

THE JOB INTERVIEW

Congratulations!! You have applied for a job, and your application/resume has resulted in an invitation for a job interview. What follows are some suggestions on how to increase the likelihood that the interview will result in a job offer.

There are three stages to the job interview: a before, a during and an after stage.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

- Research the company - you will want to be able to answer the question, "So why do you want to work for this company?" That means knowing some basic information about their departments and their products or services, who their customers are, how long they've been in business, and so forth. The Internet is a great place to find this information. Before your interview, make sure you read their corporate web site. You may also find information on linkedin.com.
- Try to read a copy of the actual job description to determine the knowledge, skills and abilities that are required and/or desired for this position. You will want to develop answers that show how you have acquired these skills and how you have used them in the past. If you cannot get a copy of the job description itself, read a description of the general occupation. The Occupational Information Network is a great resource for this: <http://online.onetcenter.org>
- When confirming the date and time for your interview, try to find out more details about the interview itself: how much time you should allow and who will interview you. This will give you some clues of the type of interview that will be conducted.
- Know yourself. Make a list of your strengths, abilities, skills, weaknesses, professional experiences, values, and plans for the future. Be prepared to talk about yourself in a positive manner. You want to be able to answer the question, "So tell me why we should hire you."
- Develop answers to the most frequently asked interview questions, and practice your answers to these questions with a friend or mentor.
- You will need to have an idea of the salary range for the type of position. If the salary was not listed, or the ad said "depending on experience," research the industry to find out what this type of job generally pays. You can find salary information for different occupations at the Occupational Information Network: <http://online.onetcenter.org>.
- If you haven't already done so, prepare a list of references and ask your references' permission to use their names. You want to remind them so when the employer calls they are prepared to give a good recommendation of you.
- Decide what you will wear on the day of your interview and make sure everything is clean and pressed. You will want to look your very best. You will only have one chance to make a good first impression.
- Be prepared to bring several copies of your resume and your list of references. You may be asked to fill out a job application, so you need to make sure you have a list with the names, addresses and telephone numbers of previous employers as well as your dates of employment with them.
- Make sure you know the address where you will be going, how to get there and how long it will take you to get there. The day of your interview is not a good day to be late or get lost. Allow enough time to park and freshen up, and bring money for the parking meter. Remember the name of the person who will interview you!

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

All employers try to find an answer to the following 3 questions during the interview:

1. *Can he/she do the job* (in other words, does this person have the required knowledge and skills)?
2. *Will he/she do the job* (in other words, does this person seem reliable, motivated, enthusiastic, and confident—will they show up every morning and not quit after a week)?
3. *How will this person get along with others?* Many employers state that this last question is probably the most important of the three. If an employer does not find you likable, or fears that you may be difficult to get along with, you may not be hired, regardless of your qualifications.

THERE ARE 5 THINGS YOU NEED TO DO IN AN INTERVIEW:

1. Make a positive impression.
2. Communicate your skills.
3. Answer problem questions. (Gaps in employment, for example, or frequent job changes).
4. Help employers know why you are the right person for the job.
5. Follow up after the interview—send a thank-you letter.

It is your task during the interview to sell yourself to the employer, and to show him or her not only that you possess the knowledge, skills and abilities to do the job, but that you will be a positive addition to the company. Although you are trying to find the answers to some questions of your own— Will I like/can I do this type of work? Will I enjoy working here? Are conditions such as salary, hours and benefits acceptable?—the best way to interview is to look at it from the employer's perspective and tell them what you can offer them, instead of asking what they can offer you! Unless you convince them that you have what it takes, no offer will be forthcoming.

INTERVIEW DO'S AND DON'TS

- Be on time, and be alone. The interview is not the time to bring friends, relatives or animals.
- Dress appropriately to match the type of position you are seeking, as well as the particular company. If you are not sure what to wear, you may want to visit the place of employment to see what the people who work there wear. Err on the conservative side. Remove controversial jewelry, such as nose rings and lip piercings, and cover up tattoos.
- Don't wear perfume. You will most likely be nervous, and nervousness intensifies scents. You also want to make sure that you don't have tobacco on your breath if you are a smoker. Take a breath mint before going into the interview.
- Be aware of your body language. Give a firm handshake, neither too limp nor too firm. Stand or sit up straight, don't slump. Make appropriate eye contact. Don't look down or away too much, but be careful not to stare either.
- Engage in active listening. Listen carefully when the employer is speaking. This is not the time to think ahead of the answer you are going to give.
- Show a positive attitude, enthusiasm, sincerity and honesty. These are the attributes employers like to see most in the people they interview.
- Don't give simple yes and no answers, but don't ramble on-and-on either. Be brief and to-the-point. Also, ask a question or two when given the opportunity.
- Don't criticize or make negative comments about previous employers. Even if you quit your previous job because you couldn't stand your boss, don't say so. Yes, employers appreciate sincerity and honesty, but they also like diplomacy and your ability to get along with others. If asked why you quit, you can always say that you were looking for different opportunities.
- Emphasize your strengths in the interview. Don't volunteer weaknesses or other unasked for negative or questionable facts. If you have skeletons in your closet however (you were fired repeatedly; you were in jail; you have large gaps in your employment record, etc), make sure you have rehearsed a plausible explanation.
- Don't fail to ask questions at the end of the interview, but keep in mind this is not the time to inquire about compensation or benefits. Have 2 or 3 questions in mind related to the department you would be working for, the company or the job itself. (See sample questions on back of packet)
- At the close of the interview, express your interest in the position, and ask the employer what the next step is in the interview process and how soon you might expect to hear from them. You may want to ask, "When would be a convenient time to check back with you?"
- Never turn down a job offer during the interview, even if you have decided that you don't want the job. Ask for a 24-hour period to think about it. It looks more professional that way and who knows, once you get home, you may change your mind. You want to allow yourself that opportunity.

SOME WORDS ABOUT SALARY

Most experts will advise you that you should wait to talk about salary and benefits until the job has been offered to you, yet you would like to know how much the employer is willing to pay. On the other hand, the employer may ask you what your salary expectations are. This question is often used as a screening tool, eliminating those who either ask for too much or too little. If you are asked that question, try answering it in a way that might satisfy the employer without giving a specific dollar value, for example:

"I am interested in the position, and would be willing to look at any reasonable offer that you might make."

If the employer insists on a number, give a **salary range**. Do your homework in preparation for the interview: conduct research to determine what the typical salary is for the kind of position you are interested in. The Occupational Information Network is a great source for salary information for different occupations: <http://online.onetcenter.org>. After accessing their web site, enter the occupation title about which you want information. Then follow the link to get information (on a state-by-state basis) on wages and employment.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Within 24 to 48 hours after your interview, send the person(s) who interviewed you a thank-you note. According to surveys with employers, only 4-5 out of 10 interviewees send a thank-you letter, and often that follow-up has meant the difference between being hired and not being hired for two very similar candidates. Employers seem to prefer mailed thank-you notes over emailed thank-you notes. A typical thank-you note will look like this:
 - 1st paragraph: Thank the employer for their time interviewing you.
 - 2nd paragraph: Tell the employer how much you like the job and how you would be a good fit.
 - 3rd paragraph: Tell the employer where you can be reached and that you look forward to hearing from them soon.
- Send a Thank-You note even if you are not interested in the position. Sending a Thank-You note elevates your professional reputation, and you never know when you might run into the interviewer again.
- For a sample Thank-You note, see the handout on Thank-You and Follow-up Letters.