

Sail through those interviews

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A job offer is often contingent upon your performance during the interview

An interview is the gateway to employment, a chance for the applicant and the employer to get to know each other on a personal level and decide if they are a good 'fit'. Oftentimes, the impression an employer gleans from an interview can be the difference between a job offer and a letter of condolence. To interview successfully, a candidate must have an understanding of how interviews work and what employers are looking for in new employees. Here are just a few helpful tips to get the most from your interview and maximize your chances of getting that job.

Understanding interviews

The interview is the main 'battleground' in your job campaign and should therefore be the focus of your efforts. Not all interviews are about offering you a job. Screening interviews, for example, are designed to weed out the unqualified or the unsuitable and may be conducted by telephone. Second interviews aim to draw up a final shortlist of candidates and can be the toughest of all. Panel interviews, conducted by a team of three or four interviewers, can be quite intimidating and lengthy. There are also competency-based interviews, technical interviews, assessment centered interviews, and presentation interviews. Psychometric interviews, which measure the five big personality traits (extroversion, agreeableness, emotional stability, conscientiousness, and openness to new experiences) are becoming increasingly popular. Integrity tests, meant to root out dishonest candidates, are also common. Different types of interviews require different tech-

niques and strategies too numerous to mention here, but all interviews have some common ground rules:

- **Be prepared.** Set aside at least one or two days to prepare thoroughly for each interview to give you a head start. Make sure you know your CV by heart. Remember that poor preparation will show and could cost you the job. Research the company and, if possible, find out about the interviewers themselves.
- **Make first impressions count.** The first two minutes of an interview are often the most important. Make sure you look the part, be clean, tidy, and well-presented. Be poised and confident. Wait until the interviewer asks you to sit down. Maintain eye contact throughout.
- **Master body language.** Body language reveals, as nothing else can, the trustworthiness, enthusiasm, and sincerity of the applicant, as well as his feelings toward the interviewer. Body expressions are facial or body movements that can be classified as 'active' or 'passive.' Active body expressions reveal empathy or a willingness to communicate, whereas passive expressions mean the opposite. In face-to-face conversation, the eyes are probably the best signal of a listener's active or passive attitude.

Body motions or gestures communicate understanding or lack of it. When communicators like or are in agreement with each other, their bodies tend to move at the same time or rate, or in some similar manner. Passive listeners may scratch their chin, run their fingers through their hair, wipe their forehead, look at the ceiling, or play with their watch to reduce their anxiety.

Posture communicates attitude. When people are negotiating, they will sit closer to the table if they are pleased with the progress of the talks and farther from the table if

they are unhappy. Posture can convey alertness, boredom, disgust, eagerness, enthusiasm, and energy—or a lack thereof.

- **Keep it brief and simple.** Try not to talk for longer than two minutes at a time. Avoid jargon and unnecessary detail. Watch for body language signs that the interviewer has heard enough. Listen attentively. Be positive and enthusiastic. Show interest in the employers' needs and demonstrate how the organization will benefit by recruiting you.
- **Refer to your references.** Use your references as support. They can influence the employer's final decision.

What to avoid

In stiff competition for a position, the following could cost you the job:

- Limp, fishy handshake;
- Restlessness (indicating discomfort with responses);
- Overbearing, aggressive, or conceited attitude;
- Lack of tact or maturity;
- Evasiveness on vulnerable areas;
- Inability to express thoughts clearly;
- Over-emphasis on money; and
- Condemnation of past employers.

Is the organization right for you?

Use the last part of the interview to, in effect, interview the company. They might want you, but you need to be sure that you want to work for them, too. Do your research, then ask about any gaps in your knowledge about the job or the organization—ask about the organization's culture, goals, and aspirations. Have a prepared list of questions and do not be nervous about referring to it—it shows that you are both prepared and conscientious. Above all, be confident; if you have done your homework, you have nothing to fear.

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