

INTERVIEWING

Many job seekers approach the interviewing process with a sense of apprehension born of a fear of the unknown, but employment is simply a focused, goal-oriented exchange of information between two people. While impressive resumes and cover letters will get you employment interviews, it is the interview itself that will typically be the most significant aspect of the employment process.

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Broadly speaking, there are two basic types of interviews: screening interviews and selection interviews. The screening interview is usually rather general and is relatively short (30-45 minutes). It is intended primarily to eliminate unqualified candidates from further consideration. For example, when employers recruit on a college campus, they use screening interviews to decide which of the numerous candidates are potentially best qualified to meet their organization's needs. These selected candidates are then invited to the employer's office or plant for a second, more detailed interview.

The selection interview, a longer, more thorough interview, is designed to identify the most qualified candidate for the position. A selection interview may last up to one hour or more. It is not uncommon for a candidate to go through a sequence of four or five selection interviews with several different employment officials during the course of a day-long plant visit.

WHAT EMPLOYERS ARE SEEKING

What are employers looking for in candidates? Not always what you may think. In a recent study on interviews, employers ranked oral communications, motivation, initiative, assertiveness, loyalty, leadership, maturity, enthusiasm, punctuality, and appearance as the ten most important factors, in that order. Students in the study generally ranked the same ten attributes as significant, but placed them in different order. The study showed how the top ten attributes in the employers' ranking indicate they are searching for basic "value system" attributes that are more enduring in nature. These attributes are indications of a manager who can handle future responsibility and tenure with the organization. In comparison, the student's high ranking for enthusiasm, appearance, work experience, and so on indicates that students think employers emphasize more superficial attributes rather than personality factors. Although this research focused on business-oriented interviews, the indications are transferable to other career areas. From an employer's perspective, hiring you is a risk. Through studying some paperwork that you have submitted and talking with you over a relatively brief period of time, he or she is expected to make a sound decision. You have the opportunity to convince the employer of your "safety". By relating specific experiences and accomplishments, you must convince them that you will fit into their organization and contribute to its purposes. Ultimately, the employer's decision reflects his or her opinion as to whether you can do the job and whether you will do the job.

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Thorough preparation for your interview is essential. Most candidates interviewing for a given position will have the basic qualifications necessary to do that job. However, it is typically the candidate who does the best job of presenting himself or herself who gets the job offer. Preparing thoroughly for your interview will enable you to effectively present yourself and your qualifications as they relate to the position for which you are interviewing. Basic interview preparation should include:

Know Yourself. Before going into the interview situation, you will need to spend a considerable amount of time thinking about yourself. Are your interests consistent with the general career area and this specific job? What are your employable skills and how do they correspond with this position? Is this opportunity compatible with your work values?

Know the Organization. Knowledge of the organization, its products or services, hierarchical structure, locations, and needs are essential. Have these issues clarified in your mind prior to the interview and be prepared to verbalize your thoughts. Be especially conscientious about reading and digesting the organization's "recruiting literature". Employers go to great expense to provide this literature, particularly for campus interviews, and they expect you to be thoroughly familiar with it. Generally, the more you know about the organization, the industry it represents, the position under consideration, and how this all relates to your own career goals, the more effective you will be. Thorough preparation will strengthen your self confidence and will demonstrate sincere interest in the job.

Clearly Define Your Goals Before the Interview. Employers look favorably upon candidates who have specific and well-defined career goals. Knowing what you want to do is difficult, but you will do well in an interview to start on a specific note. For example, you may say to an interviewer, "Ms. Nicks, I am particularly interested in a sales representative position with your company. Eventually, I would like to advance to a sales management position." Many mistakenly believe that the more general they are about what they want to do, the better their chances of getting a job. Such is not the case. Focus as clearly as possible on your job objective.

Considering the Match. Continue the interview preparation process by considering your interests, values, skills, and needs in relation to the specific job you are pursuing. How does this position fit in with your long-range goals? You may find it helpful to make a list with information about the career and specific position for comparison. Be prepared to discuss the link-ups with your interviewer. Your task is to help the employer become as well informed about your attributes and goals as you are. The better you relate your career interests and qualifications to the employer's needs, the more successful you will be.

FIRST IMPRESSIONS AND INTERVIEWING BASICS

Getting your interview off to a good start is important. Again, by being prepared and knowing what to expect you can increase your effectiveness in the initial stages of the interview. The following list indicates areas you should consider in preparation:

What to Wear. When you are neatly groomed and appropriately dressed you create a favorable impression. The suit is the basic element of the interview wardrobe for men and women alike. Generally, colors such as dark blue or various shade of gray are considered most appropriate, although camel and beige are acceptable during the summer. Other colors for women also include dark brown, dark maroon, and medium blue. Fabric patterns such as solids, tweeds, muted plaids, and closely spaced pinstripes create the most professional look. For men, white, tailored cotton shirts are best—ties are a must! Dark, over-the-calf socks and lace-up or slip-on shoes in brown, black or cordovan are the best choices. Women commonly wear tailored shirts or blouses in white, off-white or pastel colors. A basic medium pump in a color that compliments the suit is recommended. Distracting jewelry, nail polish, make-up or perfume should be avoided. Overall, be immaculate. A good appearance reinforces your many positive attributes.

Be Punctual. Your first opportunity to make a favorable impression on the interviewer is to be punctual. Never be late for an interview! Try to arrive early enough to allow time to check your appearance, collect your thoughts, etc. If for some reason you will be late, be certain to call ahead. Upon arrival for your interview, greet the employer’s receptionist or secretary courteously and with respect. First impressions really count!

Handling Introductions. The introductions between you and your interviewer are important in getting the interview started on a positive note. Greet your interviewer with a smile, a firm handshake and direct eye contact. The interview will generally begin with a social comment about the weather or such to put you at ease. Expect it and react in a normal, cordial fashion. Be sure to note your interviewer’s name and use it during the interview.

What to Bring. Always carry extra copies of your resume to the interview. If you have updated your resume for your specific job for which you are interviewing, carry along the revised version and give it to the employer. In addition, you may want to bring along a copy of your academic transcript or a typewritten listing of courses you have completed. An increasing number of interviewers are interested in determining the actual courses you have taken, and many will ask you to provide them with this information. Check with the Registrar’s Office to obtain a copy of your academic record. If appropriate (as in the case of advertising, art, or education), bring a portfolio containing samples or illustrations of your work. It is also a good idea to carry a typewritten list of your references which indicates their names, titles, addresses and telephone numbers. You will also want to carry a pen and paper along to make notes following the interview, particularly about your impressions and about any requests the employer made that need your action. **Do not** take notes during the interview; devote your attention to the interviewer. Additionally, it is generally best to refrain from referring to notes during the interview.

Behavioral Interviewing. Many employers incorporate the concept of behavioral interviewing when selecting employees. Behavioral interviewing is based on the concept of behaviorism or the idea that future success can be predicted from past success. Employers who use behavioral interviewing want candidates for certain key skill sets (i.e. *can* you work under pressure) and questions usually begin with “Can you give me an example of ...”. The goal of the candidate is to respond to the question based on a real life experience that addresses the particular skill (i.e. *how*

you have worked under pressure) that the employer is asking about. The more specific the response to the question the better. Answering behavioral questions takes patience and practice but is really no more difficult than answering other employer questions.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Keep in mind that virtually all interviewers are making comparative judgments as they screen numerous candidates.

Although no single interviewer will ask you all the questions that follow, this listing is designed to give you an idea of the types of questions you can expect to be asked. Study it carefully and prepare to respond effectively to these and similar other questions. **Tell the interviewer about yourself! If you don't, no one will!**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your major strengths/weaknesses?
3. Why should I hire you over other candidates?
4. What kind of professors did you like?
5. Give me an example of a time when you had to work under pressure. Be specific.
(Behavioral)
6. Can you share with me examples of your initiative or where you've been innovative?
(Behavioral)
7. What supervisory or leadership roles have you had?
8. What have been your most satisfying and most disappointing experiences?
9. Why did you decide to interview with us?
10. What can you do for us now? What can I do for you?
11. Why are your grades low? Do they reflect your ability?
12. What do you know about our organization?
13. What interests you about this specific position?
14. What qualifications do you have that make you feel you would be successful?
15. What is not on your resume that you would like to tell me?
16. What have you read recently?
17. Which school activities did you enjoy the most?
18. If you were starting college all over again, what would you do differently?
19. What are your long-range/short-range goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
20. What do you see yourself doing in five years from now?

21. What do you REALLY want to do in life?
22. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
23. Why did you select Augusta State University?
24. Give me an example of a major problem you have had and how you dealt with it. (*Behavioral*)
25. Give me an example of a mistake you have made. How did you overcome it? (*Behavioral*)
26. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you hope to work?
27. What other employers are you interviewing with?
28. What would be your ideal job?
29. If there were one thing you could change about your past, what would it be?

Be prepared for behavioral interviewing questions...Give examples of your initiative, creativity, patience, leadership, teamwork and/or problem solving.

QUESTIONING THE INTERVIEWER

There is another side to employment interviewing. Interviewers expect candidates for employment to ask pertinent questions during the interviewing process. Many applicants mistakenly believe they are evaluated solely on their responses to interviewers' questions. In reality, candidates are also evaluated on the basis of the questions they ask during the interviews.

Your questions should reflect a sincere interest in the organization and an awareness of the employer's needs and how you can fulfill them. Questions relating to salary and benefits should normally be avoided during initial screening interviews. Rather, these types of questions should be raised in subsequent interviews -- after you and the employers have developed a greater degree of mutual interest.

Don't scare off an interviewer by seeming to be overly concerned about salary, benefits, vacation time, etc. What, then, are good questions to ask interviewers? Some of the following may be useful examples:

1. What qualities are you looking for in your new hires?
2. Could you describe a typical first-year assignment?
3. Could you tell me about your initial and future training programs?
4. How is an employee evaluated and promoted?
5. What are the opportunities for personal growth and/or professional development?
6. What is the retention rate of people in the position for which I am interviewing?
7. What are the most challenging facets of the position?
8. What are your expectations of new hires?

9. What is the work environment like?
10. What are the company's plans for future growth?
11. Is the company stable and financially sound?
12. How has the company fared during recent recessions?
13. What makes your firm different from its competitors?
14. What industry-wide trends are likely to affect your company?
15. What are your company's strengths and weaknesses?
16. How would you describe your corporation's personality and management style?
17. Why did you join and stay with the firm?

CONCLUDING THE INTERVIEW

Most interviewers will conclude the interview by indicating when you can expect to receive further word on your status as an applicant. However, if the interviewer does not volunteer this information, be certain to ask. This will help you to follow up your interviews within a reasonable time frame. When employers are interviewing numerous candidates, your follow-up efforts will help distinguish you from other, less conscientious applicants. As a means of facilitating this follow-up process, ask the interviewer for one of his or her business cards, and keep it handy for future reference. If the employer does not have a business card, be certain to write down his or her full name, title, address, and phone number for your records immediately after the interview.

HANDLING THE SALARY ISSUE

The topic of salary will probably come up in your selection interviews. As part of your pre-interview search, investigate salary levels within your career field for similar positions. The *Occupational Outlook Handbook*, published by the U.S. Labor Department, the National Association of Colleges & Employers *Salary Survey*, plus the *American Almanac of Jobs and Salaries* will prove helpful. Salary resources are available in the Career Center and many resources are now available on the Internet. Salary information may also be found in pertinent professional journals and various other publications in the reference sections of university and public libraries. In any event, have an appropriate salary range in mind based on your research prior to the interview, but don't get so bogged down on the salary issue that you give the employer the impression that you are more interested in salary than the opportunity at hand. Normally, there will be sufficient time to negotiate salary after the employment offer has been made.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

As a matter of courtesy, it is important to send your interviewer a short thank-you letter after the interview. Generally, all that is necessary is to thank the interviewer for his or her time and to express your on-going interest in the position. If the interviewer indicated a specific time frame

by which you should learn of your status as an applicant, be sure to mention that you are looking forward to hearing from him or her by this time. As is the case with other types of employment correspondence, your thank-you letter should be neatly typewritten to ensure a professional image.

EVALUATING YOUR INTERVIEWS

Immediately following your interview, take some time to evaluate your performance. Consider the means you can use in future interviews to strengthen your effectiveness. Each interview should be a learning opportunity and an opportunity to profit from your experience. Generally, you will find that the more you interview, the better you become at effectively presenting your career interests and qualifications to employers.

However, if you consistently find yourself a victim of “rejection letters”, consider some of the following factors:

1. Have you set realistic job goals for yourself?
2. Do you need to do your pre-interview research more thoroughly?
3. Are you presenting yourself in the best possible manner?
4. Does your resume reflect your career interest and support your claims?
5. Are you conveying an enthusiastic and well-informed interest in the position and an eagerness to learn?

A valuable resource you may want to utilize in your interview preparation is a mock interview at the Career Center. The staff can help you to assess where your strengths and weaknesses are in this process. Mock interviews can be obtained by appointment by calling 737-1604 and generally take at least an hour.

Ultimately, as you evaluate your interviews, you will develop new skills in the entire process of interviewing. Beyond being well-prepared, don't underestimate the importance of being enthusiastic. Be the best you can be. Highlight your qualifications and potential. Remember, the number one rule in any hiring situation is to convince the organization that you are worth more than they will be paying you. Be confident in yourself, and don't give up trying.

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