

OBJECTIVE

Your objective in any interview should be making a *positive lasting impression*. Even if it doesn't sound like your dream job, make a connection with your interviewer. The responsibilities and pay range of a position can change if an employer is convinced they need to hire *you*. Plus this meeting could lead to other opportunities. People hire and refer candidates they like, so nailing an interview can open doors you never thought possible.

BE PREPARED

- Ask about the format of the interview. Will it be an informal one-on-one, or a formal panel discussion?
- Know who will be involved in the interview. What is his/her position and professional background (search LinkedIn)?
- Get directions - know where you're going and get there on time. Try to be 5-10 minutes early.
- Do your homework. A quick online search could help you figure out if this company is one you want to work for.
- Think of questions you might ask in the interview. The best interviews are just good conversations.
- Bring multiple copies of your resume and reference sheet, as well as a copy of the job description or advertisement.

SHOW ENTHUSIASM

Be positive and show enthusiasm for the company and the position - even though you may not know as much as you'd like about either. Hiring managers look for candidates who are excited about the opportunity. Believe it or not, many of them are just as nervous as you are about the interview. Showing enthusiasm lets them know you are definitely interested in moving forward and makes their decision to bring you back for a second interview that much easier.

- Again, arrive 5 - 10 minutes early.
- Dress appropriately and professionally. Err on the conservative side. (Shirt and tie, minimal jewelry/ perfume/ makeup, etc.)
- Watch your posture. Use positive body language, a firm handshake, smile, and relax.
- Listen carefully to the interviewer and respond to their real questions.
- Speak loudly enough to be easily heard.

REASONS TO PURSUE THIS OPPORTUNITY

This is also known as "reasons for leaving your current position". You should always address this subject in a positive manner. Your motivation to make a career change should make logical sense and not be emotionally driven. Please note that discrediting or insulting your current employer/management reflects negatively on you. Discuss the reasons you are pursuing this position rather than talking about the things you dislike about your current position. This is also *not* the time to mention compensation.

Examples of why you're there

- Potential for growth and advancement
- Reputation as a progressive company offering an employee-minded, friendly environment
- Looking to expand your experience in a new industry or focus on a particular skill
- Wanting to reduce your commute or achieve better work/life balance

ASK GOOD QUESTIONS

Asking questions demonstrates your preparedness, as well as your interest in the company and position. This three-tiered approach will lend a logical flow to your questions. You don't have to ask them all, but pick a few that are important to you and appropriate for the situation. Be sure to ask your most important questions first (in case you run short on time), take notes, and listen before responding.

Tier One – About the Company

Check out the company website and do a web search. Be alert to recent events, trends, and press releases, etc.

- Who are their competitors and customers?
- What are their strategies for growth, projections, and the direction of company?
- What is their mission statement and the philosophy of the company's leaders?
- Is the Company involved in the community?
- How long do employees stay, on average?
- Why do employees stay? (features and benefits of company, retention strategies)

Tier Two - About the Department/ Division/ Manager

- How is the department organized? (Manager and staff etc.)
- Who are the people/positions you would interact with most?
- What are the reporting relationships - above and below the open position? What is their management style?
- How does the manager(s) develop their staff?
- How does the department interact with other division, subsidiaries or corporate departments?
- How does the department interact with outside groups, including vendors, customers and governmental units?

Tier Three - About the Position

This is the heart of the interview. Your questions here will serve two distinct purposes. First, it provides you with sufficient information to determine if the position is appropriate for your skill set and career objectives. More importantly, from an interviewing perspective, you'll see what the hiring manager is looking for in your background. What are you bringing to the table and how will you benefit the department? Skills, experience, education and long-term goals are important, but smart hiring managers are more focused on finding the right personality fit to complement their existing team.

- What are the specific duties and responsibilities of the position?
- What will it take to be successful in the position?
- Are there areas that require special attention or any special challenges?
- Which projects will be addressed initially and over the next six months?
- What are the dynamics of the team?
- Is any special training required?
- Why is the position open?
- How many individuals have been in this position in the last 5 years?
- What have they not seen in other candidates who've applied?
- Has anyone who has held the position been considered a "good fit"? Why? – This is a natural lead into the next step.

DISCUSS YOUR QUALIFICATIONS

If you want the job, now's the time to sell yourself. Carpe diem! Seize this opportunity. In today's highly competitive job market, you must distinguish yourself from other candidates. Don't be shy about it. Since the hiring manager will typically lead this discussion, be prepared to answer their questions fully and with a positive attitude.

- Know your resume including dates of employment, accomplishments, etc.
- Realistically relate your skills and strengths to the needs of the company and position. A good way to accomplish this is by using examples from your experience.
 - What challenges have you faced?
 - What were your solutions and how did you implement them?
 - What were the positive results, including dollar/time savings or other quantification?
 - How does this example relate to the needs of the hiring manager?
- Be prepared to field questions about weaknesses. What areas are you improving in?
 - Choose something that is not vital to your success in the open position.
 - Avoid personality/character flaws.
 - Present a game plan you have devised to improve the weakness.
 - Confirm that you do not feel this weakness would limit your success in this new job.
 - If your weakness is completing your degree or strengthening software skills – it can become a strength.
- Volunteer information about skills / work habits that make you successful, even if the interviewer hasn't asked about them.
 - You should have five in mind and appropriately present these throughout the interview process.
 - Examples: self-motivated, loyal, strong work ethic, take pride and ownership in your work, dependable, team player
- Confirm with the interviewer that you have satisfactorily answered their questions.
 - Once you have answered a question, don't ramble. If there is ever an uncomfortable silence simply ask, "Have I answered the question? Should I elaborate on anything?"

The prior information covers the bulk of most first interviews. The following information becomes more critical as you progress through the interview process.

POTENTIAL FOR ADVANCEMENT

This is an area of obvious interest and concern to you. However, you must be careful in how you approach the subject. Hiring managers look for individuals who are goal-oriented and keep pace with the progression of the company. They are reluctant to hire those who outpace the company and may not stay in a position or with the company for long. Here are some tips on how to safely address this issue.

- Express a high level of interest in the position.
- Ask the interviewer how he/she got to their level in the company.
- Ask, “If someone performed very well in this position, what additional responsibilities or promotions might be available?”

SALARY AND BENEFITS

It’s inappropriate for you to bring up salary and benefits during the first interview, but you want to be prepared to discuss this issue if the interviewer brings it up.

- Let the hiring manager know that the most important thing to you is the right company and the right position, and you feel very good about this opportunity.
- Your opportunity to negotiate the best offer comes when you know you are the final candidate. You’ll know that when they make you an offer. Until that point it’s best to avoid discussions about salary.
- If you’re working with a recruiter, speak with him/her regarding any salary and benefits information prior to the interview so your questions are answered ahead of time. It’s best to allow your recruiter to negotiate on your behalf.

If the hiring manager continues discussing salary, an appropriate response would be:

“My salary compensation has been \$_____. I understand the salary range for this position is \$_____. Given my experience and strengths, I hope you would make me an offer at the mid to high end of the range. I am very excited about this opportunity and I would definitely entertain your best offer”.

ENDING THE INTERVIEW

When the interview is winding down, there are a few key points you need to cover. Regardless of what has happened up to this point, you must conclude the interview by **asking for the position**. You want to know how you’ve done and what to expect. The meeting may end quickly, so be prepared. These points are vital to making a lasting impression on the interviewer.

- Thank the interviewer for his/her time.
- Re-express your sincere interest in the position and the company.
- Ask the following questions.
 - Is there anything I can clarify or elaborate on to help you make your decision?
 - Do you have any hesitation in hiring me? (Address any/all of their objections)
 - What else might I do to earn this position?
 - What is the next step in the hiring process?

Following the interview, send a Thank You card or email to the interviewer. They should receive it as soon as possible.