

INTERVIEW ADVICE

You've been invited to attend an interview for a role you're interested in. Even if it's not your first choice of role, or you have some doubts, make sure you're "in it to win it"! It will be good interview practice; you'll learn from the experience, make new acquaintances that 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!!!

And if you can't turn up, PHONE 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 they 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. Simply not turning up leaves the client a long-lasting negative impression of the agency concerned and, most importantly, YOU.

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!

A couple of videos to show the kinds of interviews to avoid!

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=90FPorucgaY>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U4hESuvEdjw>

Real-life examples of what NOT to do...

Turning up smelling of fish (ground into soles of shoes in the factory!)

Being drunk and incoherent

...and one Hygiene Manager, when asked whether she preferred the use of hoses or buckets, replied "I hate hoses, men just swing them around like they're giant d*cks" – yes seriously that was her answer!!!

Preparing for the interview

Don't just rely on information provided in the job description. Do some research yourself! 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 – Some sources of information:

- Company website
- LinkedIn:
 - Does the company have a LinkedIn profile?
 - Has anyone in your network worked there...can they give you any additional information about company culture, the people interviewing you, etc?
- Twitter – does the company have an official Twitter feed? Do any of its employees tweet?
- Facebook – does the company have an official Facebook page?
- Google: find out what information is publicly available about the company
- Trade publications, e.g. Food Manufacture (printed and online), Food Processing, etc...what's been published about the company?

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

Awards/standards achieved – What accreditations do they hold (e.g. BRC...at what grade and up for renewal when, ISO14001, ...?) 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 sales situation, but that works both ways!** 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 suitable business attire (e.g. business suit; for women: avoid excessively high heels/short skirts), unless you have been specifically told to dress down
- 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 (via 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 and make sure you still look presentable.
- 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.

- You only get ONE chance to make a first impression! When you walk in, shake the employer's hand in a firm/confident manner, smile, convey energy and enthusiasm. Be genuinely pleased to be there and to meet them!
- 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**
- Maintain eye contact with your interviewer...but don't over-do it in a stalker-ish staring kind of way!!
- 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. Give examples and, if appropriate, provide 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 (but also make sure you don't come across as desperate!!!**

Don't

- 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** – take cues from your interviewer's body language...if they appear to be falling asleep, you're probably not maintaining their interest...
- **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 something along the lines of "Whilst salary is important, of course, it is not the main deciding factor for me. It is important for me to ensure it is the right role, with the right company... 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 them 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 ensure you do have at least one not-too-damning weakness you can mention, to show self-awareness (it's best not to come across as an arrogant candidate who thinks he/she's the best thing since sliced bread and God's gift to the food manufacturing industry all rolled into one!))
- 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.
 - 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?
- What sorts 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/legislation?
- 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/Task: What was the situation/task? What was your brief? What did you need to achieve? 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 (aside from turning up)!

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!**

"Paul, 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?"

"John, 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 (via your Consultant) & a decision.

Just as Important...

Immediately after your interview you must telephone your Consultant. Very often, when employers telephone us to give us feedback, they 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.

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, via your Consultant. E-mail your Consultant and we will forward your comments.

One final thought...

If your interview is successful and you decide to resign...a quick tip from a previous real-life "how not to...": Don't resign by scrawling a note on a piece of toilet paper apologising for the empty whisky bottles hidden in your desk drawer!