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Interview Preparation – Increase the chance of success in securing the role that you want by following some simple but proven techniques and methods of which some you will know, and others may be new to you.

COMPANY AND JOB RESEARCH

Preparation & research are essential – *“By failing to prepare you are preparing to fail”*
Using knowledge gained through research enables you to:

- Convey your interest in the job & the company.
- Convey your enthusiasm about working for the company.
- Demonstrate that you have invested time & effort in finding out about them.
- Approach the interview with more confidence.
- Find common ground with the interviewer & gain credibility
- Demonstrate that you are the best person for the job.

The more you are able to show that you want to work for the Company, the more that the Company will feel that they want you to work for them.

THE COMPANY

Try to find out the answers to the following questions, whenever a Company invites you for an interview:

- What business or businesses is it in?
- What is its range of products & services?
- How long it has been established
- How many people does it employ?
- What is the turnover in monetary terms?
- What are the names of any subsidiaries or specialist divisions?
- How many offices, factories, branches & sites are there?
- Where are they located?
- Who are the board members?
- Who are its main competitors?
- What is its standing in the market place?
- How does it market itself?
- Has there been any recent media coverage?
- Have there been any new products, services or innovations?
- Have there been any recent technological developments?
- What about the future plans?
- What is the Company Vision & Mission statement?

SOURCES OF INFORMATION

Possibilities Include:

- The Library
- The Internet
- Company Literature
- The Job Advertisement
- A Company Visit
- Company Correspondence sent to you
- Annual Report
- Trade Journals
- Business Directories e.g. Dun & Brad Street
- Quality newspapers e.g. Financial Times. Daily telegraph
- Chamber of Commerce
- Companies House
- People who buy from or sell to the Company
- Friends, relatives & Acquaintances

If a prospective employer sends you any information you must read it thoroughly. If you are questioned on it & you cannot provide answers it will give the impression that either you are not particularly interested in the Company (any old Company will do) or you were not motivated & dedicated enough to prepare.

You will certainly not be expected to know everything, but there is absolutely no excuse for knowing nothing.

THE JOB

Because you need to sell yourself against what the interviewer is looking for, you must be able to effectively match your skills, qualifications, experience & attributes to the duties & responsibilities of the job.

Sources of information can include:

- The job description/specification.
- The advertisement for the job.
- A Recruitment Consultant
- Someone who has done that type of job before or is doing it now.

With knowledge gained about the job you will be able to prepare positive evidence to use at the interview to prove that you:

- Are genuinely interested & enthusiastic about the job
- Can do the job effectively
- Are well suited to do the job
- Are the very best of those applying for the job

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

How well you answer the questions put to you by the interviewer will obviously have a great bearing on the outcome of your job application.

Interviewers often ask the same questions, so there is no excuse for being unprepared for many of them.

Remember that the ability to listen is a key interview skill . to pay attention, to absorb & understand what the interviewer is saying without misinterpreting, assuming or jumping to conclusions.

ACTIVE LISTENING

- Tilt the head to one side to show you are listening.
- Concentrate
- Look at the interviewer to demonstrate that you are listening intently.
- Pay attention to the tone & inflection of the interviewers voice . where is the emphasis?
- Be careful not to mishear or misunderstand.
- Seek clarification if you are not exactly sure what is being asked.
- Don't decide upon your response until you have listened to the entire question.
- Don't focus so much on what you want to say that you lose track of what the interviewer is saying.
- Don't jump in if the interviewer is merely pausing.

ADVICE ON ANSWERING QUESTIONS

- Practice your answers.
- When asked what YOU have achieved in your career to date, or what YOUR responsibilities have been in a particular role, answer %did this %or %am responsible for this+- after all, the interviewer is looking to establish how deep YOUR skills go. The biggest mistake people make at interview is to effectively %hide behind+the achievements of others or the workings of a team, and reply with %we do this+or %we did that+. not what the interviewer is looking for!
- Identify the question areas from the job description & advertisement & consider what questions you would ask to confirm a candidate's suitability.
- Take your time before answering a question.
- Stay calm & collected.
- Talk at a comfortable pace & use the volume & tone of your voice to sound confident & believable.
- Avoid %Umm+& Ahh+.
- Do not ramble . be clear & concise.
- Be positive and enthusiastic.
- Frame your answers around actual experiences as opposed to opinions.
- Understand what the interviewer is looking to evaluate and sell your skills, experience, personal qualities and achievements in that area.
- Have examples ready to back up your assertions.
- Do not %wing it+. if you do not know an answer, it is better to admit you don't rather than give the wrong answer.
- Tell the truth.
- Watch the interviewer for signs of their feelings.
- Don't get downhearted if you are getting a hard time or are put under pressure.
- Deal with interruptions in a confident and relaxed manner . smile.

POSSIBLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Tell me about yourself?

- Will come at the beginning.
- Is the archetypal %why should I employ you?+
- Is a blank cheque to fill in
- Is a great opportunity to sell yourself and your abilities
- Answer should be short positive, concise and relevant.
- Do not say %What exactly would you like to know?+
- Do not begin with %was born inõ ..+

WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?

- What are your strengths . %why should I employ you?+
- What are your weaknesses . %why should I not employ you?+
- Question is about self-awareness . Do you know what you are good at and in what areas you need to improve?
- Focus on the strengths that are relevant to the job.
- Do not undersell yourself.
- Do not mention more than 2 weaknesses.
- Do not state weaknesses that clearly relate to the job
- State weaknesses that can be viewed positively.

Perfectionist: Paying attention to detail is viewed more positively.

Workaholic: Being dedicated is viewed more positively.

Bored easily: Need to be challenged is viewed more positively.

Don't suffer fools gladly: Having high standards is viewed more positively.

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE A LEVELS / DEGREE THAT YOU DID?

- Question used to evaluate your decision making process.
- Finds out about your motivations and approach to learning.
- Discovers whether there was a logical and sensible reason for your choice.

REASONS FOR LEAVING CURRENT OR LAST EMPLOYER

- Are there any reasons that might make me not want to employ this candidate?+
- Do not openly criticise colleagues, manager or company.
- If your reason for leaving is money talk about your skills, attributes and experience in terms of market rate. Employers like value for money . you do not want to appear greedy or mercenary.
- If you were made redundant do not react defensively or negatively. Give the interviewer a full picture . restructuring, number of jobs affected, time frames etc.
- If you did not get on with your boss be constructive and talk in terms of management style, providing examples where appropriate.
- Remember one of the best reasons for leaving is to broaden your experience.

WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST ACHIEVEMENT?

- Your answer will give an indication of what motivates you and what is important in your life.
- The interviewer will be looking for evidence of the skills and positive characteristics you displayed which will be useful in the job.
- Select only one fairly recent example, which wasn't particularly easy to achieve.

WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN 5 YEARS TIME?

Question used to find out.

- How ambitious are you?
- Do you have a vision?
- Will you stay with the company?
- Are you realistic?
- Do your plans fit in with the company's plans?

The safest answer is probably to highlight that your first priority is to attain a high level of achievement in the role you are considering, before assessing where your skills could be affectively utilised next.

WHAT WAS YOUR BIGGEST MISTAKE?

- Are you honest and objective enough to recognise and admit a mistake?
- Could it have been avoided?
- Is your judgement sound?
- Have you learnt from it?
- What would you do/have done differently?

WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN THIS POSITION?

- Best Opportunity to make the match+
- Sell what is relevant and important to them.

HOW MUCH DO YOU KNOW ABOUT OUR COMPANY?

- Opportunity to demonstrate that you have taken the time and effort to properly research the company.
- Prioritise to show you have a good general knowledge of the company and an insight into any challenges and issues it may face.

WHAT DID YOU DO IN YOUR LAST JOB

- Talk enthusiastically and in detail.
- Emphasise those elements of your last job that are relevant to the requirements of the job for which you are applying.
- Remember to talk about levels of involvement and achievements.

WHY SHOULD WE EMPLOY YOU?

- The effectiveness of your answers will depend on how knowledgeable you are about the needs of the job and company, how well you have analysed your skills, experience and attributes and how well you match up the two.

OTHER QUESTIONS

- What did you like best about your last job?
- What did you like least about your last job?
- What was your greatest challenge in the job?
- How successful would you say you were?
- How do you like to be managed?
- How would you describe your relationship with your colleagues in your last job?
- What did you learn from your last job?
- How were you targeted?
- How was your performance assessed?
- What is it about the company that appeals to you?
- What do you think you can bring to this company?
- Do you consider yourself a team player?
- What would your last manager say about you?
- What would your previous colleagues say about you?
- What would your friends say about you?
- How would you describe yourself?
- How satisfied are you with how your career has advanced so far?
- What are you looking for from your next employer?
- What is your biggest disappointment to date at work?
- What has been the biggest problem you have faced & how did you solve it?
- How do you deal with conflict?
- Give me an example of when you feel you have coped well under pressure at work?
- Give me an example of when you have been criticised and talk to me about how you responded?
- How well do you manage your time?
- What motivates you?
- What demotivates you?
- Give me a recent example of when you have shown initiative at work?
- Give me an example of when you felt particularly enthusiastic about a task you had to complete?
- Give me an example of when you have been required to show a sense of urgency at work?
- How do you read when you are left to work unsupervised?
- What salary are you looking for?
- When can you start?
- What do you like to do in your spare time?

QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Do not say "No I don't have any questions"
- Always write down your questions . this is evidence of preparation & interest
- Even if you believe all your questions have been answered during in the interview, still double check your list in front of the interviewer
- Ask a minimum of 4/5 questions
- Be careful not to talk too much and outstay your welcome
- Do not have questions about salary, holiday, sick pay etc the top of your list
- Genuinely seek information to assist in your decision making . do not ask questions just for the sake of it

QUESTION AREA

- Company structure and reporting lines
- The team
- Company plans and how the job fits in with those
- Industry outlook and competitive challenges faced
- Current Company performance
- Existing or new products and services
- Reason for the vacancy
- Focus of the role
- Performance appraisal success indicators
- Training and development
- Future opportunities
- Interviewers own career history with the company

BODY LANGUAGE

Body language is

- Posture
- Body position
- Gestures
- Eye contact
- Facial expressions
- Body movements

Recognising and interpreting body language offers an insight into what people are thinking and feeling. Some interviewers may take body language into account when considering and forming an opinion of the interviewee.

Non-verbal signals include:

- Crossing arms, doing up jacket . defensive, resistant
- Avoiding eye contact, rubbing eyes . lying, embarrassment
- Touching collar/mouth/nose - lying
- Persistent, hurried nodding . impatient
- Tense facial expressions . nervous
- Nodding as a natural gesture . agreement
- Sitting forward . agreement

Although it is helpful to be aware of your body language, you should not become too self conscious . just be yourself!

GESTURES

Avoid using gestures that might irritate or distract the interviewer

- Fiddling with jewellery or repeatedly pushing glasses upon nose
- Running hands through hair or twiddling bits of hair
- Picking at fingernails or ears or even biting fingernails
- Blinking incessantly
- Continually clearing throat
- Scratching a lot
- Tapping fingers or feet
- Fidgeting in chair
- Putting hands in and out of pockets
- Flapping arms around when talking
- Jangling loose change in pockets
- Repeatedly clicking pen
- Laughing at inappropriate moments

You may not do these things because you are nervous, but they are likely to make you appear nervous

Nerves are normal & help you to give of your best during the interview, however, it is important to feel & appear as relaxed as possible. The following will help:

- Get a good nights sleep before the interview
- Consciously slow everything down on the day of the interview
- Remember you have prepared well & can only do your best
- Remember most interviewers want you to perform well
- Smile
- Be positive & imagine the interview going well . and feel confident about your appearance
- Allow plenty of time to get to the interview and arrive 10-15 minutes before the interview time
- Breath slowly & calmly

1/3 of your message is conveyed through your words

2/3 of your message is conveyed through your non-verbal communication

FIRST IMPRESSIONS

You never get a second chance to make a first impression+

Most people, including interviewers, make initial judgements about others based on their appearance. Interviewers form up to 90% of their opinions within one & a half minutes of meeting people

If you make a poor first impression you have built a hurdle that you have to get over during the interview, in order to convince the interviewer that you are the best person for the job.

Psychologists research shows that the % contribution to first impression judgements is:

55% What people see- appearance, posture, body language, facial expressions, eye contact

38% What people hear- tone, pace, volume, pitch, clarity of speech, hesitation

7% The words people use

What you look & sound like are initially far more important than what you say

ARRIVAL

Your interviewer effectively starts when you enter the Company's premises & you should act accordingly

The receptionist & other staff you meet in the reception area are part of the organisation you are looking to join. The interviewer may seek their opinions about candidates & you have a good opportunity to create the right first impression even before you meet the interviewer

DO

- Be pleasant & polite to Company employees
- Smile
- Read the Company literature available
- Look over your preparation notes & mentally prepare
- Be patient & calm if the interviewer is running late
- Prepare your introduction/greeting
- Relax

DON'T

- Smoke, eat or chew gum
- Wear sunglasses
- Bring shopping bags or gym bag to the interview
- Use your mobile phone or ask to use their phone
- Check your appearance in public
- Bring anyone with you

GREETING THE INTERVIEWER

- Smile, Stand up when the interviewer approaches and stand up straight with shoulders back, don't slouch
- Make eye contact and offer a firm, %try+handshake!
- Project your voice, don't mumble . and walk alongside the interviewer
- Be prepared for the small talk-did you get here OK? Did you find us ok? How was your journey? How did you get here? The weather!
- If the interviewer is not talking, initiate the conversation with your positive first impressions of the Company

THE CLOSE

You must ensure that you & the interview end on a positive note to reinforce the good first impression you made at the beginning. It is very important to make best use of the closing moments in an interview, if an interviewer is seeing a number of candidates with similar qualifications & experience, their decision regarding appointment may be greatly influenced by the candidate's behaviour at the end of the interview

Remember the more you show how interested you are in the Company, the more interested they will become in you

Always make the interviewer aware of how enthusiastic you are about the job. Playing it cool may work in poker. It doesn't work in job hunting

%Thank you for seeing me today - I've really enjoyed our meeting. This is exactly the type of organisation I'd like to work for & I would love to have the opportunity of proving myself in this role+

THINGS YOU SHOULD NEVER DO AT THE END OF AN INTERVIEW

- Bluff-pretend you have another offer
- Ask the interviewer how well you have performed
- Try to pressurise the interviewer into a decision
- Ask the interviewer when they are expecting to make a decision

MONEY

Although they may ask you about salary expectations and you will need to answer if asked, you should avoid instigating the conversation yourself.

It could be appropriate for sales people to talk about money, when their package is based upon bonus/commission.

Examples:

How much can I earn?

What is my earning potential?

GOOD LUCK!!!

Remember . by virtue of the fact that the client has requested your attendance at interview, there is already interest in what they know about you so far from your CV. Use the interview as the opportunity to build on that foundation and ensure that at the end of the interview, they believe as you do that no one else would be more suited to the position than yourself!