you?”

A. Pick 2-3 strengths which align with the most important job requirements but be prepared to give an example, using the STAR technique (see section on Ability), in which you have used your strengths. Practical, positive, ambitious, enthusiastic, decisive, organised, self motivated, leadership skills, team building skills, people management skills, communicating or problem solving could all be potential strengths. Pick 2-3 weaknesses which you have tried to improve or will try to improve. There are no rights or wrongs here. The employer is looking for self awareness and everyone has weaknesses. Being too willing, expecting high standards, talking too much, being creative with many ideas but not interested in the detail are all weaknesses depending on the environment in which they are practised.

### Q. “How do you manage under pressure?”

### Q. “When have you taken the initiative?”

A. Pick examples from your present employment and use STAR to elaborate.



**Q. “What has been your greatest achievement?”**

A. Pick something in which you have used a skill or attribute that is required for this job. Determination and communication, teamwork or leadership are transferable skills where you may have flourished, but there are others. Use the STAR technique to describe your achievement.

**Q. “What drives you to reach your objectives?”**

A. The employer wants to know what motivates you. This may be a hands off or hands on management style, being goal orientated or something else. Think about what motivates you, or would motivate you, in your present job and give your answer with an example using STAR.

**Q. “What will you be doing in five years?”**

A. The employer wants to know if you intend to stay long enough to be of use, so think about your answer to this question. How long does it take to become competent in a job? At what point may you be looking for something more challenging? Has the company got a program of development?

**Q. “What challenges do you see this company facing in the next year?”**

A. If you have done your research you should already know this. You could say that according to their website the challenges could include----. In this way you show you have done your homework and are honest about where the answer has come from.

**Q. “What do you know about the company?”**

A. Answer on the structure, finances, products/ services, key staff, customers, competitors, market trend and challenges.



## QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD EXPECT TO ASK

- Why did you join and stay in this company?
- What do you enjoy about this company?
- Why did the last person leave?
- How long has my manager been in post?
- How do you see my role being developed?
- What encouragement is given to progress in this company?
- What prospects exist for staff development?
- Will I have the opportunity to use my initiative?
- What training facilities do you have?
- What type of training is available for employees within the department?
- How often do employees undertake skills appraisal?
- What age range are the people I will be working with?
- What are the personalities of the people I will work with?
- What is the atmosphere like in the department/office?
- How long would you expect someone to remain in this role?
- Where could I hope to be within this company in five years?
- Could good performance in a short term contract lead to something more permanent?

**Many of these questions may have been answered during the interview. Nevertheless ensure you have them written down in your A4 pad and refer to the whole list, ticking off the areas covered while acknowledging this to the employer.**

# PRESENTATION

An employer's first impression of you is what they see and hear, so your appearance and how you conduct yourself need to create an immediate and positive impact. People who take pride in their appearance, look neat and tidy and show confidence in communication demonstrate high personal standards. Equally, moderation in appearance shows self control and self discipline. All three attributes are transferable to employment and valued by employers.

## DRESS

- For men, a well pressed, clean, dark coloured suit with a colour co-ordinated tie and shirt are essential. Facial jewellery, unless required to be worn for cultural and/or religious purposes, may best be avoided.
- For women, a well pressed, clean trouser suit or skirt and jacket with smart polished shoes are essential. A blouse should cover the body from below the waist to the neck, showing minimal flesh. Skirts should be on or below the knee.
- Ensure your complete outfit is ready to try on a few days before the interview so corrections can be made if required and that the same outfit is cleaned after interview in preparation for the next one.
- Carry either a black briefcase or document wallet for any paperwork your future employer requires and your A4 note pad with personal notes. Arrive early for interview with time to compose yourself, check your appearance and revisit your research and written preparation. If you have worn a coat over your suit, take it off in reception.

## COMMUNICATION AND BODY LANGUAGE

- Before you enter the building, turn off your mobile phone. As you approach reception, take a deep breath and remain unflustered. Appearing calm gives the impression of being self assured and in control. State your name, the job title you will be interviewed for and the interview time to the receptionist. Thank them for their help.
- Be well-mannered and respectful to everyone you meet. In small companies you will be expected to fit in with the existing workforce so any employee you encounter may contribute to your final rating. Smile and offer a quick, firm handshake to each of the interviewers and thank them for seeing you at the end of the interview.
- Look at the person asking you questions and listen carefully but deliver your answers to all involved in the interview. Do not be afraid to ask them to rephrase a question if you do not understand. Sit up straight and resist the urge to fidget. Have your A4 pad on your lap or on the table in front of you. Explain that it contains your research about the company and you would like to refer to it during interview to ensure you include everything. It is unlikely that an employer would refuse. Holding the pad will help to keep your hands still and present a professional profile. Placing markers on the pad to identify specific sections of information will save time and appear organised.

# ABILITY

An employer uses your curriculum vitae to decide if you may have the skills required for a particular job. However, your ability will often need to be tested at interview through questioning. The employer is not looking at whether or not you have accomplished something. Instead the emphasis is on the tasks you were set, the action you took and the outcome you achieved. In this way, candidates can be compared and their ability scored. Look through the original job description. If you are lucky, it will come with a specific set of expected skills and competencies. If not, you may have to work out what these might be by reading through your role. On your A4 pad, write the skills and competencies down and against each one give examples of when you have used them, applying the following format.

**Setting:** Describe the situation briefly

**Task:** Describe what you were asked to achieve

**Activity:** Describe what you did

**Result:** What was the outcome?

Did you meet or exceed expectations?

If you failed to achieve, what did you learn from the experience?

Write as many relevant examples as you can think of for each skill required. Keep them short and to the point. Relevance is more important than quantity. Examples can be used from present and previous employment, family and personal experiences, outside interests or voluntary work. However, concentrate on what you have done; interviewers are not interested in group work, only your part in it. You will then have a selection of examples with which to impress the interview panel. Using the A4 pad at interview is acceptable practice and shows ability to think ahead, together with organisational skills.

## REALISM

If you are unable to think of any relevant examples to prove your ability in key areas, reflect on whether this is the right job for you. Do you really have the right skills or will you feel inadequate? If you genuinely cannot give instances for some areas you should be honest. Say you are unable to supply an example of what you did because you have not had the opportunity to practice such skills. Instead offer to discuss what you would do in that situation.

It is unlikely that you will know or remember everything about the company from your research. However, by keeping in mind a few interesting facts and using them in relevant conversation or questioning, you can demonstrate eagerness and interest.

## EXPRESS INTEREST

If you feel after interview that the position would be a positive career opportunity and you have felt comfortable with the answers to your questions, express your continued interest before you leave.

### IF YOU ARE NOT ALREADY AWARE, ASK THE FOLLOWING:

- Will there be a second interview?
- When will the panel recall for the next stage?
- How many candidates will be called to second interview?
- Who will interview the next stage?
- When will a final decision be made?