

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

OBJECTIVE OF THE INTERVIEW: Get an offer!!!

The company will examine your work history, education, strengths, weaknesses and accomplishments. They will also evaluate your level of motivation, values, attitude and personality. You need to determine the responsibilities, expectations, work atmosphere, opportunities and company direction.

PREPARE!

You most probably will not be the only qualified candidate considered. The deciding factors will be the way you present your skills and qualifications relevant to the position, how you conduct yourself during the interview, the image you project and the 'chemistry' you have with the hiring manager(s) and current team.

RESEARCH THE COMPANY

You should by now have a solid understanding of the position under consideration, what the company wants in the person, and some insight into the people you will be interviewing with.

Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is attractive to you, to assure yourself that you want to be associated with them, and to raise your interview 'comfort level'.

The Internet is a very useful tool in your preparation. Review the company's home page and any industry specific information that you can obtain. Know the competitors in the marketplace and as much information of the company's products and services as you can find. Check www.hoovers.com for general company and financial information. Look at www.thomasregister.com for product info (often an on-line photo catalog is available, and sometimes a link to their home page).

WHAT TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

- ✓ **Your Resume (bring enough copies to give each hiring manager/interviewer)**
- ✓ **Three Professional References (Third party referrals go a long way to getting an offer)**
- ✓ **Portfolio of past accomplishments**
- ✓ **Pen and paper to take notes**
- ✓ **Your written questions**
- ✓ **A positive mental attitude**

ARRIVAL AT THE INTERVIEW

Arrive fifteen minutes before the interview. Get there early and wait for the proper timing! If asked, complete an application. Complete it in full and leave no blanks. Do not write "see resume" as a response to any application question. Respond to "expected salary" questions as "open", and to "current salary" questions truthfully. List references if requested. My name should be your response to any "referred by" questions.

BEHAVIORAL-BASED EMPLOYER QUESTIONS

Behavioral-based interviewing is becoming increasingly popular with companies. It is based on the premise that the best indicator of future success is past performance. Although it is not the only indicator, as a predictive tool, past performance demonstrates the strongest correlation to future success.

Therefore, the most effective selection techniques tend to be anchored on an exploration, in behavioral terms of the candidate's past performance. Evolving from this approach is the most efficient assessment technique - the structured, behaviorally based evaluation interview. It combines many different questioning techniques to accomplish its predictive objective. It is a flexible approach that must be adapted to each individual situation.

Behaviorally based questions are individually designed to uncover the candidate's experience in solving problems, handling challenges, and producing results as it relates to that position. Typically they begin with one "broad" question and are followed by "probing" questions designed to get even more detail.

In answering behavioral-based questions it is best to use the "**STAR**" approach. **Situation, Task, Actions, Results.** Listen to the question; describe the situation, the task, action you took and the end result (s). Always provide results for this is when you truly sell your skills to the potential new employer.

In no particular order and not necessarily related to any specific position, the following questions will provide you with example of this assessment technique. Remember, the questions you will be asked will be related directly to the position you are interviewing for.

1. Tell me about a time when you went beyond what was expected of you on your job?

- What prompted you to do this?
- What actions did you take?
- What were the results?

2. Give me an example of a recent conflict you had with a coworker (manager, customer, vendor)?

- What were the causes of the conflict?
- What specifically did you do to handle it?
- What was the outcome?

3. Tell me about a time when you had to overcome a particularly difficult obstacle in order to achieve results?

- Why did you choose that approach?
- What were the results?
- How did you feel about that?
- If you had to do it all over again, what if anything would you do differently or what would you change?

4. You just provided me with a listing of your strengths. How did you develop those strengths?

- In specific terms, how do you utilize each of these strengths in your present job?
- What value or benefit does this bring to your company (job)?

5. From a business perspective, tell me about the last time you or one of your ideas or suggestions were rejected?

- How did that make you feel?
- What role did emotion play in how you handled it?
- What were the results?
- Did you consider alternative approaches?
- If you had to do over again, what if anything would you have done differently?

By anticipating job related behavioral-based questions, questions directly related to the position you are interviewing for and the "probing" questions, you will be able to provide actual work related examples. Also, by using the "STAR" approach in responding to the question you will eliminate many of the follow up probing questions.

TYPICAL EMPLOYER QUESTIONS

In the interview and/or plant tour, look for areas of familiarity to you and get across that you know about it (equipment, systems, etc.). Look for opportunities to compliment the company

Tell me about yourself. Or, describe your background and experience.

This means "Tell me about your qualifications", not you personally. Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications. Start with education and discuss your experience. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.)

Why are you looking to make a career change?

Again, be positive. "I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at _____ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth and challenge. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions and advance my career.

What is your greatest accomplishment up to this point in your career?

Do not let modesty 'sell you short', but stick with reality. Show loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, that you are a fast-learner. Technical skills, politeness, and promptness ... expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid generalizations such as "I like people". Be ready with one or two examples that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples. Document this information.

What has been your biggest failure up to this point in your career?

Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state "not being able to go to work on Mondays", or "coming in late", etc.). Present your weaknesses as professional strengths, (i.e. "Sometimes I tend to work too hard to make sure things are done accurately.").

Why should I hire you for this position? Or how will you benefit us?

Be positive and sell! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses. Explain how your qualifications "fit" the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it's work that you enjoy.

Why do you want to work for our firm?

The response should be for the opportunity. Compliments about the company would help.

Where do you hope to be in five years?

Use conservative growth projections that clearly show that their investment in you will pay off. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Show a desire for promotions.

What interests you most about this position?

Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one or two-word answer such as, "the challenge" or "the opportunity", should cause them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

What are your career goals?

Your answer should reflect specific time frames:

Short term – "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."

Long term – “After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp.”

What are you doing to achieve your goals?

“I look at continued learning as the key to success. I continue my education, as you see from my resume, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organizations in my field.”

Why did you leave your previous employer?

Before the interview have a solid answer ready for each job change. Having a written summary is helpful. If downsized, give specifics; If you were recruited away, say so; If it was for family reasons, OK; If you were fired, be up front about it. Your background will probably be verified. NEVER speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

What did you like most/least about your previous job?

An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

Are you applying for any other jobs?

Don't give an indication that you are just shopping. Be honest about this. If you are actively seeking a change, show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective.

What type of salary do you have in mind?

Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: “I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer.

What is your current salary?

Answer truthfully and include all income such as bonuses. Cite your last W-2 and any increases since then. If a raise is due in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

Are you willing to relocate?

Be ready to reassure them that not only you, but all family members are ready to go. Be prepared to discuss any factors that may complicate or delay a move. Think about this in advance!!!

When could you start?

Immediately or with 2 weeks notice! Have a '*can start not later than*' date.

Other Questions:

- If you could improve anything about the way your present manager goes about his/her work, what would you improve?
- Describe the best manager you ever worked for. What made him/her the best?
- Who was the least effective manager you've ever worked for? What made him/her the least effective?
- What do you especially enjoy about your work?
- How are you held accountable; that is, how is your job measured? How have you performed against those measurable objectives?
- Based on your understanding of the position we are interviewing for, what else do you need to know in order to make to a decision regarding this position?
- If you were to accept a new position, how do you envision spending your first sixty days on the job?
- What do you envision as your top priorities?
- If we were to speak to your current manager, what would he/she say is the area in which you could use the most improvement? Do you agree with your manager?
- If you could change or improve one thing about yourself, what would it be?
- How organized are you? Do you use a system to organize yourself? Please describe.
- What are your feelings about dedication and commitment?
- How do you accept failure and what do you do about it?
- When you succeed at your job, what forms of recognition would you feel are most important to you?
- Describe a typical day in your current position.

PREPARING YOUR QUESTIONS

Any question that is important for you to know the answer to before you accept an offer be certain to ask. Write out all of your questions prior to the interview date and rehearse them. Avoid any questions that are related to the “what do you have for me?” attitude (i.e. salary, vacation, bonus).

Make sure to get a complete understanding of what you would be expected to do. This is without doubt the most important information to be exchanged in the interview.

What are the responsibilities for the position?

Describe a typical day on the job?

What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?

What is the most critical objective for the new person?

What are the longer-term objectives?

What are the most difficult aspects of the position?

Who would I be working for and with?

What on-going support is available related to my new role?

What on-going training programs are offered related to my role?

What projects will I be engaged in within the first 90 days? First year?

LISTEN! The first two or three things the interviewer mentions are probably the most important right now, even if not the principal items on the job description. Address your capabilities to those needs/desires.

Encourage the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by a current employee. The answer may give you a job description! You may discover that nobody in this organization would accept it or that the present staff, while competent, simply do not have the background for a new function...*OR*, you might learn that the company is looking for a 'fresh view', or someone with more career potential.

Why is this position open?

Is there a reason it is not being filled by a present employee?

What became of the last couple of people who held this position?

How many people have held this job in the last five years?

Were they promoted or did they leave the company?

General info:

What is the projected department's/company's growth in the next 2 years?

What is the philosophy on training and development here?

Has there been downsizing within the company? How is it handled?

The Future:

If I perform well, what are the possible advancement opportunities?

If the turnover has been high, you might wonder if the job might leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you could expect to be promoted quickly.

What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?

Here you may discover you are overqualified, or not up to it. It also will give you a glimpse of the company's management style.

What is the person doing who formerly held this position?

When would you need me to start?

FINAL TIPS!

The interview should be a two-way exchange. Ask questions....but in a conversational manner, not interrogation! This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision afterwards.

Some questions are appropriate to ask each interviewer, (what do you enjoy most about this company?, how long have you been with the company? questions about the area, etc.) while some should be restricted to the managers directly involved in the decision, (what is the first priority for the position?, why is the job open?, is there any additional information about me you would need?, etc).

Don't cross-examine the employer.

Ask questions requiring an explanation. Questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.

Don't interrupt when the employer is answering YOUR question.

Ask job-relevant questions: responsibilities, the company, products, services, people.

Ask about your potential peers, subordinates, and superiors.

Take notes.

INTERVIEW CONCLUSION

If you are sincerely interested in the position, your role now becomes a salesperson! Close the interview.

You should clearly communicate your feelings to the employer, perhaps by as simply as saying, *"Based on everything I know about the opportunity, what I saw and heard today, this is something I know I can do and am very interested in it".*

CLOSE THE INTERVIEW! Find out where you stand (if possible...there may be other candidates, feedback may be necessary from various people you interviewed with.

Ask the interviewer if he/she feels that you are qualified for the position. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully.

Ask *"is there any further information you need about me to determine if I am the right person"?*

"How do I compare to other candidates? Are they stronger in any area?" With this you might learn what your chances are, but also it might allow strengthening your 'case'.

"What is the next step?"

"When do you plan to make a decision?"

In parting, thank the people for their consideration; again state your interest and that you could be available to start within two weeks (or sooner!)

The farewell should also include a smile, direct eye contact, and a firm but gentle handshake.

PROFESSIONAL FOLLOW-UP...THANK YOU NOTES

Be certain to get business cards from everyone you meet during the interview process. Send a short note of appreciation to thank the employer or interviewer for the opportunity to interview. Restate your interest in the position and the company, and why, as well as your ability to do the job. Be sure to mail it not later than the following day. This is a good way to keep your name current in the interviewer's mind. Also, send a personalized e-mail immediately following confirming your interest and availability.

RECRUITER FOLLOW-UP

Call me as soon as the interview concludes to review the interview while everything is still fresh in your mind. I want to know the "4 C's": **CHEMISTRY, CONCERNS, CASH** and **CLOSING**.