

## **CHAPTER 12**

### **THE INTERVIEW**

## PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW

The interview is your most decisive step in your search for a job. You will want to be as thoroughly prepared for your interview as you can be. When you are face to face with an employer interviewer, you are a salesperson. Your product is you. Whether or not you are invited to continue your pursuit of employment opportunities with a given employer will depend upon your success with the initial, or screening interviewer in selling yourself during the first interview.

To sell yourself convincingly, have the following facts ready to answer: Your work history, educational and/or service background, job objective, skills and experiences you have that would be meaningful to the employer, interests and organizations to which you belong, plans for the future, hobbies, and why you feel qualified for the position for which you are applying. Take your resume along to every interview. You never know when you will be asked for your resume. The interviewer may ask for samples of your work. Remember, **BE TOTALLY PREPARED AT ALL TIMES.**

Don't rely on your application or resume to do the selling for you. Most interviewers will want you to speak for yourself, so be prepared to sell while you tell.

Don't be late. Plan ahead, but don't be too early. Show up for the interview with enough time to read some company literature enabling you to know something about the company. You may also have to complete an application form.

Remember that your interview starts at the moment you enter the company's front door. You may be observed as you wait in the in the waiting room and/or complete the application form. Act like you are there desiring a very important job and not just there because someone told you to go. Be alert at all times.

Job offers are made to employment seeker for a variety of reasons; however, most decisions are based largely on how well a person interviews. Those who interview well tend to receive several employment offers. Some employment seekers with average abilities can successfully find work because they possess good interviewing techniques.

All candidates, regardless of their talents or experiences, must learn to sell their assets to an employer during the interviewing process. **A POSITIVE ATTITUDE IS OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE. THE ATTITUDE YOU DISPLAY DURING THE INTERVIEW WILL BE AS IMPORTANT AS ANY INFORMATION PRESENTED TO THE INTERVIEWER. YOUR ATTITUDE MUST APPEAR TO REALLY BE YOU AND NOT A PUT-ON!** Attention must be given to avoid being over-bearing or arrogant, but never undersell yourself. You must sell at every interview.

Every applicant should dress neatly and conservatively and be well groomed. Clean clothes, hands and body (taker a shower before interviewing), neatly brushed hair, clean teeth, and light use of make-up for women are essential. Your appearance gives a lasting impression to the interviewer. Most general impressions about candidates are received within the first five minutes of an interview.

It is highly recommended that employment seekers know something about the company. Sending for company information in advance of the interview or reading company literature in the office waiting room prior to the interview will provide candidates with necessary knowledge about the company, product lines, and method of operation. Know the company's reputation, what their growth has been and what their growth potential is for the future.

When you enter the interviewer's office, think of yourself as a guest. A friendly greeting, but not bubbly manner, and a firm, but not overbearing handshake, are your best approaches. The interviewer realizes you may be nervous, but try to relax and be yourself. Smile, it certainly can't hurt.

Bring a resume with you to the interview and present it to the interviewer at the start of the interview.

When interviewing, you must be prepared to provide the interviewer with only necessary information. Know your program and be prepared to answer questions about it. Know when you will graduate, the number of students graduating from your program, and know where you fit in scholastically with the rest of your classmates (i.e. upper 10%, upper 25%, upper 50%, etc.)

Do not smoke at any interview, not even if the employer allows you the opportunity. Don't chew gum or have any candy in your mouth. It leaves a poor impression.

Most interviews take the form of questions and answers although some interviewers prefer to let you just talk about yourself. In either case, you will be expected to provide the same type of information. Remember, what you say cannot be stricken from the record of the interviewer's memory. Take a few seconds to think your thoughts through before answering. If you are asked if you have any questions, ask at least one intelligent question regarding the company or the job, chances for advancement or education assistance in returning to school to make a more valuable and knowledgeable employee.

During the interview you should demonstrate enthusiasm for the job and let the interviewer know that you are genuinely interested. It is important to cultivate a professional image and demonstrate good communication skills at the interview. Good eye contact is also very important. Those who avoid eye contact generally are perceived as having something to hide or lacking self-confidence. Interviewers tend to be more impressed by candidates who are over confident than those who are shy. Thus you should work at being self-assured.

Knowledge of one's self is also vitally important to properly answer questions at the interview. Understand in advance how your strengths will be of value to the employer. Show how you would fit into the position and the organization.

Watch for clues that let you know how the interviewer is responding to you. Is the interviewer relaxed, alert, interested, following you and encouraging you with nods, smiles and comments? If so, you're on the right track. Develop your points fully, but don't talk too much. As soon as you see or sense a loss of interest, you're going off the track. Get back on by asking, "Have I covered that point adequately?" or "Is there anything else you would like to know?" Clarify if you must to keep the interviewer with you.

While you are observing the interviewer, the interviewer is also observing you. Don't tap your feet or play with your hands, and don't skip from point to point without continuity. **KEEP EYE CONTACT WITH THE INTERVIEWER AS MUCH AS POSSIBLE.**

Be prepared to ask questions. Every interview is a two-way street. While the interviewer is trying to determine whom the most qualified candidate is to fill the position, the candidate should be determining whether the company affords the opportunity for growth and development in his/her career field. If not mentioned by the interviewer, ask what the primary responsibilities of the position will be, why the position is open, what type of training there will be and any questions about working conditions.

The interviewer will close the interview when enough information about you has been obtained. Don't attempt to extend it unless one of your important qualifications has not been discussed. Then ask to make just one more point and make it brief.

Don't blow your chances at the job by asking about sick leave, pensions, vacations, holidays, etc. at the first interview. However, if the interviewer brings it up first, feel free to respond. If salary has not been brought up by the end of the interview, don't hesitate to ask about it.

Always thank the interviewer before you leave. Follow up with a note thanking the interviewer for his/her time and reaffirming your interest in the job.

## **INTERVIEWING TIPS**

### **DO:**

Know the title of the specific job for which you are interviewing.

Know how you relate to that job in terms of interests, education, skills, etc.

Get a good night's sleep before the interview so you are alert.

Have your hair neatly combed or arranged and have your mustache and/or beard trimmed.

Have your face, hands and fingernails clean. Brush your teeth, have fresh breath, take a shower and use deodorant.

Bring your resume along to the interview even if you have previously provided a copy to the employer.

Bring a typed list of your references to the interview and provide to the interviewer if requested.

Keep effective eye contact.

Know where the company is located and how long it will take you to get there.

Arrive for the interview early enough to complete an application form and, so that you know something about the company, read available company literature.

Check your appearance before entering the building.

Be friendly and courteous with everyone with whom you come in contact.

Give a firm handshake, but not bone-crushing in nature.

Stand until the interviewer tells you to be seated. Sit straight in the chair and look alert. Avoid smoking or chewing gum during the interview.

Provide sharp, concise answers, speak distinctly and smile occasionally.

Allow the interviewer to control the interview. Speak clearly and avoid slang words such as "yeah", or "ya know".

Tell the interviewer you would like the job. Expressing your desire automatically tells the company that you want to work for them. If appropriate, ask for the next interview if you determine the present one is a screening interview.

Ask about the salary for the position, but only at the end of the interview if the interviewer has not brought it up.

Write a thank you note as a follow-up letter. In the note try to include reference to a specific topic covered in the interview and thank the interviewer for taking time to discuss your qualifications.

Keep in mind that the interview is a two-way process. Don't be afraid to ask questions that will help you decide if you really want the job and want to work for that employer. Examples of questions you might ask are:

- Does the company have any plans for expansion in the next two years?
- Why is this position vacant and is it a permanent position?
- What advancement potential does this position have?
- Will training be involved for this position and how long is the probation period?
- How soon will a decision be made on who will be hired for this position?

Thank the interviewer for the opportunity to have a personal interview. Shake hands again and indicate if you are definitely interested in the position.

### **DO NOT**

Be late.

Take anyone with you to the interview.

Sit until you are invited to do so in the interview.

Chew gum, have candy in your mouth, or smoke.

Joke around.

Swear, lie, or criticize your former employer.

Interrupt the interviewer at any time.

Display your nervousness by swinging your leg or playing with your hands, hair, watch, or jewelry.

Wear high fashion, see-through anything, cowboy boots, buckles, hats, excessive jewelry, or unbuttoned shirt.

Wear heavy perfume and aftershave, heavy makeup, dangling earrings, and excessively high heels.

Answer questions with "yup" or "nope" answers. Explain when possible, but avoid "over-answering" questions.

Discuss your personal or financial problems with the interviewer.

Inquire about benefits, vacations, bonuses or retirement benefits at the first interview. However, if the interviewer brings up any of these topics, ask any questions you feel necessary.

### **CONCERNS OF THE INTERVIEWER**

When deciding who should get the job offer, interviewers will often review the following areas of concern.

1. Will the person have a concern for productivity?
2. Will the person have pride of craftsmanship or quality of work?
3. Is the person responsible enough and have the ability to follow through with a task?
4. Will the person be dependable and possess good work habits, and become a team player with other company employees?
5. Does the person have a good attitude toward the company and will he/she have a suitable attitude toward other employees?
6. Does the person have the ability to write and speak effectively, follow directions, and read and apply printed matter on the job?
7. Does the person have the ambition, motivation and desire to get ahead?

## **TYPES OF INTERVIEWS**

While each individual interview is different, most fall into a specific category or “type” of interview. There are basically six types of interviews, each with a different approach.

### Screening Interview

If you are invited for an interview with a large company or organization, your first interview will often be with someone from the Personnel Office. The goal of such an initial or screening interview is two-fold. The personnel interviewer wants to be sure that you have the skills to do the job. In addition, he/she wants an opportunity to assess your personal characteristics; your appearance, your ability to communicate, your mannerisms, etc. While the Personnel Office does not usually have the authority to offer you a job, the personnel interviewer generally does determine who gets to move on to the next phase of the interview process.

### Technical Interview

This type of interview may be your first, and perhaps only interview with some employers, or it may follow the screening interview. Regardless of where it falls in the interview process, it is in this interview that you are face-to-face with the person who has the power to hire you. In the technical interview you must be able to relate your personal employability specifically to the job at hand. The interviewer knows the job. It will be up to you to convince him/her that you are the best person for the position.

### Stress Interview

While this type of interview is not common, it does occur. The purpose of a stress interview is, generally, to see how you react under pressure. Interviewers can create pressure in a variety of ways but, regardless of how it is done, it is important that you remain calm. Respond to questions clearly and concisely in this type of interview.

### Multiple or Panel Interview

Occasionally you may be interviewed by a group of people, rather than by a single interviewer. While this is not necessarily designed as a stress interview, it usually turns out to be one. In the panel interview you often have several different people asking you a mixture of technical and general questions. If you find yourself in this kind of situation, bear in mind that you can only answer one question at a time. Do not get rattled simply because the questions come from different people.

## Telephone Interview

This is one of the most efficient ways for an employer to screen job applicants. It is also one of the most lethal types of interviews from the standpoint of the job seeker. In a telephone interview you are being evaluated, at least in part, on your manner over the telephone. Therefore, try to avoid a telephone interview if at all possible. Ask if you may have an appointment to discuss the job in person. If you must be interviewed over the telephone, make your responses confident, positive, clear and brief.

## On-Campus Interview

A number of companies send recruiters to interview on campus. These interviews are essentially screening interviews. The goal of the on-campus recruiter is to identify students who might be good candidates for employment with his/her company. The most qualified students are then usually invited to the company for additional interviews.

## **THE INTERVIEWER**

There seems to be an aura of mystique that surrounds the interviewer. But who is this person really? What is his/her role in the whole employee selection process? You can help de-mystify the interviewing process by taking a moment to put yourself in the interviewer's position.

The first thing to know about interviewers is that most do something else for a living. The shop foreman who interviews you for a welding position, the doctor who interviews you for a medical assistant position, the store manager who interviews you for a sales position; all of these people are interviewers only when they have a position to be filled.

Most interviewers do not interview often. Some do not interview well. This is very important to know since too often the tendency is to view the interviewer as the "expert". This may not necessarily be the case. Even the "professional" interviewers, those who work in the personnel office, are not in nearly as good a position to control the interview as is the well-prepared interviewee. You know all about yourself. The interviewer knows only the highlights. Who is in a better position to control the interview?

A common complaint of interviewers is that interviewees seem to feel that it is their role to remain passive. If you can be an active interviewee, helping the interviewer discover your strengths and how they relate to the job at hand, you have gone a long way beyond the typical applicant. This is not to say you should dominate the conversation. It merely means that you can help control the direction and flow of the interview if you know your selling points.

## **NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATON AND NERVES**

Non-verbal communication, or body language as it is sometimes called, can provide you with valuable clues as to how the interview is going. Your non-verbal clues also can send messages to the interviewer as well as the interviewer sending non-verbal clues to you. It is helpful for you to know how to read such messages, both from the interviewers and your point of view.

Non-verbal communication involves all of the cues you send out through things such as posture, gestures, mannerisms and expressions. Things such as maintaining eye contact and correct posture and appearing relaxed are positive non-verbal signals. Slouching, yawning and restlessness are seen as negative non-verbal communication.

Try to be aware of the signals the interviewer is sending out. If his/her attention seems to be wandering you can recapture it by asking a question such as “Is this the kind of information you need?” By being aware of the non-verbal cues, you can help keep the interviewer focused and on target.

Much of the non-verbal communication sent out by the interviewee can often be related to nervousness. Most individuals do not go through enough successful interviews in their work like to ever really get over being nervous. It is helpful to keep in mind that most interviewers expect you to be nervous and will spend part of the interview trying to help you relax.

If you are well prepared for the interview and know how your skills relate to the needs of the employer, you will be surprised at how quickly your nervousness fades once you are in the interview.

Avoid chewing gum, candy and smoking at every interview. Don't fidget in the chair, and above all, keep good eye contact. Your non-verbal signals will likely not be the sole criteria on which you are judged by an interviewer. On the other hand, they definitely contribute to his/her impression of you.

Interviewing for a job is much like taking a test. The more mentally prepared you are the better the chance for success. Since no two interviews are exactly the same, it is necessary to be totally prepared to answer any questions which are asked and/or to spend fifteen to twenty minutes verbalizing your work history, educational background, skills and experiences to the interviewer while he/she just listens to you.

In either case, you must be prepared to expand on many of the following sample questions. Most of the questions require a lot of thought before answering and that is why prior preparation is needed. Spend some time thinking how you might respond if you were asked any of the information that follows.

### **QUESTIONS FREQUENTLY ASKED DURING AN EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEW**

1. Why should I hire you?
2. What do you know about our company?
3. What contributions could you make to this job and/or company?
4. What attendance record did you have in school and/or in past employment?
5. Why do you want to change jobs or career fields? (if applicable)
6. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
7. Where in our company would you like to be in five or ten years?
8. What have you learned from past mistakes?
9. Why do you feel you are the most qualified to apply for this position?
10. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
11. How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?

12. In what school or community activities have you participated? Why?
13. What jobs have you held? how were they obtained and why did you leave?
14. If you had one thing to change about yourself, what would it be and why?
15. Tell me about yourself.
16. What determines a person's progress in a good company?
17. How do you get along with others?
18. How do you work under pressure?
19. Describe your most rewarding school and/or work experience?
20. What have you learned from your past employment?
21. Do you have plans for continued study or an advanced degree?
22. Are your grades a good indication of your academic achievements?
23. What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
24. Are you willing to relocate to accept employment and/or to be promoted?
25. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
26. What led you to choose your career field?
27. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
28. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
29. What salary would you expect if you were hired for this position?
30. Why did you decide to seek a position with our company?
31. What are your greatest accomplishments so far?
32. Are you willing to travel if hired for a position with our company?
33. What qualities should a successful manager possess?
34. Describe an effective working relationship between an employee/supervisor.
35. Do you have any questions you would like to ask me?

There may be an occasion when an interviewer will place you into a work situation and ask how you would handle a problem, whether from a practical standpoint or from something learned from a previous job. If you are in a marketing career field, you may be asked to sell the interviewer something, such as a paper clip, rubber band, etc.

Sex, race, religion, or disability may not be used as a reason to reject any applicant. Specific questions relating to these topics may not legally be asked by the interviewer. If this situation arises, it may be advantageous to answer any irrelevant or prying questions as diplomatically as possible. However, you are within your rights to state that you feel any of these questions are rather personal and you would just as soon refrain from answering. Another sound approach to take is to ask the interviewer what relationship the question has to the job, and if it does have merit you would answer the question. The main point to remember is: **STAY CALM WHEN YOU ARE ASKED A PERSONAL QUESTION!** Blowing up and telling the interviewer it is none of his/her business probably would eliminate you from employment with the company.

## ANALYZING THE INTERVIEW

It is important for you to analyze each interview as soon as possible after its completion. Such analysis will help you identify strengths and weaknesses in your interviewing style.

### IMPORTANT:

### EACH INTERVIEW SHOULD HELP YOU TO BE BETTER PREPARED FOR THE NEXT INTERVIEW!

Respond to each of the following questions after each interview. Answer each question as completely as possible.

1. How did I appear to the interviewer? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

2. How well did I answer the questions? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

3. How well did I get my selling points across? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

4. How well did I communicate and keep eye contact? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. What selling points did I not get across? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

6. Why should this employer make a job offer to me? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

7. What would I change about this interview? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

8. What questions did I have a hard time answering? \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Record the name of the interviewer and date of the interview on the appropriate employer information card explained in Exercise #19, and also the date on which you can expect to hear from the employer.