

## Upfront & Personnel Interview hints and tips

### Focus on your strengths

What do you have to offer an employer? Why should that employer choose you over someone else?

It's about matching their problems and needs with your qualifications, skills and traits. Your goal is to convince the interviewers that you are the solution they have been seeking.

Concentrating on your five best strengths will help you focus during the interview and will make it easier for them to remember you. You can begin the interview by identifying your five key strengths and matching them up with the job requirements. Once you've done that, determine ways to bring up these matches during the interview. Read through the job description and identify the key factors needed to do the job.

### Tell me about a time when...

As soon as you hear these words you should be aware that the interviewer is probably using a behavioural interview technique. This technique uses your past experiences and behaviours as an indicator of your future success. In other words, if you can demonstrate through examples that you have accomplished something before, there is a tendency for the interviewer to believe you may do it again.

For example, if you saved your company money by streamlining a process and you relate that experience to the interviewer, he will become interested because there is a strong possibility you could save his company money too.

Remember to be specific. Sometimes it is difficult to come up with a specific illustration, because the situation, such as managing multiple tasks at once, occurs regularly in your line of work.

Preparing your stories is one of the most beneficial exercises you can do to become focused before your interview. If you say your good at something, prove it with a relevant example.

The exact questions that might be asked are virtually limitless, here are a few examples:

- Tell me about a time when you challenged processes and they way things were done. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you failed. What happened and how did you recover?
- Tell me about a time when you were working with someone who wasn't pulling their weight and they had a different value system than yours. How did you deal with this person?

### Do you have any questions?

Ask questions relating to the job, the company and culture. Assuming this is a first interview, don't ask questions related to the benefits, as this is too premature. What's in it for me questions can be interpreted as self-centered and a sign of a lack of interest in the job.

It is important to ask questions to learn more about the company and the jobs challenges. In some cases, the interviewer will be listening for the types of questions you ask. The best questions will come as a result of your listening to what is asked during the interview.

A good response to the interview asking, "Do you have any questions?" would be: "Yes, I do. From what you've been asking during the interview, it sounds like you have a problem with customer retention. Can you tell me a little more about the situation, and what the first challenges would be for this new person?"

Be prepared, depending on who is interviewing you, your questions should vary.

- If the hiring manager is interviewing you, ask questions about the job, the desired qualities and the challenges.
- If you are interviewing with the human resources manager, ask about the company and the department.
- If you are interviewing with management, ask about the industry and future projections. This is your change to demonstrate your industry knowledge.

You will have to use your judgement about the number of questions to ask and when ask them. Think of this as a conversation. When you begin to think of the interview as a two-way process, you will see it is important for you to find out as much as possible about the company.

### Don't talk too much

The gift of the gab can be something of a curse during an interview. You could end up talking your way right out of the job.

It is important to remember that interviewers are only human and their attention tends to wane as you speak. Fully understanding this is critical to effectively communicating during an interview. Your response should be less than a minute and a half when an interviewer asks you to "tell me about yourself."

Near the end of your response, it's important to keep the interviewer engaged by asking questions, for example, "Is this the level of detail you are looking for?" This strategy helps to reengage your listener and promotes two-way communication.

Your interview goals are to ensure you are understood and to make the best presentation of your talents.

### Successfully closing the interview

Regardless of your style or how you choose to close the interview, there are some key points to keep in mind:

1. Leave your interviewer with the right picture of you. Think of at least five skills or traits you want remembered after the interview.
2. Ask if there is anything else you can provide, such as references, background information or work samples.
3. State your interest in the position if you are keen to pursue it. Don't act overly anxious, but act interested. Remember to mention the added value you can bring to the job.
4. Ask about the next step in the process.

### Interview Essentials

Companies want to hire competent, successful, articulate executives, yet the very first encounter between the candidate and company often places the candidate in a particularly stressful and uncomfortable situation: The interview.

The reality is you must deal with the hiring process, as it exists. To accomplish that, you must learn how to comfortably manage and control your interviews. Here five key strategies to help ensure interview success:

#### Sell It to Me, Don't Tell It to Me

Interviews are the time to sell what you have accomplished, not simply to tell what you've done. For example, if you're asked how many people you managed in your last position, it's tempting to quickly respond, "I had a team of 35." However, a much stronger response is, "My staff at IBM included 35 professionals and support personnel. Not only was I responsible for managing those individuals, but I also directed all recruitment and hiring activities, set salaries, designed bonus plans, facilitated the annual performance review process and projected long-term staffing requirements. What's more, my team increased annual sales by more than 35 percent within just one year."

### Turn Every Negative into a Positive

What do you do if your interviewer asks about your experience working with Excel spreadsheets and you have none? Don't simply say you don't know Excel. Instead, use related experiences to illustrate you have some relevant knowledge. For example, you could answer, "I have extensive experience designing Lotus spreadsheets, so I'm sure getting a handle on Excel won't take any time at all." Then, even though you've been honest, you've positively positioned yourself and your knowledge.

### Big to Little

When someone asks you about your experience with mergers and acquisitions, use the big-to-little strategy to organize your thoughts, respond seamlessly and make it easy for your interviewer to understand your specific experience. Start big, with an overview of your experience in M&A transactions -- just a short description of your overall scope and depth of experience. Then, follow up with smaller details -- two to four specific achievements, projects or highlights that are directly related. You might talk about your involvement in due diligence, negotiations, transactions or acquisition integration. In essence, you're communicating, "This is what I know, and this is how well I've done it."

### Take the Initiative

You're nearing the interview's close, and you had wanted to share your experience in supply chain management. However, the topic was never brought up. It is your responsibility to introduce it into the conversation. You might comment, "Before we end, I'd like to share one more thing with you that I think is important to the position and my fit within your organization." Then proceed with sharing the information. You must take the initiative during an interview to be sure you have communicated all that is of value.

There is no doubt interviewing is a stressful and often difficult situation. However, it's your professional life on the line. Walk into each interview knowing what information you want to communicate. Quietly control the interview to be sure you paint a picture of knowledge and success as you position yourself for an offer.

## **Making a so-called weakness seem positive.**

If you are asked the question, "What are your weaknesses" conventional wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness like "I'm a perfectionist", and to turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed because they've probably heard the same answer a hundred times. The correct approach would be to highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviews don't care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.

## **The interview rules**

### **1. 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 also should find out about the company's culture to gain insight into your potential happiness on the job.

### **2. Be Prepared.**

You should have at least five questions prepared to ask at the end of the interview.

### **3. Show Enthusiasm.**

A firm handshake and plenty of eye contact demonstrate confidence. Speak distinctly in a confident voice, even though you may feel shaky.

### **4. 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.

### **5. Answer the Question Asked.**

Candidates often don't think about whether or not they actually are answering the questions asked by their interviewers. Make sure you understand what is being asked, and get further clarification if you are unsure.

### **6. Give Specific Examples.**

One specific example of your background is worth 50 vague stories. Prepare your stories before the interview. Give examples that highlight your successes and uniqueness. Your past behaviour can indicate your future performance.

### **7. Ask Questions.**

Many interviewees don't ask questions and miss the opportunity to find out valuable information. Your questions indicate your interest in the company or job.