

INTERVIEW ADVICE

So, you've been offered an interview at a company you're interested in. Even if you have some doubts about the opportunity, you should still 'play to win'! It will be good interview practice, you'll learn from the experience, make new acquaintances which might be useful in the future, and who knows, your doubts might be ill-founded and this might just be the perfect opportunity for you!

Most important point: Turn up!!!

If for any reason you cannot attend an interview at the agreed date/time, it is essential that you let your consultant know at the earliest opportunity so that we can re-arrange this for you wherever possible. If you are having last-minute second thoughts about whether the role is right for you, please call the consultant to discuss your thoughts. We have seen many occasions where a less than enthusiastic candidate has then come out of the first interview convinced that it was the perfect role for them. Simply not turning up leaves the client a long-lasting negative impression of yourself and the agency concerned.

In any case, in choosing to go to an interview, your aim should always be to win a job offer, and you should always do everything in your power to achieve that.

It is therefore important to remember that an interview is a sales situation. In this case you are the salesperson, and you are the product! Find out as much as you can about the employer's requirements, and then sell yourself effectively – explaining exactly what strengths you can bring to the employer, and "what's in it for them".

And most importantly, close the interview properly, by expressing enthusiasm and actually asking for the job!

Preparing for the interview

Careful preparation before an interview will not only portray you in a more professional and positive light, but will also help you feel less nervous.

Our Consultants at [jarvisjohnson](http://jarvisjohnson.com) will give you all the information you need regarding your interview details, and any specific requirements you need to know about.

However, it always helps to do a little bit of research yourself, and for all the information our consultants can give you, nothing beats the preparation you can do when it comes to questions & answers, knowing how to get there, etc.

Make written notes in advance, write down any questions, and don't be afraid to refer to your notes during the interview, or to write down answers to questions you have asked, so that you can refer to them after the interview.

Research and make notes about:

The Company – We will give you as much information as we can, but it is always good to look at the company website and find out as much as you can for yourself, as well.

Their product(s) – What market do they sell to? Who are their customers? What product range do they offer?

Awards/standards achieved – Are they BRC or ISO 9000 accredited? Have they won any major industry awards recently?

Their ethos – Do they pride themselves on ethical trading? What training and development do they provide?

The job – What does the role involve? What is required of the successful candidate? What prospects for progression does the role offer?

The journey – How will you get there? How long will it take? Find out about parking, traffic hot-spots, public transport cost and routes, etc. Ideally, you should do a "dummy run" to familiarise yourself with the route and avoid problems on the day.

Once you start gathering information, you will find out that there are some of those questions that you can't answer prior to interview, and that will automatically give you some questions to ask at interview. Remember, an interview is a two-way process! You need to find out whether the job and the company is right for you, as much as the employer needs to find out whether you are the right candidate for them. Employers will also expect you to have some questions for them, so show you have prepared by writing questions down, and refer to your notes if you need to, during the interview.

During the interview

Do

- Wear a clean dark suit (for women: skirt should be no shorter than knee-length) and clean dark shoes (for women, no excessively high heels!)
- Plan to arrive about 15 minutes early - Late arrival for a job interview gives an immediate bad impression! If you are unavoidably held up, make sure you call and advise them (and your Consultant) of the delay and the reasons for it!
- As soon as you arrive on the premises, ask to use their conveniences. Use this opportunity to freshen up from your journey.
- Make 'small-talk' with the receptionist if appropriate. You never know who will be asked for their first impressions about you.
- If you have to wait in reception for some time, take the opportunity to read any company newsletters/industry publications as these will give you a better understanding of the company and may generate further questions for you to ask at the interview.
- If the employer presents you with an application form to complete, fill it in neatly and completely.
- Give the appearance of energy as you walk in, Smile! Shake hands firmly - be genuinely glad to meet the employer.
- Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting. Sit upright in your chair whilst looking alert and interested at all times. Be a good listener as well as a good talker.
- Smile
- Look a prospective employer in the eye while you talk to them, but don't stare!
- Follow the employer's leads, but try to ask your questions as early in the interview as you can. If you know what's important to the company, you'll stand a better chance of telling them why you are right for the job.
- Get your points across in a factual, logical, sincere manner. Stress achievements from work, study or personal life. Take documented evidence of your successes – letters of commendation, certificates, and letters from grateful customers. Be prepared to SELL YOURSELF.
- Convey the impression that YOU WANT THAT JOB!

Don't

- Don't smoke even if the employer smokes and offers you a cigarette.
- Don't relax and rely on your application form to do the selling for you. Most employers will want you to speak for yourself.
- Don't chew gum.
- Don't answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no". Explain wherever possible all of those things about yourself which relate to (background, skills and accomplishments) the position in a positive manner.

- Don't waffle. If you find your answer has drifted away from the original question, make sure you do bring it back to the point you originally intended to make. If the interviewer looks glazed, you are probably going on a bit!
- Don't lie!
- Don't make derogatory remarks about your present or past employers
- DON'T enquire about salary, holiday, bonuses, or other benefits, unless the employer has said he would like to offer you the job. If you are asked what salary you want say 'What I'm really interested in is the career opportunity that you have to offer. I'm sure if I'm the right person for the job, you'll offer me a fair remuneration.' Alternatively, tell them you would prefer them to discuss salary with the agency. If pressed, tell him what your current salary is, if applicable.

Commonly asked interview questions

Some questions are fairly typical of most interviews, and you can dramatically increase your chances of success by preparing for these beforehand.

Examples of interview questions:

- What do you know about us?
- Tell me about yourself (prepare a 1-2 minute 'potted' history of yourself, highlighting your main strengths and achievements, particularly in relation to the position you have applied for)
- What would your boss or colleagues say about you?
- What is your greatest achievement?
- What are your strengths? (Don't be arrogant! Employers value hard work, enthusiasm and reliability above most other characteristics. Be prepared to back up what you're saying with examples)
- What are your weaknesses? (Don't admit to a damaging weakness such as laziness, but think along the lines of weaknesses that can be turned into strengths, e.g. "I set very high standards for my own work and expect the same of my colleagues. Therefore, I am quite impatient with people who don't give 100%, but I am learning to "hold my tongue" You could also impress the interviewer by saying that you look upon weaknesses as challenges you seek to work on, not bad points!)
- Why do you want to work for this company?
- Why do you want this job?

- What you want from your job:
 - What do you see as the next step in your career? (Employers look for evidence that you have a life-plan and are not just drifting from one job to the next. You don't have to be specific, but you could say 'I want to achieve as much as I can in life, and to be successful in this job is the first step. I'm sure that once I've achieved that, you'll be able to help me to decide which is the best route forward.')
 - What are your long term aims/where do you see yourself in the next five to ten years?
 - What are the most important factors you require in a job?
- Why should we select you above others? What do you have to offer our company? (You could do worse than saying 'If you take me on Mr Jones, I'll give you energy, enthusiasm and 110% commitment')
- What sort of people do you like working with?
- How have you handled a difficult colleague/boss in the past?
- How well do you fit into a team?
- Your current/previous job:
 - What was the most interesting/rewarding project you've ever done?
 - What was the most difficult aspect of your job?
 - How did you overcome the difficulty?
 - How do you handle criticism?
 - Why did you leave your last job? /Why are you leaving your current job? / Why are you looking to move?
 - Why have you frequently changed jobs? / Why have you stayed so long with one employer?
- What training have you undertaken in the last year?
- How do you keep up-to-date with ever-changing technology?
- What are your hobbies and interests?

Competency-based interviews

If you have never had a competency-based interview, you might find this a bit daunting at first, but there really is no reason to worry. Competency-based interviews are actually easier to deal with than other types of interviews, because they are the easiest to prepare for. They are also a very fair way for an employer to assess candidates against each other.

For any given role, an employer will have a list of essential competencies, or skills. They will then ask you to demonstrate, using examples, that you have that particular skill, and they will ask you more in-depth questions based on that example. They will then score each answer and it will give them a grading system for each candidate.

The most commonly used technique for competency-based interviews is the S-T-A-R technique: Situation-Task-Actions-Results

Situation: What was the situation? What was your brief? What did you need to achieve?

Task: What tasks did you need to complete?

Actions: What did you do?

Results: What was the end result? What did you achieve? What went wrong – and if something did, what did you learn from it?

You can prepare for competency-based interviews by making a list of the skills that you think are essential to the role you have applied for, and thinking of good examples that will demonstrate that you have those skills. Remember to refer to the job brief or description supplied by your consultant.

Typical competencies could be:

- Negotiation
- Communication
- Diplomacy
- Salesmanship
- Entrepreneurship
- Staying calm under pressure
- Handling difficult customers / complaints / conflict situations
- Time management
- Problem solving

Examples of good questions for YOU to ask at interview

Write some questions down and ask a few during the interview, when it is appropriate, but also ask a few questions at the end. It shows you are genuinely interested in the position and the company, and that you have prepared for the interview.

If the employer has already covered information you were going to ask, do not ask again, but perhaps refer to the fact that your questions on a particular topic/issue have been answered. If appropriate, ask the interviewer to go into more detail on points they have covered.

- Which particular range of products are successful at the moment and why? And are there any plans to expand into other niche markets?
- What type of person are you looking for?
- What responsibilities would you want me to take on board?
- Is the area well established or does it need to be rejuvenated?
- How has the position arisen? (If the person left or was sacked - why?)

- What is the background of your most successful person and why is he/she successful?
- What form of training programme is provided?
- What background have you come from? How long have you been with the company?
- What are the major benefits to customers buying your products?
- How are you ranked against other companies? (locally/nationally)
- What are you doing to ensure you keep that position?
- What made you join/stay with the company?
- What makes you successful?

The Most Important Thing!

Employers are always more interested in people who are keen on the job. If you are interested in the position, and would like to receive an offer, **ASK FOR THE JOB!**

"Mr Jones, you said earlier that there would have to be a second interview. I'm very interested in this position and I'm sure I can do a good job for you. Are there any reasons why I shouldn't be invited back for a second interview?"

"Mr Jones, I realise you have other applicants to see, but **AT THIS STAGE**, do you have any reservations? Is there any reason why you wouldn't want to employ me?"

If the interviewer **DOES** have some reservations, try to address them and then ask the question again. Agree on a time-scale by which you will have some feedback & a decision.

Just as Important...

Immediately after your interview you must telephone your consultant. Very often employers telephone us to give us feedback, and always ask 'Have you heard from the candidate?' It is much more encouraging to the employer if we can say that we have and that you are very interested. Call us from your mobile or a nearby telephone box and we will call you straight back!

If you have any unanswered questions or feel that you didn't answer a particular question as well as you could have done, tell your consultant and we will pass on your comments/questions. If you would like to write to the company to thank the interviewer for their time and re-iterate your interest, we would encourage you to do so. E-mail your consultant and we will forward your comments.