

# FIND THE CAREER YOU LOVE

Interviewing



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## **FIND THE CAREER YOU LOVE, “THE SERIES”**

This publication is part of a series of documents designed as a comprehensive tool for jobseekers. Each publication focuses on different important aspects of finding and preparing for a career you love.

**RESUMES, COVER LETTERS AND JOB APPLICATIONS: P677**

**JOB SEARCH AND NETWORKING: P678**

**INTERVIEWING: P679**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

- CHAPTER 1: INTERVIEW OVERVIEW ..... 1**
  - The Interview ..... 2
  - What Should You Ask When Setting Up the Interview? ..... 2
  - Different Structures of an Interview ..... 2
  - Behavioral Interviews and Simulation Exercises ..... 3
  - Interviews in Different Settings ..... 4
  - Employment Testing ..... 5
  
- CHAPTER 2: PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW ..... 6**
  - Steps to Prepare for an Interview ..... 7
  - Prepare Key Strengths Statements ..... 8
  - Elevator Pitch - A Tool to Market Yourself ..... 8
  - Commonly Asked Interview Questions & Practice ..... 11
  - Know Your Rights: Handling Discriminating Questions ..... 14
  - Prepare Your Interview Answers ..... 16
  - Plan to Have a Successful Interview ..... 18
  - Five Most Common Interviewing Mistakes ..... 20
  
- CHAPTER 3: EXCELLING AT YOUR INTERVIEW ..... 21**
  - Before an Interview ..... 22
  - During an Interview ..... 22
  - After an Interview ..... 25
  - Salary and Benefits ..... 27

# CHAPTER 1

## Interview Overview

An interview is a two-way process with an opportunity for you and the interviewer to address your common interests. The interviewer is determining if you would be a good fit for the organization. You are determining if the organization would be a good fit for you.



## THE INTERVIEW

The purpose of an interview is for employers to determine whether you:

- Can demonstrate the skills they are looking for in an employee
- Can solve the employers' problem(s) or meet their organizational challenge(s)
- Are the best fit for the company, organization or program

### SOME THINGS TO CONSIDER ABOUT THE JOB

- What have you accomplished in the past and what can you offer this employer?
- How can the employer help you achieve the objectives of the job, directly or indirectly?
- Are you and the employer both confident that you are the right employee for the job?

## THE TWO MAJOR TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

### SCREENING OR PRELIMINARY INTERVIEWS

During a screening interview, also known as a preliminary interview, the applicant has an opportunity to present whether they have the basic skill sets that an employer is seeking. Screening interviews are usually conducted by the organization's human resources department or may be done by a recruiter.

### HIRING INTERVIEWS

Hiring interviews are usually conducted by a person or a group of people. This is your opportunity to demonstrate good listening skills, ask intelligent questions and illustrate your accomplishments. Highlight how you can help the employer. Promote yourself as a natural addition to the employer's team.

### INTERVIEWS CAN BE DONE IN A VARIETY OF SETTINGS

- In person at the employer's location
- In person at job fairs
- On-campus interviews for recent college graduates or alumni
- Dining interviews
- Video conference interviews
- Telephone interviews

## WHAT SHOULD YOU ASK WHEN SETTING UP AN INTERVIEW?

- *How do I get to the location of the interview? What are the parking options?*
- *Who should I ask for once I arrive?*
- *Approximately how long will the interview be? (Be flexible)*
- *Who will interview me? How many people will interview me?*
- *How will the interview be structured? (For example, will I meet with the interviewer and then complete additional paperwork to apply for the job with your human resources staff) Would it be a one-on-one or group interview?*
- *Will I need to take a test? If so, what kind? (Check "Employment Testing" on page 8 for additional information about the types of tests you may take)*

## DIFFERENT STRUCTURES OF THE INTERVIEW

It is important to ask about the format of the interview when you set up an interview appointment so you can be better prepared. During the interview, you might also meet potential co-workers who will help make the hiring decision. Plan on being courteous to everyone you meet, regardless of which type of interview you may have.

### ONE-ON-ONE INTERVIEW

In this style of interview, one individual interviews you for the position. You may also be interviewed by different interviewers at different times. Usually a one-on-one interview will include some behavioral questions to learn how you might react to different situations, such as deadlines or angry customers.

## **PANEL OR BOARD INTERVIEWS**

These are generally conducted by two or more interviewers at the same time. They usually take turns asking questions and have their own separate list of things they want to determine about you. You can expect to be interviewed by 3-10 people, or possibly more.

Direct your answer to the person who asked the question, but try to maintain eye contact with all group members. You might be interviewed by multiple individuals or groups of interviewers one after the other, instead of at the same time. This is referred to as a series interview.

## **GROUP INTERVIEW**

A group interview is usually conducted with other applicants applying for the same position in different parts of the organization. Interviewing candidates in a group allows employers to evaluate how well you would fit in at the company. Establish a good relationship with everyone and promote yourself as a natural addition to the team. Be prepared to answer behavioral questions and simulation exercises during this type of interview.

## **MULTIPLE MINI-INTERVIEWS**

This type of interview is often used in the medical and dental fields, as well as by graduate schools and for academic faculty positions. Applicants move between interview stations and are observed by a single person who rates each applicant. Employers then select an applicant based on their rating scores. Each station covers a different organizational topic, such as communication, collaboration, ethics, critical thinking, awareness of health issues and subject knowledge. This technique is used by employers that have a high investment in new hires.

## **STRESS INTERVIEW**

Stress interviews involve questions that are deliberately intended to make you uncomfortable or upset. This is usually a test of how you will handle stress on the job. Remain calm and take your time in responding to the questions. The questions are not intended to be taken personally.

## **INFORMATIONAL INTERVIEWS**

When you meet people to learn about their occupation, company or industry, you are engaging in an informational interview. These are not job interviews, although completing these may lead to a job offer.

## **BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWS AND SIMULATION EXERCISES**

In behavioral interviewing, you are asked how you behaved or responded in past work situations. You may also be asked how you would behave in future, hypothetical work situations. The employer asks these questions to find out the specifics of how you would solve a problem. Sometimes, an employer may choose to have the testing done by an outside agency or assessment center. These exercises attempt to measure how you manage situations, problem-solving and decision-making skills. Behavioral interviews can be structured as one-on-one or group interviews and can be conducted in a variety of settings.

## **HOW TO RECOGNIZE A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTION**

When an interviewer asks a question about the details of a past experience or how you would act in a given hypothetical situation, these types of questions tend to be behavioral interview questions. Your response should focus on your explanation of past, present or future behavior that displays important skills for the job. Behavioral interview questions are easy to identify and prepare for in advance. They tend to start with something like the following:

### ***TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU SOLVED A PROBLEM.***

Focus on sharing a response that provides details about a time or a particular situation in which you solved a problem.

### ***WHAT WOULD YOU DO IF YOU HAD A PROBLEM TO SOLVE?***

Avoid giving a superficial response like, "Solve it." Instead, tell a story of how you solved something.

**TELL ME ABOUT A TIME WHEN YOU HAD TO WORK UNDER PRESSURE, OR GIVE US AN EXAMPLE OF WHEN YOU HAD TOO MANY THINGS TO DO AND YOU HAD TO PRIORITIZE YOUR TASKS.**

When the interviewer says, “Give us an example,” this provides you with a hint that the interviewer is expecting you to tell a story that includes details of how your skills and talents enabled you to effectively complete tasks in a work setting.

**GIVE ME AN EXAMPLE OF WHEN YOU HAD TO RESOLVE A CONFLICT IN THE WORKPLACE. OR CAN YOU RECALL A SITUATION AT YOUR PAST JOB WHEN YOU HAD TO USE YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS TO INFLUENCE SOMEONE'S OPINION?**

Recalling a situation suggests that the interviewer is asking for a story.

## **PREPARING TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

Think of situations that you've had to respond to in previous jobs. Prepare examples of how you solved problems, dealt with a difficult task, and any other memorable accomplishments you have had. A good strategy is to listen to the interview question intently. Identify if the interviewer expects a story that provides evidence that you have the specific skills that are required. Clarify the question if you have any doubts and use the CAR method of response: Challenge / Context, Action and Result.

### **CHALLENGE / CONTEXT**

This was the situation.

### **ACTION**

This is what I did (using your skill).

### **RESULT**

This was the outcome.

## **INTERVIEWS IN DIFFERENT SETTINGS**

Interviews can be conducted by employers in different formats, using multiple technologies or tools, and in different settings. Regardless of the interview setting, the interviewers are trying to discover if you are the best candidate.

To help you prepare for the interview process, ask what the format of the interview will be when you confirm the interview appointment. Knowing what to expect can help you be prepared.

## **DINING INTERVIEWS**

You should take as much time to prepare for an interview that includes a meal, or takes place in the context of a social setting, as you would for any other type of interview. Even if the conversation is casual, behave professionally because you are still being evaluated.

- Avoid messy food items; the goal is to pick easy things to eat so you can answer questions and pay attention to the conversation
- Do not smoke or order an alcoholic drink; if the interviewer offers an alcoholic drink, never take more than one
- Avoid ordering very expensive or the least expensive food items

## **JOB INTERVIEW OVER THE TELEPHONE**

Companies may interview you by phone to keep costs down or to accommodate applicants who live far from the company.

### **TYPES OF TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS**

**A SCREENING TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:** This type of call may include a series of questions that are asked of every candidate. The questions are usually based on requirements for the position and the answers allow the employer to eliminate candidates who do not meet the qualifications.

**A HIRING TELEPHONE INTERVIEW:** This type of interview is more like a face-to-face interview with a business. Be prepared to have the call last for 30 minutes or more. You will be asked the same kinds of questions you would be asked if you were meeting in person.

## AT LEAST 30 MINUTES BEFORE A SCHEDULED TELEPHONE INTERVIEW

- Turn off the radio, stereo and television
- Try to disable any "call waiting" or other phone features that produce sound
- Put the dog outside, or take other steps to prevent it from barking
- Dress in appropriate attire; you will feel more professional in appropriate clothes
- Go into a quiet room to take the call
- Make sure you have a writing surface and materials for taking notes
- Gather the information you researched on the company as well as your resume and cover letter
- Put your cheat sheet of answers to anticipated questions on the desk beside you
- Smile! It will help you keep a positive attitude throughout the interview

## VIDEO CONFERENCE OR VIDEO PHONE INTERVIEW

It is fairly common for businesses to use video conferencing to interview job applicants. As with in-person interviews, you must speak clearly, dress appropriately and present yourself in a professional manner.

### PROPER ATTIRE

Dress professionally as if you were going to a traditional interview, but avoid wearing striped patterns, plaid or all white. These patterns and colors sometimes generate poor picture quality over video.

### KNOW THE MATERIAL

Learn as much as you can about the company or business. Study any background information or material that was given to you.

### PRACTICE

Before the video conference interview, practice with the technology you will be using for the interview to get used to controlling your facial expressions and body language. Record yourself, or practice in front of a mirror or friend. See if you are shaking your leg, acting nervously or doing anything else that may be distracting to the interviewer. Note your vocal pitch, speech patterns and if you speak too low or too fast.

### DAY OF THE INTERVIEW

Make sure the background you are sitting against isn't distracting on the other end of the video conference. If you have notes, don't read from them during the interview – glance at them only if you need to. Speak in your normal, natural voice and make eye contact with the camera. Make sure you smile and show your enthusiasm. Don't sit too close to the camera or watch yourself on the monitor. Keep your body movements to a minimum and if you do move in your seat, do it slowly. Rapid movements will look jerky on the other end of the video conference.

## EMPLOYMENT TESTING

Some employers use tests or other tools as part of their screening process. In most instances, these are used as part of the pre-screening process, but sometimes they are given after someone is hired. Here are some of the types of tools employers may use:

**ABILITY TESTING:** Predicts future success in job training and worker performance.

**SKILLS TESTING:** Measures specific competency and ability within a particular job.

### PERSONALITY AND INTEREST

**INVENTORY:** Assesses the underlying characteristics of individuals to determine if they would be successful within certain types of jobs..

**HONESTY OR INTEGRITY TESTING:** Employers are particularly concerned about hiring honest employees when their job responsibilities include handling cash or merchandise.

### MEDICAL EXAMINATION:

Determines if you have a physical condition which would prevent you from performing the job, or establishes medical history prior to start date.

**DRUG TESTING:** Indicates when someone is using illegal drugs. An increasing number of companies are using drug tests to screen candidates for all job categories, including managers and professionals.



# CHAPTER 2

## Preparing For Your Interview

Appropriately preparing for your interview means understanding your key strengths and skills, researching the position you're applying for and the company you're interviewing with and identifying how you will benefit their organization.



## STEPS TO PREPARE FOR AN INTERVIEW

Contact your local New York State Career Center ([www.labor.ny.gov/career-center-locator](http://www.labor.ny.gov/career-center-locator)) to attend interview preparation workshops and get individual feedback on your interview skills.

### KNOW YOURSELF AND YOUR RELEVANT STRENGTHS

The first step in preparing for an interview is to know your strengths and skills. Personal traits can be described as your unique qualities. For example, a trait can be that you're dependable, flexible or punctual. Traits are different from skills that are knowledge-based and typically gained from education and experience. Always be prepared to provide an example of how you demonstrated skills and how they can contribute to the organization.

Is learning new skills one of your greatest strengths? If your education or past career choices do not directly relate to the job description, talk about your past experiences with learning a new skill: "Our team had to learn a software program. We were given six weeks to attend training sessions and become comfortable enough to perform new tasks. I was able to use the new software program in only three weeks."

### RESEARCH THE EMPLOYER

The more you know about the company, the better you will be able to explain how you can fit in and your talents can be used. Researching the employer can help you to:

- Identify companies that may be hiring in your field
- Help you target your cover letter and resume
- Find hidden job markets
- Prepare you for an interview
- Understand how you can apply your skills in a new field

### RESEARCH THE INTERVIEWER

Often times, you'll know the name of the individual who will be conducting your interview. If not, you should ask when you initially schedule the interview. Once you have the interviewer's name, take the time to research them. There are several ways to do this:

- Check for biography blurbs on the company's webpage
- Do a general search on the Internet
- Check their profile on LinkedIn
- Ask people in your network who may know the individual

Having knowledge of the interviewer will give you material for discussion during the interview. You can discuss projects the interviewer has previously worked on, ask about their experience with the company, or discuss mutual acquaintances.

However, depending on how much you are able to uncover about your interviewer, don't be too casual. You are still engaging in a professional interview. Bringing up things like sports teams or shared hobbies may be viewed as inappropriate. Use your best judgment on what to discuss, but when in doubt, stay as professional as possible.

### PROMOTE YOUR BRAND

During an interview, you have the opportunity to promote your unique skill set directly to the employer. First impressions are extremely important, so it is crucial that you know how to present yourself before you even start the interview.

#### YOU NEED TO IDENTIFY

- What makes you unique from other jobseekers
- Specific skills you bring to the job
- Who you are as an individual and what you've accomplished

In many ways, your brand as a potential employee is like any other brand. You need to identify what makes you different and better than your competition. You need a reputation or history of success to prove it.

## **HIGHLIGHTS FOR THE INTERVIEWER**

Write down the 4-5 most important points or highlights you want the interviewer to remember. In an interview, you are a salesperson. Your task is to promote your most important skills, strengths, experiences and values or anything that shows the interviewer that you are the best fit for the job and the company.

Short, 2-3 minute stories about your most important characteristics should be the foundation of the talking points of your sales pitch. These talking points should also shape the responses you prepare for your next interview.

Anyone can claim to be “hardworking and dedicated.” Employers are interested in proof. It is important to have evidence and examples to demonstrate this to a potential employer.

## **PREPARE KEY STRENGTHS STATEMENTS**

Many employers value five key strengths as critical for any job: customer satisfaction, team work, communication skills, interpersonal skills and adaptability. Make sure you have developed good examples that demonstrate you have these five key strengths.

### **WHY KEY STRENGTHS STATEMENTS ARE IMPORTANT**

- Understanding your interests, skills and attitudes will increase your confidence and help you promote yourself to an employer
- Increased self-confidence sends a positive message to employers
- The key to a successful interview is to be able to match and describe the skills you have that directly correspond to the specific requirements outlined in the job advertisement

### **COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

Listening, speaking and writing. Employers want people who can accurately interpret what others are saying and organize and express their thoughts clearly.

### **TEAMWORK AND COLLABORATION**

Highlight how you have built long term relationships with internal and external teams and how you can work in a team to achieve the organization's goals.

### **ANALYTICAL AND PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS**

Employers want people who can use creativity, reasoning and past experiences to identify and solve problems effectively.

### **PERSONAL MANAGEMENT SKILLS**

The ability to plan and manage multiple assignments and tasks, set priorities and adapt to changing conditions and work assignments.

### **INTERPERSONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Employers usually note whether an employee can relate to co-workers and build relationships with others in the organization.

## **ELEVATOR PITCH – A TOOL TO MARKET YOURSELF**

An elevator pitch gives a brief and persuasive snapshot of why an employer should hire you. The term “elevator pitch” is named after the possibility of a jobseeker meeting a hiring manager in an elevator and having a brief opportunity to promote their qualifications. The pitch or commercial shows that you are prepared for the interview, have researched the company and are the ideal candidate for the job.

## WHAT YOUR PITCH MUST CONTAIN

**A “HOOK:”** Open your pitch by getting the person’s attention with a “hook” – A statement or question that makes the person interested and makes them want to hear more.

**ABOUT 150-225 WORDS:** Your pitch should go no longer than 60 seconds.

**PASSION:** Be energetic and enthusiastic.

Having a prepared elevator pitch can also help you overcome networking or interviewing anxieties. An elevator pitch is helpful in writing cover letters. Different pitches might be necessary for different audiences. Practice and rehearse your pitch so that you can easily deliver it when given the opportunity to do so.

## STEPS TO DEVELOP AN ELEVATOR PITCH

An elevator pitch is a brief, prepared and rehearsed marketing tool to showcase your skills, abilities and professional expertise. To create your pitch, write a list of:

- Your areas of expertise
- Your strengths and accomplishments
- How you have grown professionally throughout your career
- Personal traits that make you unique
- What attracts you to this company

## PRIORITIZE YOUR POINTS

Include a statement or question that makes a listener want to hear more. An elevator pitch is an overview of your skills, strengths and professional experience. It is designed to get a conversation started. The point of an elevator pitch isn’t to get into every detail. Your goal is to make sure the person understands what you are talking about and why they should listen to you.

**I AM/I HAVE EXPERIENCE AS:**

Add your profession or job title.

**MY UNIQUE QUALITIES ARE:**

Your marketable traits and characteristics.

**WITH EXPERTISE IN:**

Your top skills, talents, abilities or knowledge.

**TAG LINE:**

Memorable closing statement.

**MY BACKGROUND INCLUDES:**

Your industry, department or type of company or services.

## PRACTICE

**I AM** \_\_\_\_\_

*Your profession or job title*

**WITH EXPERIENCE IN** \_\_\_\_\_

*Your top skills, talents, abilities or knowledge*

**MY BACKGROUND INCLUDES** \_\_\_\_\_

*Your industry, department or type of company or services*

**MY UNIQUE QUALITIES ARE** \_\_\_\_\_

*Your marketable traits and characteristics*

**TAG LINE** \_\_\_\_\_

*Closing statement that’s memorable*

# YOUR TOP FIVE SKILLS

As a part of developing your elevator pitch, think of the five skills that you feel most comfortable with.

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*Skill*

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*An example of you using this skill*

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*Skill*

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*An example of you using this skill*

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*Skill*

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*An example of you using this skill*

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*Skill*

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*An example of you using this skill*

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*Skill*

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*An example of you using this skill*

## COMMONLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

By completing a simple Internet search, you can draft a long list of commonly asked interview questions. Fortunately, interview questions can be divided into two major categories: questions that focus on your skills and questions that focus on your work habits. No matter which question you are answering: be honest as you talk about your strengths and weaknesses.

### SKILLS-BASED QUESTIONS

What can you offer to our workplace? Below are sample questions employers may ask. The questions might be about personal, job-specific or transferable skills. Use your 2-3 minute stories to answer these questions. Be sure to incorporate your interview highlights and also include specific information from your cover letter and resume that demonstrate the skills you want to highlight.

#### TYPICAL SKILLS-BASED QUESTIONS

- *Tell me about yourself/what would you like us to know?*
- *How would you describe yourself?*
- *What are your three greatest strengths?*
- *In your career to date, what would you consider to be your greatest achievements?*
- *Can I see examples of your work?*
- *Why do you want to work for this company?*
- *If we were to contact your most recent boss as a reference, what would he/she say about you?*
- *What kind of work do you most enjoy/dislike?*
- *What is your greatest weakness?*
- *Why are you interested in this kind of work?*
- *Who influenced you the most in your decision?*
- *Tell me about a time when you worked with a team.*
- *Share a time when you had to work with a difficult customer.*
- *Tell me about a time when you displayed good communication skills.*

### WORKPLACE CULTURE-BASED QUESTIONS

Would someone with your work habits and personality fit in well here? Employers will also ask questions about your character and personality. When practicing your responses to the questions below, think about the stories based on your cover letter and resume that give examples of your personality.

#### TYPICAL WORKPLACE CULTURE-BASED QUESTIONS

- *Of the past positions you have held, which did you like most (or least)? Why?*
- *What were the events that led to your leaving your last position?*
- *What do you do in your spare time?*
- *Have you ever been fired or asked to resign?*
- *Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?*
- *How do others describe you?*
- *What kind of a student were you?*
- *What were your favorite courses? Why?*
- *Why are you looking to change careers?*
- *Do you work well under pressure?*
- *How did you get along with your co-workers?*
- *Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond in order to get a job done.*
- *What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? (Give an example of how you handle interruptions)*
- *Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.*

# ANSWERING COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The following is a list of things to consider when preparing your responses.

## **WHY ARE YOU INTERESTED IN OUR COMPANY?**

This is a good opportunity to show that you've done research on the organization; the employer is really asking, "Have you done your homework? Do you know this organization?." Focus on how you would be an asset to the organization; be prepared to discuss a few examples of how you see yourself fitting in at the organization. Do the organization's mission, philosophy or goals make you excited? This is also another opportunity to connect your values to the company's values.

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## **TELL ME SOMETHING ABOUT YOURSELF.**

This is the most common question and is often the first question that is asked. This is a good time to use key strengths statements from your elevator pitch. Make sure your response is relevant to the position, and set the tone of the interview with this question.

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## **WHAT KIND OF WORK DO YOU MOST ENJOY OR DISLIKE?**

Be careful not to mention disliking aspects of the position you want. Compare your former positions with the position you are interviewing for in a positive way; if this is a fast-paced job, you may want to say that the pace at your previous job was slower than you prefer. Never speak poorly about your former boss or company.

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## **WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?**

**IF YOU WERE LAID OFF:** Refrain from speaking negatively about your previous employer. Saying you were laid off because of lack of work is common and generally not perceived as the worker's fault.

**IF YOU WERE FIRED:** Prepare an easily-said, direct response saying what happened and what you learned. Refrain from using emotional language because you may be seen as angry or bitter. Was there a change in expectations or a new boss? And did you learn anything from that experience that has or will help you grow and be a better employee? For example, say, "I had a new supervisor in my last position that had different expectations from the former supervisor. As a result of this I was terminated. What I learned from this experience is that organizations are constantly changing and I now know how to adjust to changing expectations."

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**WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES?**

This is a good time to show how your strengths, skills and accomplishments can benefit the corporation. Be honest about your weaknesses, but give examples of how you're working to improve on them. It's best to highlight a weakness that you've already successfully addressed; an example might be that you started creating a list of company priorities to better organize each day's work and meet deadlines.

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**WHY HAVE YOU CHOSEN A CAREER IN THIS SPECIFIC FIELD?**

The answer to this question will differ from person to person. It is a great opportunity to explain the path of experience and education that brought you to this point. The best way to answer this question is to tell them about your strengths and how you are a good fit for their company.

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**IMAGINE YOU ARE A PRODUCT AT A HARDWARE STORE AND THIS COMPANY IS SHOPPING. WHICH PRODUCT WOULD YOU BE AND WHY?**

This is a good example of a question that you may not anticipate. There are many variations to this question, but most involve imagining and describing yourself as an inanimate object. Sometimes these questions are posed to see how you think, process information or problem solve; it is an opportunity for you to be creative.

A good approach is to think of a trait or strength that you would bring to the job, and then describe what in that category you could use as an example of that trait; for example, if you wanted to mention that you are a good communicator, you might select "telephone," and then point out that you could communicate the company's goals to others or market how a product would be helpful for the customer.

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**WHERE DO YOU SEE YOURSELF IN FIVE YEARS?**

When answering this question, try to relate your future plans to the company (Do you see yourself being promoted? Do you see yourself training new people about the company and its methods?). Two common mistakes when answering this question:

1. Sharing that you are looking forward to retirement in a couple of years. Make sure the plans you discuss will be seen as beneficial and not costly or disruptive to the company.
2. Saying you want to take the job of your boss.

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**TELL ME ABOUT AN ACHIEVEMENT YOU HAVE HAD THAT WILL APPLY TO THIS JOB.**

This is where your interview research and preparation really pay off. Try to introduce a better way of doing something. Don't just name specific strengths, give an example of how you used that particular strength in your former position and how it benefited your employer. Short, 2-3-minute stories are a powerful way to convey information about your achievements.

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**TELL ME ABOUT YOUR EDUCATION QUALIFICATIONS.**

Always answer personal questions truthfully – lying will work against you in the long run; for example, if you did not really enjoy being a student, explain clearly why, and then show how you slowly changed your opinion to such a degree that you made subsequent education work for you; this type of response demonstrates that you are resilient and mature. Show the relevance of your college degree or other qualifications to the job you are applying for and how you would use it to benefit the organization. Make sure you continue to receive training after you 15 graduate so that you can show you are keeping up with the new developments. This question is usually asked to see if your education has prepared you for the job you want.

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**WHAT ARE YOUR SALARY REQUIREMENTS?**

A good response to this question would include mentioning your interest in the company and that you would like to learn more before discussing specific salary and benefits requirements. You may mention that you are aware of the salary range based on your research and would entertain an offer within that range. You may also mention that salary is simply one part of the compensation package; other aspects of the job are important to you as well. If pressed to give an actual number, mention a specific salary range but be sure you are able to accept the lowest figure of the given range.

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**KNOW YOUR RIGHTS: HANDLING DISCRIMINATING QUESTIONS**

Federal law, Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, prohibits employers with at least 15 employees from discriminating in employment based on race, color, religion, sex and national origin. According to New York State law, you do not have to answer questions about race, color, religion, creed, national origin, sex, marital status, sexual orientation, age, and disability on applications or during the interview. During an interview, an employer should not inquire into your personal life for information that is not job-related.

Know that the person interviewing you may not be a trained interviewer. They may not know that they are asking questions that could result in unlawful employment practices. If this occurs, make every effort to provide an appropriate response, and one that makes the best impression to the interviewer.

It is important that you decide before starting an interview how sensitive you are about specific topics, and how you intend to handle them if they come up. These questions can also be a red flag for you. Think about why the interviewer is asking these questions and whether you want to work for this type of organization.

## QUESTIONS EMPLOYERS SHOULD NOT ASK WHEN MAKING HIRING DECISIONS

As a general rule, employers can ask applicants only job-related questions. Questions an employer should not ask are related to, but not limited to, the following:

- *What is your race, color, religion or national origin?*
- *What is your age?* (Except to ask if you are under 18)
- *What is your gender?*
- *Do you have any disabilities?*
- *Do you have an arrest record?* (An interviewer may ask about any convictions in New York State)
- *Are you married/does your spouse work?*

Do not assume that the interviewer is intentionally asking you a discriminatory question. If you have questions or concerns about this, contact the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission ([www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm](http://www.eeoc.gov/laws/statutes/titlevii.cfm))

## IF YOU ARE ASKED A DISCRIMINATORY QUESTION

Take a moment to evaluate the situation, ask yourself questions like:

- *How uncomfortable has this question made me feel?*
- *Does the interviewer seem unaware that the question is potentially discriminatory?*
- *Is this an indication that the interviewer has a concern?*

If you are not sure whether you want to answer the question, first ask for a clarification of how this question relates to your qualifications for the job; you may decide to answer if there is a reasonable explanation. When you're asked an improper interview question, you have three choices:

1. You can refuse to answer, and tell the employer that the question is improper or discriminatory. You may feel better, but chances are you will not get the job. After you get clarification on the question, if you feel there is no justification for the question, you might politely say that you do not see the relationship between the question and your qualifications for the job and you prefer not to answer it.
2. You can answer the question. You may feel uncomfortable, but you might be considered for the job.
3. You can answer the concern that probably lies behind the question and ignore the improper question itself. Answer briefly and try to move the conversation back to an examination of your skills and abilities as quickly as possible. For example, if asked about your age, the employer may be concerned about how quickly you may retire. You might reply, "I have a lot of experience that would be an asset to your company and will stay as long as I can be productive and valued." Overall, if you are asked an inappropriate interview question, identify a way to respond that draws attention to your skills for the job.

## POSSIBLE EMPLOYER CONCERNS AND DISCRIMINATORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### DO YOU PLAN TO HAVE CHILDREN?

Possible employer concern: The interviewer may have a genuine concern about how long that candidate might remain on the job. You can address the concern by confirming that you plan to pursue a career whether or not you raise a family. You can ignore the inappropriate question, but still address the interviewer's concern.

### WHAT'S YOUR GENERAL STATE OF HEALTH?

Possible employer concern: The employer may be trying to uncover whether you suffer from an illness or disease that would impact your performance. You can relieve the employer's concern by mentioning your willingness to take any physical examinations that are required for the job. You do not have to discuss health concerns you may have.

### IS YOUR SPOUSE EMPLOYED?

Possible employer concern: Some employers believe that people from dual-income families have less incentive to work, are less dependable, and therefore are less productive. You can address this potentially discriminatory question by first telling the truth about your spouse's employment, but stress the fact that your spouse is very supportive of your career pursuits.

## HAVE YOU EVER BEEN ARRESTED, OTHER THAN FOR TRAFFIC VIOLATIONS?

Possible employer concern: New York State allows questions about convictions, but not arrests. Be prepared to deal with any negative reactions to your background. Show that you are a trustworthy person and a strong candidate for the job. Accept responsibility for any past convictions, but do not discuss them more than necessary. Be brief and truthful. Then move on. Focus on what you have done to rehabilitate yourself and discuss how your skills will make a positive contribution to the business.

## WHAT HOBBIES DO YOU HAVE?

Possible employer concern: There's no reason not to give a direct answer, although you're looking for a job based on your professional skills, not your hobbies. The interviewer may simply be curious or may use this question as a transition to discuss extracurricular company events, such as a softball team.

## QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT ASK AN INTERVIEWER

Toward the end of the interview, employers often ask, "Do you have any other questions?" This is another opportunity to demonstrate your enthusiasm for the job. You can show that you are knowledgeable about the job if you mention details the interviewer shared with you.

### EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK THE INTERVIEWER

- *What are some of the biggest challenges to your organization?*
- *If I am selected for this position, what do you hope I will accomplish within the first year?*
- *What are you looking for in an ideal job candidate?*
- *What might a typical day look like in this position?*
- *When do you anticipate making a hiring decision? When should I follow up?*

### QUESTIONS YOU SHOULD NOT ASK THE INTERVIEWER

- Don't ask questions you can find answers to on the company's website; this shows you didn't do your research
- Don't ask questions about vacation and personal days until you're offered the job; then you can discuss compensation

## PREPARE YOUR INTERVIEW ANSWERS

Once you have determined the personal traits and skills you possess that best match the company and position description, you will need to organize your thoughts and main points so that your answers flow naturally. Experienced interviewers ask clever and potentially difficult questions. They usually have a short amount of time and are skilled at getting to the point. Preparing in advance allows you to deal with any pre-interview anxiety, demonstrate good communication skills and express yourself in a well-organized, professional manner.

- Write down and memorize your major accomplishments ahead of time
- For each accomplishment, follow the answer with a specific example; if you're a student, use relevant coursework
- For a technical interview, show that you are a logical thinker and explain your thinking
- Practice your responses, preparation and practice will help you handle difficult questions
- Do not get discouraged by difficult questions, you cannot think of all the questions that may be asked
- Manage your body language during the interview to portray confidence and show how you interact with people

## DEVELOP YOUR STORIES

Create a short story for each detail about your work history. Be sure to use examples from your resume, cover letter and skills that reflect the job posting you plan to highlight during the interview. Each story should be about 2-3 minutes long. People remember stories. Keep in mind that a good story can help you make your point more effectively.

For example, if on your resume you say that you are able to create a budget, write a brief story about it. Include details such as why you were asked to create the budget, what your supervisor thought of the budget and how your work helped your employer. Practice saying what you wrote down. One way is to build stories in the CAR framework. CAR stands for Challenge/Context, Action and Result.

## **ANSWERING NEGATIVE OR DIFFICULT QUESTIONS**

Based on information you provide to the employer, some questions may arise during the interview that you might feel uncomfortable answering. Think about questions that may make you uneasy and prepare and practice answers for those questions. For example:

- If you have gaps in your employment history, be prepared to discuss them honestly and tell the employer how you were able to build your skills between jobs
- If you have a criminal record or have changed jobs frequently, be prepared to answer questions about it

To answer a difficult question, demonstrate how you learned from the experience by taking responsibility for any mistakes. It is also unwise to complain about anything – including former bosses or your home life. This may lead the employer to believe that you will be a difficult person to work with.

Always be honest about your answers, but you do not have to go into details that specifically emphasize a weakness. For example, you may get an interview question like, “What do you think about traveling?” If traveling may be difficult for you at times, consider saying, “Doing a good job is important to me. If traveling is essential to my doing that, I would do my best to travel as much as I could.” You do not have to share details of why traveling will be difficult for you.

Some interviewers may not be good at asking the right questions. In this case convincing them of your skills becomes harder. If the interviewer doesn’t ask the right questions, then try to focus the discussion on the highlights of your successes that you want the interviewer to know. Whether an interviewer is experienced or not, preparing in advance allows you to demonstrate good communication skills and express yourself in a well-organized, professional manner. Before the day of the interview, practice the responses you plan to give to the interview questions.

Practice! Record your practice interviews. Observing yourself can give you insights into how you can improve your answers and body language. Share your video with a friend or family member. Discuss areas they think you need to improve upon. Make note of one or two things you will try to improve before your next interview. Practice improves performance. This is as true for interviewing as it is for any skill.

Contact your local New York State Career Center ([www.labor.ny.gov/career-center-locator](http://www.labor.ny.gov/career-center-locator)) to attend interview preparation workshops and get individual feedback on your interview skills.

## **GIVE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES WITH DETAILS**

You should be able to identify specific and concrete examples of actually doing what you say you can do. If you said, “I am a hard worker,” come up with three different instances when you performed that “hard work.” Examples can come from your life, work or educational experiences. You can support your examples with related education experiences or trainings you’ve done. People remember stories and details more than empty statements. Any time you give an example include the following details: who, what, where, when, why and how. This will help you tell a more complete story about your skills.

## **USE PAST TENSE AND “I” STATEMENTS**

Say that you have done something, not that you will or can do something: “I’ve done it before and I can do it again!”

## **ADD NUMBERS AND WORKPLACE TERMS**

Whenever you give an example, you want to try to use numbers (dollars, quantities, years, the number of things/people, quotas). Employers can use these numbers to compare your performance with that of your competition. Instead of saying, “I loaded a lot of trucks.” Say: “I loaded 12 tons of produce onto six trucks in less than three hours.” Instead of saying, “I worked as a supervisor,” add more details. Say, “I was responsible for setting the schedule and providing daily oversight for six administrative assistants.” Providing this type of detail will also give

you the opportunity to use the terminology of your workplace to demonstrate your expertise.

## **SHOW RESULTS**

Employers care less about what you did than the results of your action. When you are discussing your accomplishments:

- Make sure that you try to use numbers
- Know how you measured your results as well as how you know the result was a good one
- If the results were less than positive, be prepared to tell what you learned from that situation and how you might do it differently next time

## **CONNECT THE DOTS**

You want to tell the interviewer how the skills you used in your example match the skills needed for the job you want. Just because you used a skill to do something doesn't guarantee that the employer will see how your example fits into what he wants or needs. Most employers aren't good at guessing what you are trying to say. If you want them to know something – tell them.

## **PLAN TO HAVE A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW**

Along with planning how you will respond to interview questions, you must also plan for how you will dress and get to the interview site. Think about things you will need to take to the interview. Your goal is to be as prepared as possible to avoid any problems on the day of the interview. By being prepared you will demonstrate that you have good work habits. Finding people with good work habits is as important to an employer as finding people with good skills. Do you have the qualities and attitude of a good worker? Let your words and actions show the interviewer that you should get the job.

## **DRESS FOR SUCCESS**

Know your future work environment. Investigate appropriate clothing to wear at your future job before you decide your interview attire. Talk to people who have worked there or try to visit the organization before your interview so you can see what people generally wear. Dress in ways that show the employer that you understand the work environment and will dress to fit that environment. You should also:

- Shower, brush your teeth and neatly comb your hair
- Wear shined shoes and clean clothes
- Do not distract the interviewer with excessive jewelry, makeup or cologne
- Remove your hat and coat during the interview
- Depending on the job and the work environment, consider whether you need to hide your tattoos and piercings

## **GET TO THE INTERVIEW**

Try going to the interview location beforehand. This way, you will be familiar with the route on the day of the interview. Otherwise, give yourself plenty of time for any delays that might occur. If you drive, find out in advance about parking options near the interview location.

## **COMMUNICATE CONFIDENCE WITH YOUR BODY LANGUAGE**

Actions speak louder than words. This is particularly true in an interview situation. Body language plays a significant role in determining whether an employer sees you as a trustworthy, confident, capable individual.

Also keep in mind that the more interested you are in what you are saying, the more interested the interviewer will be in listening to you. Lastly, smiling during the interview is important. If you smile, you will present yourself as a positive individual who is likable and would fit in with an existing team.

## NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION

### 1. HANDSHAKE

The handshake is your first interaction with an interviewer. It is as important as being dressed appropriately for an interview. Make sure you have a firm handshake and maintain eye contact with the person whose hand you are shaking.

### 2. POSTURE

Sit up straight during your interview.

### 3. ACTIVE LISTENING

Body language can show that you are interested and truly listening. Be optimistic and alert, but relaxed.

### 4. BE RELAXED

Do not slouch or sit too stiffly. Take a deep breath before meeting with the interviewer.

### 5. EYE CONTACT

Maintain friendly and attentive eye contact without staring. Do not let your eyes wander. When there is more than one interviewer, establish eye contact with everyone.

### 6. FACIAL EXPRESSION

Make sure your facial expressions match what you are saying. Relax and smile often.

### 7. GESTURES

Be careful not to tap nervously or fidget. Do not bite nails, chew gum or smoke. These gestures may give a bad impression.

### 8. C<sup>3</sup>

Appear calm, cool and confident. Do not appear desperate. The best strategy to develop appropriate body language is to practice in front of a mirror or get feedback from friends and family.

## WHAT TO TAKE TO THE INTERVIEW

It is important to be prepared with a list of things you will need to bring with you to the interview. Here are a few things you should bring:

- Photo ID or identification for a security check-in desk
- Copies of your resume
- Copies of reference letters
- A pad of paper and a pen
- A portfolio or work sample, if applicable
- The address and room location for the interview
- Directions to the interview location and the phone number of the contact person for the interview
- A list of past employers with addresses, dates and phone numbers
- A list of possible questions to ask
- A sheet with a list of your stories and takeaway points

Having all these things with you on the day of your interview is good, but do not spend the interview flipping through papers to look for information. Be prepared to recall the highlights of your achievements during the interview and use the documents only if the interviewer asks for them.

## HANDLING INTERVIEW ANXIETY AND JITTERS

Some anxiety is healthy and normal, but too much may ruin your interview. These tips will help alleviate any pre-interview anxiety you may have on the day of the interview:

- Feel good that you have been selected for the interview
- Give yourself credit – no matter what the outcome, this is great practice!
- Stick to your routine the day of the interview

- Get ready the night before the interview: Prepare your clothes for the interview; shine or dust off your shoes
- Practice your interview responses
- Plan to go to bed early so you will be well rested on the day of your interview

## **FIVE MOST COMMON INTERVIEWING MISTAKES**

1. Not being prepared. You should do research on the company and come prepared to have an exchange of ideas with the interviewer. You should prepare how you will answer questions and have questions ready to ask.
2. Answering questions about your weaknesses incorrectly. When asked what your weaknesses are, avoid boastful answers like, “I’m a perfectionist” or “I work too hard.” You need to highlight a skill that you genuinely want to improve and state what action you are taking (or you took) to correct it.
3. Not dressing for success. You will not be taken seriously if you arrive for the interview in clothes inappropriate for the work environment.
4. Leaving your cell phone on. Turn off your cell phone before the interview, and do not keep it in plain sight.
5. Arriving late to the interview. This is one of the biggest mistakes you can make. Be sure to arrive no more than ten minutes early to make a good impression.

# CHAPTER 3

## Excelling at your Interview

The time has come to put your knowledge into practice! Completing your interview successfully increases your chances of landing the career you love.





## BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

Remember that you are assessed from the moment you enter the building, even before you sit down in front of the interviewer for questions.

- Be on time; this shows that you respect the interviewer's schedule
- Plan on getting to the interview location about 15 minutes early in case you get lost
- Keep in mind that arriving too early can send the message that you are overly anxious or make the interviewer feel rushed; if you are too early take time to review your material in the car or some other space before announcing your arrival
- When you have arrived make sure you greet the security guards, receptionists and anyone you come into contact with professionally
- Be courteous at all times; you do not know the relationships within the organization and word may travel fast if you are rude or unprofessional
- Turn your cell phone or any other personal electronic devices off; this demonstrates that you want to focus on the interview
- Go to the interview alone, bringing your friends or children to the interview is not professional

## INTERVIEWING DO'S AND DON'TS

Interviewers seek enthusiastic people. Show enthusiasm by speaking positively about previous experiences, internships or supervisors. Smile often and express your desire to be a part of the organization.

### DO

- Arrive ten minutes early
- Dress appropriately
- Take copies of your resume and reference letters
- Greet the receptionist or security guards
- Demonstrate knowledge and skill
- Ask questions related to the position / company
- Allow the interviewer to present a complete thought without interruption
- Be honest about your background and experiences
- Restate your interest in the position
- Use jargon and acronyms, only when appropriate
- Send a thank-you email / letter after the interview

### DON'T

- Freeze or become tense
- Arrive late for the interview
- Make unrealistic promises
- Take friends or children to the interview.
- Criticize ex-bosses, employees or yourself
- Dress inappropriately
- Interrupt the interviewer
- Ask about your expected salary, benefits or vacation time until after you have been offered the job
- Use slang

## DURING AN INTERVIEW

The interview is usually a two-way discussion between you and a prospective employer. The interviewer is attempting to determine whether you have what the company needs. You are trying to determine if you would accept the job if offered. Both of you will be trying to get as much information as possible in order to make those decisions.

The interview that you are most likely to have is a structured interview with a traditional format. It usually consists of three phases. The beginning of the interview includes the greeting and an overview of which areas will be discussed during the interview. The second, or exchange of information phase, is a question-and-answer period. The interviewer asks most of the questions, but you are given an opportunity to ask questions as well. The closing phase gives you an opportunity to ask any final questions you might have, discuss any important points that haven't been addressed and get information about the next step in the process.

## THE BEGINNING PHASE

This phase is very important. You want to make a good first impression and, if possible, get additional information you need about the job and the company.

### MAKE A GOOD IMPRESSION: NON-VERBAL CUES

The interviewer's first impression of you is based mainly on your body language. The interviewer is assessing your overall appearance and behavior. When greeting the interviewer, be certain your handshake is firm and that you make eye contact. Wait for the interviewer to signal you to sit down before taking a seat.

Once seated, your body language is very important in conveying a positive impression. Find a comfortable position so that you don't appear tense. Maintain eye contact with the interviewer. Try to smile at appropriate times. Show that you are open and receptive by keeping your arms and legs uncrossed. Avoid keeping your briefcase or your handbag on your lap. Try to appear relaxed and confident. Most importantly, be a good listener and follow the interviewer's cues.

### WHEN TO ASK QUESTIONS

During a traditional interview, you are often given the chance to ask questions late in the interview. The interview conversation may answer some of your questions or may provide details that you can use to ask additional questions. An interview is a two-way conversation. As you answer questions from the interviewer, you may ask questions relevant to the topic at hand much like you would in any friendly conversation.

Imagine you are interviewing for a plant manager position. The interviewer informs you that you would be expected to conduct monthly safety trainings and wants to know about your experience delivering trainings. Being prepared, you are able to give a short 2-3 minute story about your experience delivering trainings. It would be entirely appropriate to follow up your answer with a question to the interviewer about training opportunities that would be available to you as plant manager so that you too could stay up to date with your knowledge of the industry.

## THE EXCHANGE OF INFORMATION PHASE

During this phase of the interview, you will be asked many questions about your work experience, skills, education, activities and interests. You are being assessed on how you will perform the job. Employers look for evidence of your skills.

### COMMONLY ASKED FIRST QUESTION

There is no one response to the statement, "Tell me about yourself." Respond by explaining your strengths and accomplishments that would be useful in the job you want. One approach to responding to "Tell me about yourself" is by using the "Elevator Pitch." Briefly describe your professional experience and background. The interviewer is looking to learn about who you are in the context of work. Answering this gives the interviewer insight into how you may fit into the organization. Do not talk about personal information, such as marital status or children.

### BEFORE YOU START ANSWERING A QUESTION

When a question is asked during the interview, take a moment to think about what exactly is being asked and what response might be expected. Sometimes the questions might seem repetitive. Be aware that you can guide the answers to direct the conversation and focus on your takeaway points that were not emphasized in previous answers. Be sure to do the following:

1. Listen to the question intently.
2. Ask yourself: *What is the employer really asking? Is this a behavioral question? What story or evidence can I provide to answer this question? Which skills does the employer expect me to discuss to answer this question?*

3. **Prioritize:** From your already planned answers, pick a story that best suits the question and particularly displays the skills that the question is addressing. It is important that you do not exactly repeat a story that you already shared in previous answers
4. **Clarify:** If you are unsure about the question, ask the interviewer to clarify or summarize the question before you start answering.
5. **Answer:** Use the Challenge-Action-Results (CAR) method for behavioral questions. Try to share a story, people tend to remember stories.
6. **Smile:** It is important to smile throughout the process. Display your enthusiasm with your body language.
7. **Recheck:** Ask the interviewer if you answered the question satisfactorily. Confirm whether they have any clarifying questions.
8. **Note:** If possible, take notes about other follow-up questions you would like to ask. If you have a list of stories, check off the stories that you already shared.

Answer all questions fully and clearly within 30-40 seconds. Keep it simple. Be prepared to answer questions about your skills, what you can offer to the employer and how you will fit into the work environment. Provide examples or stories that give evidence of your skills. Be sure to connect your stories to the needs of the employer. It is also important to be an active listener and manage your body language.

Although your responses should be prepared in advance so that they are well-phrased and effective, be sure they do not sound rehearsed. Remember that your responses must always be adapted to the present interview. Incorporate any information you obtained earlier in the interview with the responses you prepared in advance, and then answer in a way that is appropriate based on the question.

## **THE SUMMATION AND CLOSING PHASE**

Towards the end of the interview you might be asked, "Would you like to tell me anything more about yourself?" Be sure to quickly review your takeaway points for the interviewer and cover the points that you wanted to elaborate on further. Highlight any of your strengths that have not been discussed.

Sometimes you may find that the interview is conducted like a lecture. The employer may do most, if not all of the talking. If this is the case, at the end of the interview be prepared to:

- Ask the employer if they have questions about your skills or resume
- Summarize your qualifications
- State that you would like the job

During the closing phase of an interview, you will be asked whether you have any other questions. Ask any relevant question that has not been answered. This is an opportunity for you to show the employers that you did your research and you have expertise in the field.

## **CLOSING THE INTERVIEW**

- Express your enthusiasm and state your desire for the job
- Summarize and promote your skills and strengths
- Ask what the next steps will be in the hiring process and when to call back
- Ask for the business cards of the interviewer(s) and use this information to write thank-you emails or letters to the interviewer(s) after the interview
- As you leave, smile, shake hands firmly while maintaining eye contact, thank the interviewer by name, offer to provide any additional information they may need and say goodbye

## AFTER AN INTERVIEW

- If you are not able to get a business card, write down the name and title (double check spelling) of the interviewer
- Review what the job entails and record what the next step will be
- Note your reactions to the interview; include what went well and what went poorly
- Assess what you learned from the experience and how you can improve your performance during future interviews
- Write the interviewer(s) a thank-you letter or email

## REFLECTING AND LEARNING FROM YOUR INTERVIEW

1. After the interview, go home and write down everything you can remember about the interview, especially what went well and what didn't. If you don't get the job, this information could prove to be very helpful.
2. If you are offered a position, write down any other questions you might need answered to help you with the decision.
3. If possible, see if you can get feedback from the interviewer. Contact the interviewer if you didn't get the job and ask if there was something you could do to improve your interviewing skills. If the interviewer says that the organization simply chose a different candidate, then ask the interviewer if they would consider you for any additional openings in the future. Also consider asking the interviewer if they might be aware of similar positions that you can apply for within the organization or elsewhere. You can also ask the interviewer if they would be willing to forward your information to anyone they know who might be looking for a candidate with your skills. In effect, you might convert this disappointment into a networking opportunity.
4. Do not rely on only one interview. Keep looking and networking for more job openings until you get an offer you will accept. Be prepared for disappointments, and don't let them slow you down.

## THANK-YOU LETTER

After the interview is complete, send a thank-you letter to the interviewer. A thoughtful thank-you note can move you to the top of the candidate list, and gives you one more chance to remind the employer about the special skills that you can bring to the company.

- Your thank-you note should be handwritten only if you have very good handwriting
- Sign your note with your first and last name
- Keep it short, no longer than three quarters of a page
- Proofread the note to check for spelling or grammar errors
- Ask someone else to proofread the note for you as well
- Provide your telephone number with area code, and an email address if available
- Send the note no later than the day after your interview

### FIRST PARAGRAPH

Thank the employer for the interview and the time the employer spent with you to discuss your qualifications for the job. Mention again that you are interested in the position.

### SECOND PARAGRAPH

Briefly state a few of your skills without repeating the information on your resume word for word. After the interview, you should know the critical qualities of the position and the person who will fill it. Highlight why you think you are a good candidate for the position. At this point, you can include any important information not mentioned at the interview.

### THIRD PARAGRAPH

End with a statement that indicates that you are looking forward to being contacted by the employer regarding the status of your application for the position.

## SAMPLE THANK-YOU LETTER TO THE INTERVIEWER

Dear Mr. Barnes:

Thank you for the opportunity to interview for the Office Manager position. As we discussed the required qualifications, duties and responsibilities, I am certain that I can be an asset to your company. While working for Any Product Management Company, I built a reputation as someone who could be trusted to complete assignments on time and with the highest quality, resulting in being honored with multiple employee recognition awards.

During my last five years of working for Any Product Management Company, I lead my team to deliver an average of 66 more units each year – an increase of 13%, or \$124,000, in annual profits. My ability to accomplish this has been a direct result of some of the things you highlighted as being important to your company: a passion for the work, attention to detail and the skill to motivate both staff and supervisors. Based on my past work experience, I feel confident that I can meet or exceed past successes for your company.

I look forward to a second interview where we can further discuss my qualifications.

Sincerely,

*John A. Smith*

John Smith

## FOLLOW UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

During the interview, if you were not told when a hiring decision will be made, call to check on the status of the hiring decision after three to seven days.

1. At that time, if you learn that the decision has not been made, find out whether you are still under consideration for the job. Ask if there are any other questions the interviewer might have about your qualifications and offer to come in for another interview if necessary. Restate that you are very interested in the job.
2. If you learn that you did not get the job, try to find out why. You might also inquire whether the interviewer can think of anyone else who might be able to use someone with your abilities, either in another department or company.
3. If you are offered the job, you have to decide whether you want it. If you are not sure, thank the employer and ask if you can have some time to think about it. The employer may give you a deadline. Be prepared to make your final decision by then. Be sure to ask any other questions you might need answered to help you with the decision.
4. If you know you want the job and have all the information you need, accept the job with thanks and get the details regarding when you will start. Ask whether the employer will send a letter of confirmation, as it is best to have the offer in writing.

## WHO GETS HIRED?

In the final analysis, employers will hire someone who has the abilities and talents to fulfill their professional needs. It is up to you to demonstrate at the interview that you are the person they want.

## IS THIS JOB FOR ME?

The following questions will help you decide whether you should accept a job offer:

- *Is this a job you are interested in doing?*
- *Would someone with your work habits and personality fit in well there?*
- *Will you have to relocate or move?*
- *Will you spend more money than you can afford for gas or tolls?*
- *Will there be enough opportunities for you to develop your skills and advance your career?*

## SALARY AND BENEFITS

Avoid raising questions that focus on the expected salary and benefits during the interview. Typically, compensation is covered after you have been offered a job or during second interviews. If you ask about your salary and benefits during the first interview, this may give the appearance that what is most important to you is how much you will be paid and the type of insurance or other benefits you will get.

After you have been offered the job, and you are sure you want the position, it is okay to discuss the salary being offered, such as “I’m hoping that I’ll be offered a salary that matches my years of experience and skills for this area. What salary range is the company offering?”

## SALARY NEGOTIATIONS

During salary negotiations, you are not only talking about your monetary salary but your entire compensation package. This includes vacation time, sick leave, health insurance, tuition reimbursement and other benefits the company may offer.

Your base salary and performance-based raises are probably the most negotiable parts of your compensation package. Many companies let you select from a number of benefit options based on a total monetary cost. Employees usually have some flexibility on which benefit options they select. For example, employees with children might select child care reimbursement, while employees interested in school might choose tuition reimbursement.

When negotiating your compensation package, it is important to keep in mind the total package. Make sure you consider all of the benefits the company has to offer, not just the salary. Before you begin negotiating your compensation package, decide which benefits are most important to you so you are ready to negotiate.

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