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Top Interview Tips

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Having secured an interview you want to maximise the opportunity. The quality of your preparation will directly impact your performance on the day, and the impression that you leave.

A professional recruiter will take you through many of the areas addressed below. After all, once in the employer's domain the performance of the individual will directly impact upon the recruiter's reputation.

Preparing for Interview - Points for consideration...

Point 1 - The Basics

Remember that the interview is a two-way communication process, it is about giving and receiving information. Further, that communication process includes verbal and non-verbal information. The verbal information is of course what we say and how we say it. The non-verbal information is how we shake hands, how we stand or sit, how we hold our head, and how we use our eyes and facial expressions. It is important to think about the entire communication process, not only what we say.

Offer a firm handshake, but avoid crushing grips or turning of hands.

Avoid negative body language such as crossing your arms or lounging back in your chair.

Maintain regular eye contact with the interviewer, but avoid constant staring as this may unnerve the interviewer. Seek natural occasional breaks in eye contact.

Point 2 - Research

Before you walk into the interview you should have a detailed knowledge about the company, the position for which you are interviewing, and the individuals that you are meeting. In today's world of mass communication there is no excuse for lack of research. Your recruiter will provide some of that information, but you should also search the web and other sources for additional information. Try to understand the company's history, product range, customer base, competition, competitive advantage, strengths and weaknesses, and the future challenges facing them and their market. Finally write a list of questions to ask the employer about the company, their products, and market.

Point 3 - Dress Code

Clarify the dress code in advance. In today's business environment many employers have adopted less formal dress codes. Even if the employer has a less formal dress code you should not dress down unless the company specifically requests you to do so. If in doubt dress in formal business clothes. But if you have been asked to dress

in a particular way then do so. To ignore the request may be taken as a sign that you would not be comfortable in their environment.

Point 4 - Time, Date & Location

Double check the interview time, date, and location, via your recruiter. If the meeting has been set for some weeks then be sure to call closer to the date to confirm that everything is still OK. Also, make sure that you have an emergency number should anything go wrong whilst travelling to the interview. If possible it is advisable to travel to the interview location prior to the day in order to test the route or public transport services.

Point 5 - Managing Questions

It is important to prepare yourself to respond to the interviewers questions, and to prepare to ask your own questions. Preparing to respond to the interviewer's questions is not as easy as reading your CV and the details of the job. It requires careful consideration. You want to answer questions promptly, concisely, and confidently. It is easy to become complacent with information about ourselves, especially that contained in a CV that we prepared. You need to find a new angle to review yourself.

One way to do this is to break down your CV into three sections...

1. On a piece of paper list the facts about your career to date, types of companies, positions held, and responsibilities.
2. Next, list the skills that you developed and the benefits that you have delivered to your employers, what value were you to them, why did they employ you.
3. Finally list the specific achievements from your recent career. Make them specific and quantify the result. They should be evidence of the skills and benefits that you identified in (2).

This process should prepare you to respond to just about any question related to your career to date. It also enables you to present information in a very effective way. Let us assume that the employer asked "Tell me about yourself". What they are really asking is "Why should we employ you, what can you do for us?" They are interested in benefits and achievements, and by presenting your career in this (1) Facts, (2) Attributes and Benefits, and (3) Achievements basis you will be helping them to understand why they should employ you.

Moreover, they will retain the key information presented towards the end of your answer. From this they will judge what you can do for them. They are generally not interested in the factual information that can be read in the CV.

Whilst employers are interested in the basics of your home situation, they are rarely interested in the detail. When responding to motive questions ("Why did you?") it will normally be more appropriate to answer with reference to your career.

Develop a list of 15 to 20 questions about the role, the company, their products, challenges facing the business, and the potential for development within the company. This may seem like a long list but many will be answered in the course of the interview discussion. It is very important to have half a dozen very good questions to ask at the end of the interview.

Don't be afraid to place your written list of questions on the table at the beginning of the interview. Many people feel nervous about producing a written list. It simply shows that you have taken your preparation seriously, and that you are taking this opportunity seriously.

Answer questions clearly, concisely, and confidently, then stop. Don't allow yourself to ramble on. If the question is unclear then ask for clarification.

Point 6 - Be Enthusiastic

Interviews are complex communication events, and enthusiasm for the opportunity can easily be lost in the intensity and focus of the process. At the end of the process the employer is going to feel most comfortable with somebody that is enthusiastic about the opportunity and the company. All other things being equal, the more enthusiastic interviewee will normally win the day.

Asking for feedback and about the next steps can help to reinforce your desire to go further.

Point 7 - Make Notes

Make notes. Don't write every detail and remember to be attentive to the visual communication needs of the interviewer (eye contact), but don't leave everything to memory.

Point 8 - Remuneration

It is unusual to discuss money at the first interview, but be prepared just in case. If a client quotes a number that you like then acknowledge your interest, if the number is below your expectation then it may be better to explain that you are interested in the role but need to think about everything that has been discussed. Try to avoid a direct negotiation about salary as this can lead to a conflict situation with the potential employer. It may be more appropriate to utilise your recruiter to liaise on salary and other remuneration issues.

Under no circumstances should an interviewee raise the subject of money during an interview.

Point 9 - Leave on a High

At the end of the interview pack up your belongings, thank the interviewer, and leave. Don't be tempted to ramble on about why you want the job or why you would be good for the company. Too many people destroy their good work with a sloppy rambling close. Don't do it!.

Point 10 - Curriculum Vitae

Always take a few clean copies of your CV to the interview, but do not present them unless specifically requested to do so by the interviewer...

Point 11 - Interview Expenses

If the potential employer is reimbursing expenses then remember to present receipts to an administrative person after the interview. Do not present these to the interviewer during the meeting. If there is no other opportunity then ask the interviewer informally after leaving the interview room who you should hand your receipts to.

Point 12 - Food & Drink

If the interview is arranged around a meal or drink then think carefully about what you order. Don't order food that is difficult or messy to eat. Choose something easy to control. Avoid alcoholic drinks, no matter what the interviewer drinks. Let the interviewer pay. Thank them for their hospitality, but don't start a dispute about who should pay.

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