

# EMPLOYMENT INTERVIEWING



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## I. WHAT IS INTERVIEWING?

Interviewing is a communication process between two people. The interviewer is using the interview as an opportunity to determine whether or not you will be a good "fit" for his/her organization. He/she does this by exploring your personality, evaluating your capabilities, motivation and skills, and answering questions you have about the organization and the position for which you are interviewing. The interview is an opportunity for YOU to present your qualifications, sell your potential and gain additional information which you feel is pertinent to your decision-making process. The interview is a two-way process in which you and the interviewer discover mutual interests.

More specifically, the interviewer will be assessing this "fit" between mutual interests in terms of the following: Are you qualified for the position? What are your career objectives? Do they fit the opportunities the position will afford you? Are you sincerely interested in this particular position and employer? You, the interviewee, should be considering some of the same issues: does my background qualify me for this position? Does this job opportunity fit with my career goals? Will this particular organization and position offer me opportunities to meet my career goals?

**The initial interview** is usually conducted by a member of the Human Resources Department or by an operating (line) manager/supervisor. The interviewer may use a rather direct approach because he/she is most interested in getting the facts; or the interview may be in a conversation-like atmosphere. A selection interview will probably be done by the supervisor or manager to whom the candidate will report. In most organizations, this will usually be a candidate's second interview and will occur at the organization's offices.

## II. PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

### A. Know Yourself

It is not very impressive to an employer if you haven't sized up and taken a personal inventory or assessment of your abilities, skills, interests, values and personal characteristics. Before you go to an interview, you will need to know just what you can do for the employer in terms of the qualifications you will bring to the job (i.e. writing, verbal communication, problem-solving, leadership, programming, organization). You need to be prepared to give examples of accomplishments that show you have those abilities/skills. You should be able to verbalize why you are interested in pursuing the job (i.e. how it fits your values, objectives and interests). If you need help with this, make an appointment with the The Career Services Center. We can help you define your skills and interests, and can assist you in preparing for interviews. Also, use FOCUS, on The Career Center's web site; it is a self-directed, self-assessment program that will help you. Additionally, attend one of our Interview Preparation workshops and participate in a "mock" interview. Employers are known to look more favorably upon persons who have specific and well thought out career goals. Of course, it would be rare to know exactly what you want to do. But it is to your advantage in an interview to start on a specific note while indicating your "flexibility."

### B. Know the Job

Know what the job entails. The more you know about the job's duties and responsibilities, the better prepared you will be to relate your specific qualifications and skills to that job. Even if your academic major specifically prepared you for the job, it is still important to do research. There are several ways to conduct research. Start by reading information about the specific job, organization, and career field; use the resources available on-line (The Career Center's web site) and in the CSC, Roy O. West Library and public libraries. This will give you a good general feeling for the job. To obtain more specific information, meet and speak with people who are

employed in the same kind of job for which you will be interviewing; these sessions are commonly referred to as informational interviews. First-hand information like this is invaluable and it will help you understand the job.

### C. Know the Organization/Company/Industry/Occupation

It is essential to learn as much as you can about the organization and the industry in which it operates for the following reasons:

- It shows that you are interested, committed and enthusiastic.
- It is easier to convince an employer that you will be an asset to his organization if you are knowledgeable about the field and the organization itself.
- Information obtained through research can help you decide whether or not you want to work for the organization and in that particular field.

Information you should know before the interview:

1. How old is the organization?
2. What are its services and/or products?
3. Where are its offices, plants or stores located?
4. Has the organization shown substantial and consistent growth?
5. What is its financial condition?
6. What are its new services and/or products?
7. Are there any expansion plans?
8. If the company sells, to whom does it sell? Retailers? Wholesalers?
9. Who are the organization's major competitors?
10. How does the organization rank in the industry?
11. What were the company's gross sales last year?
12. What is the organization's public image?
13. To what degree is the organization committed to solving community problems?
14. If it is a non-profit organization, what purpose does it serve? How is it funded? Whom does it serve? What functions does it perform?
15. Is the organization family-owned? If so, how will this effect advancement potential?
16. Does the organization have excessive employee turnover?
17. How centralized is the organizational structure? Do subordinates participate in decision-making activities?
18. What are the specific duties and responsibilities of the job?\*
19. What kind of training do new employees receive?\*
20. What are the avenues for advancement?\*
21. What happened to the person who previously had this job? (i.e. promoted?)\*
22. What are some of the organizational problems that people face in this position? (By identifying the problems that the organization faces, it will be easier for you to match your abilities and determine if it's a place you want to work.)

\*answers to these questions may need to be obtained during the actual job interview(s).

Sample sources of information on employers include: 1) their homepage; b) calling the company to ask for material; c) public libraries; d) Roy O. West library; e) The Career Center's library and web site.

### III. THE INTERVIEW

#### A. Preliminaries

1. **Your appearance...**The first impression is very important and can determine the tone for the rest of the interview. Dress is an aspect of interviewing that many people overlook. A safe guideline is to dress for the image that you want to communicate. Applicants usually want to convey a professional business-like image. Men should wear a suit and tie, and women should wear a suit or a dress. It is probably best to observe what someone normally wears day-to-day in the particular job and dress a little more conservatively than that. It is usually best to not wear "trendy" or "faddish" clothing. Stick to more conservative fashions. Realize that dress serves as an "auxiliary message" by telling the employer something about your personality and attitudes. There is no point in turning someone off because of your clothes.
2. **Your arrival...**Arrive ON TIME for the interview!!! It is a good idea to be early so that you are not rushed and will have time to collect your thoughts. For off-campus interviews, leave early, especially if you are going to an area with which you are unfamiliar in terms of location and parking. If possible, check it out the day before so you know how long it will actually take to get there.
3. **What to bring...**Bring spare copies of your resume, as well as pen and paper. You will NOT want to take notes during the interview, but after you leave the interview there may be some things you need to write down, such as the interviewer's name, a note to remind you of a request made by the interviewer with which you will need to comply, or just some points you want to remember to prepare for the next interview. This information may also be helpful when writing your thank-you letter.

#### B. The First Minute

The first minute of the interview is usually very important. Whether you like it or not, during that time you will be judged on your handshake (firm), appearance, and eye contact; maintain good eye contact but do not stare. The first minute may set the stage for the rest of the interview, during which the interviewer will attempt to confirm his/her first impression. Most importantly, **BE YOURSELF!**

If the interviewer does not offer to shake your hand, take the initiative to shake his/hers. Address and greet the interviewer by name, and be personable. Take a seat once the interviewer has offered or has taken one himself, but do not slouch! The tone of the interview should be serious but not tense. It is normal to be nervous, particularly in the early interviews; in fact, the interviewer expects a certain amount of nervousness. Attempt to channel some of your nervous energy into genuine enthusiasm about yourself, the position for which you are interviewing and the recruiting organization.

#### C. Review of Your Background, Interests, Goals and Qualifications

1. **Answering questions.** During this stage the interviewer will ask questions designed to measure your self-confidence, your ability to relate comfortably with others, and your ability to communicate clearly and logically. Questions dealing with your future plans and aspirations assist the employer in understanding your ambitions, your desire to get ahead and the soundness of your thinking. The interviewer will be eager to learn of your involvement

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in extracurricular activities and campus leadership positions, part-time or summer jobs, internships, etc. He will be looking for mature individuals who are not afraid to work, and who are self-starters and leaders. These characteristics may be detected from your outside activities, interests and part-time jobs. This is your opportunity to build upon and supplement the information you have outlined in your resume. Relate your strengths, qualifications and positive characteristics to the needs of the company/organization.

Do not be afraid of a pause in the conversation during the interview. It is better to collect your thoughts and think about your answer for a few seconds rather than prematurely blurt something out to eliminate the silence. While a few seconds of silence may seem like eternity, do not worry; it is not nearly as long as it feels. If you have sufficiently answered a question, do not ramble - you will just get yourself in trouble.

- 2. Listening...**Your ability to listen during the interview will be as important as your ability to speak. Listening is an active process involving more than just hearing. When listening to an employer try to understand his meaning, and how and why he feels the way he does. Hints for becoming a more effective listener include:

- listen for ideas.
- judge content, not delivery.
- avoid distractions.
- do not be hasty in your reply to questions.
- do not interrupt the interviewer.
- keep an open mind.
- practice listening.

- 3. Non-verbal Communication...**Messages are conveyed during the interview not only by what you say but also by how you say it and how you behave. An interviewer may interpret any aspect of behavior as meaningful. These non-verbal communication factors may reinforce or contradict your verbal message. Rather than becoming paranoid about non-verbal messages, it is better to recognize them and use them to your advantage.

- a. Speech:** Rate, loudness and intelligibility of speech can affect whether or not the interviewer receives your message. It is best to speak at a moderate rate and volume and in an organized, concise manner which hopefully is reasonably natural for you.
- b. Eye Contact:** Maintaining eye contact indicates interest in the job and the interview. Attentiveness and self-confidence are also being conveyed; but do not stare.
- c. Facial Expressions:** Your facial expressions say a lot. Be sure they do not contradict what you are saying. Do not be afraid to smile; it often connotes warmth, confidence, sincerity and a pleasant personality; it can also help you relax.

#### 4. Other helpful hints....

- (1) **Avoid the use of nervous phrases** (i.e., "you know" or "uh..." or "like")
- (2) **Keep to the point.** Do not bring up extraneous matters or tell long anecdotes.
- (3) **Don't try to take over.** Let the employer give you the clues. Don't try to dominate the interview.
- (4) **Don't try to give the answer the interviewer wants.** Most employers have experience in conducting interviews, and they will know when you are trying to play this game.
- (5) **Don't exaggerate.** It will come back to haunt you.
- (6) **Don't play comedian** or try to entertain the interviewer.
- (7) **Be consistent.** Don't lie.
- (8) **Try to be as specific as possible.** Never say, "I'll do anything." Take charge of your own life or someone else will take charge of it for you.
- (9) **Don't bring in a pile of exhibits** or samples unless asked.
- (10) **If you personally know an individual in the company,** don't play it up or try to hide it.
- (11) **Never slight a former employer or colleague.** It will only reflect badly on you. If there were problems, try to put answers in the positive rather than the negative.
- (12) **Don't overplay technical knowledge.** Avoid sounding like you are showing off your knowledge.
- (13) **Watch your grammar.** Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves articulately and properly.
- (14) **Don't expect an offer on the spot.** Offers generally are not made until at least after the second interview, sometimes two or three weeks later.
- (15) **Most important: BE YOURSELF.** You do not want to get hired on the basis of something you are not. You want to be hired for who you are!!

#### D. Discussing and Assessing the Employer's Opportunities

Remember that the interview is a two-way street; it provides you the opportunity to learn more about the specific position, its duties and responsibilities, as well as the employing organization. It should help you determine whether or not your interests and goals are compatible with those of the potential employer. Sample questions you may want to ask are:

1. How will my performance be evaluated and how often?
2. What type of training is available on an ongoing basis?
3. How much contact/exposure will I have with senior management?
4. What are the opportunities for advancement?

#### E. Concluding the Interview

Certain points will be clarified and the recruiter will explain how and when the next contact will be made. During this phase you have the opportunity to ask any final questions, to briefly summarize your interests, and to clarify what your next step should be (i.e. perhaps sending your transcript). If you are genuinely interested in the position, this is the time to say so; do not leave the interviewer guessing about your level of interest. Another word of advice: Don't prolong your departure! Employers have busy schedules; do not hurt your chances by lingering after the interview.

## IV. AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### A. Write Thank-you Letters

You should write the interviewer a thank-you letter, which serves several functions:

- it reminds the interviewer of your abilities and reiterates your strengths.
- it shows your interest, assertiveness and ability to follow through.
- it is a social and professional nicety.

### B. Do a Post-Interview Assessment

How you handle yourself emotionally during the post-interview period can be important, critical, particularly if you have other interviews during this time. If your first interview experience is not successful, you may suffer from self-doubt, lack of confidence, and unanswered questions about how to improve for the next interview.

One good strategy for dealing with this post-interview period is to talk with someone who listens well, knows you well, and cares about your success. Other people who have experienced the interviewing process can also be helpful. Talking through the course of the interview, how you were feeling, and how you feel after the interview can be very helpful in improving your next interview. What were your strengths/weaknesses in the interview? What did not go as planned?

How can you improve the next interview? Like anything new, interviewing takes practice. You may want to participate in one of the CSC's "mock" interviews to become more comfortable with the interview process.

### C. Prepare for Second Interviews

Rarely are job offers extended on the basis of a single interview. Employers usually want to speak with a candidate more than once and they want you to speak with a number of individuals from within their organization. Candidates who exhibit the most promise in the initial interview are usually invited for a second interview at the home office or plant. During the second interview candidates may expect to further discuss job responsibilities, observe the organization's operations, visit facilities where they might work, meet other personnel, and perhaps tour the community. Candidates may also be asked to take a series of tests, which could be psychological or aptitude in nature. At this stage employers are interested in how well you will fit in to the organization. Based on the second interview, decisions are usually made on whether or not to extend an offer.

You should accept an invitation for a second interview only if you are sincerely interested in the employer. If the invitation does not mention expenses, contact the employer for clarification. Most employers pay all reasonable expenses incurred on visits; keep receipts for transportation, food and lodging. If you are planning to visit more than one employer on the same trip, inform each of them and they will help you pro-rate your expenses. The following items are **not** considered normal expenses: entertainment, tours, cigarettes, alcoholic beverages, magazines, personal phone calls, valet expenses, flight insurance, and excessive tips.

#### D. Reasons for turn-down

No matter how well you prepare for your interview, there is always the possibility that you will be turned down. Following are some reasons (in no particular order) why interviewers turn down applicants as shown in the Northwestern Endicott Report, Northwestern University.

1. Poor personal appearance.
2. Overbearing - aggressive - conceited "superiority complex;" "know it all."
3. Inability to express oneself clearly - poor voice, diction and grammar.
4. Lack of planning for career; no purpose or goals.
5. Lack of confidence and poise; nervousness; ill-at-ease.
6. Lack of interest and enthusiasm - passive, indifferent.
7. Failure to participate in extracurricular activities.
8. Overemphasis on money - interested only in the best dollar offer.
9. Poor scholastic record - just got by.
10. Unwilling to start at the bottom - expects too much too soon.
11. Makes excuses - evasiveness - hedges on unfavorable factors in record.
12. Lack of tact.
13. Lack of maturity.
14. Lack of courtesy - ill mannered.
15. Condemnation of past employers.
16. Lack of social understanding.
17. Marked dislike for school work.
18. Lack of vitality and enthusiasm.
19. Fails to look interviewer in the eye.
20. Limp, fishy, hand-shake.

#### V. INTERVIEWING: A SKILL TO DEVELOP

Interviewing is new to you. It is a skill, and it can be learned. The three keys to successful interviewing are **preparation, preparation and preparation**. Practice will also assist you in effectively interviewing. Not every interviewer is highly trained with sound human evaluation skills. Depending upon the employer, the type and level of position and the expectations of the organization, different representatives may be involved in the screening and selection process. Therefore, a set "routine" on your part is not likely to work in every interview situation. By being well-prepared, knowledgeable about your skills and interests and responsive to a particular interviewer, you will tremendously increase your odds of success.