

INTERVIEWING POWER

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

- **Know Yourself** - Analyze your strengths and weaknesses, your background, academic performance, what you enjoy doing and do well, and what is important to you. What experiences have helped you to develop the skills you possess?
- **Know the Employer** - Learn about the organization and the position for which you are interviewing. When conducting your research, consider the size of the organization, location, products or services, and potential for growth. Most organizations have web sites that are a good place to start your research. See the Career Services web page for some recommended web sites.

Talk with former students employed at the organization you are interested in. Conduct informational interviews to gather pertinent data. Use the Mentors listing off the Career Services web page for alumni contacts. The alumni contacts are also available on a database in Career Services.

- **Practice** - Refer to "**Questions Interviewers Frequently Ask College Students**" at the back of this article. Another suggestion is to participate in a videotaped mock interview offered by Career Services.
- **Logistics** - Make certain that you know the exact time and place of the interview, the interviewer's full name, the correct pronunciation, and their title. Be sure you know how to get to the employer's office and allow plenty of time for the unexpected, i.e., traffic jams, or finding a parking place. Plan to get there with time to spare so that you arrive about ten minutes before your appointment.
- **Dress in Good Taste** - Appearance does count, particularly with first impressions. Although different fields have different dress codes, you can never be too conservative. The traditional dark tailored suit is usually recommended for initial interviews for men and women. Career Services has books which offer detailed recommendations on interview attire and professional dress.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

- **Follow the Interviewer's Lead** - Think of yourself as the interviewer's guest. Wait for the interviewer to extend her/his hand to initiate a handshake and to invite you to sit down.
- **Attitude** - Your self-confidence is important. If you feel good about yourself, the employer will feel good about you. Emphasize your strong points and remember that the recruiter is looking for inherent personal energy and enthusiasm.
- **Accentuate the Positive** - Try always to dwell on the positive. While past failures and shortcomings need not be volunteered, do not try to cover them up or sidestep them. Should an interviewer ask, try to explain the circumstances rather than give excuses or blame others.
- **Listen to the Interviewer** - Make sure that you understand every question that you are asked. Do not hesitate to ask for clarification or to restate the question in your own words. Pay attention to nonverbal cues of the interviewer, i.e., if she/he begins to tap her/his finger on the desk or appears distracted, you may want to wrap up your response.
- **Be Honest** - If ever in doubt, tell the truth. Honesty is indeed the best policy - interviews are no exception.
- **Questions** - When asked for questions, be prepared and have some. There is nothing wrong with writing out a few questions on a 3 x 5 card and taking it into the interview.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Follow-Up with a Personal Thank You Note** - Within 48 hours of your interview, you should send a thank you note. This applies whether or not you are still interested in the position. As with cover letters, it is recommended that thank you letters be printed on good quality bond paper. In most situations, the typed letter is recommended rather than an e-mail. If you were interviewed by more than one person, it is thoughtful to write to each interviewer. Most importantly, if you still are interested in this job, make certain that your letter reflects your enthusiasm. If you have decided that you do not want this position, thank the interviewer for her/his time and then state that you are no longer interested in the position.
- **The Job Offer** - Generally, an interviewer will inform you of her/his decision within a few weeks unless another timetable was discussed. If you do not hear from the interviewer after that time period, follow-up with a phone call to demonstrate your continued interest.

SECOND INTERVIEW/SITE VISIT

If you have been invited for a second interview or site visit, you can be assured that the organization is interested in you. Conduct yourself in the same manner as you did in the first interview.

ARRANGEMENTS

1. Reply promptly to all requests for second interviews.
2. Let employer make hotel/motel arrangements and travel arrangements if offered.
3. If you are more than two hours from the interview, schedule your travel so you arrive the night before. If you are driving straight to the site, plan to arrive at least one hour early to avoid any unexpected delays.
4. Let employer know your travel arrangements.
5. If expenses are not mentioned, ask how they will be handled. Government agencies and non-profit organizations often cannot pay for travel expenses.

PREPARATION

1. If flying to your destination, you may want to carry on board your "interview clothes." Have a professional attitude and appearance.
2. Bring extra copies of your resume.
3. Bring samples of your work, if appropriate, i.e., designs, brochures, thesis, newspaper articles, etc.
4. Study all of the company literature or web site data that is available. Be knowledgeable about the organization.
5. Review salary information, and be prepared for salary questions. Let the employer be the first to bring up the topic. If forced to give figures, give a range.

TYPICAL OUTLINE OF DAY

1. Points typically discussed early in your visit include:
 - Outline of day's activities.
 - Company organization/structure.
 - General employment procedures and guidelines.
 - Answers to general questions.
2. During the visit you may meet with several people including your potential supervisor.
3. Tours are not uncommon but not always standard procedure; if you want one, ask.
4. You may have a meal with one or more people. Order food you can easily handle while talking. Keep in mind you are being evaluated during this time as well. Do not order alcoholic beverages or smoke.
5. Wrap-up at end of day:
 - You should be given some idea of how soon a decision will be made.
 - If expenses have not been mentioned or need to be clarified, ask now before you leave.

FOLLOW-UP

Regardless of whether or not you are still interested in the position, always send a thank you letter to your interviewer and all others with whom you met. If expenses are to be reimbursed, send an itemized expense list and all receipts. If you are interested in the job, say so. If you are not interested, let them know immediately.

TYPICAL INTERVIEW STRUCTURE

1. **INTRODUCTION** - This is the time of rapport building, designed to create a friendly, comfortable atmosphere. The interviewer may engage you in a few minutes of "chit-chat" to help you both ease into the interview. Keep in mind, "you never get a second chance to make a first impression".

2. **INFORMATION EXCHANGE** - The interviewer presents information about the organization. During this time there may be an opportunity to ask questions. The interviewee should have done background work on the company and be ready to relate skills and goals. The interviewer then asks questions - open or closed, structured or unstructured. Some interviewers like to ask open questions for which there are no right answers. For example, some questions might be:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you here?
- What can you do for us?
- What can we do for you?

When you get these questions, take a few seconds to relax and think about the points you would like to make. The interviewer may want to know about qualifications, goals, work values, past experiences, and candidate's attraction to the career field, organization, and position. She/he will probably assess strengths and weaknesses and may provide hypothetical situations. This is the candidate's opportunity to take charge and articulate relevant information on background and skills.

A technique that is becoming increasingly popular with interviewers is called "behavioral interviewing." Be prepared for this type of question, which seeks to make assumptions about your future performance based upon your past behavior. For example, "Tell me about a time that you had to deal with an irate customer." Or, "Give me an example of an instance when you successfully completed a team project", would be possible behavioral questions. These questions are general in nature. **Remember**, an interviewer may also ask you behavioral questions that pertain directly to the position being filled.

3. **CLOSING** - At this time, both parties clarify information. Add anything you did not get a chance to say. Ask questions if you have not had the opportunity to do so. Show examples of your work if appropriate. Ask about the next steps. When leaving an interview, make certain that you thank the interviewer for her/his time and consideration. If you are still interested in the position, make sure that your interest and enthusiasm are evident.

NEGATIVE FACTORS WHICH CAN LEAD TO REJECTION OF AN APPLICANT

1. Poor personal appearance.
2. Overbearing, aggressive, conceited, superiority complex, "know-it-all."
3. Inability to express self clearly -- poor diction, grammar, and delivery.
4. Lack of planning for career, no purpose and goals.
5. Lack of interest and enthusiasm; passive, indifferent.

6. Lack of confidence and poise; nervousness; ill at ease.
7. Failure to participate in activities.
8. Overemphasis on money. Interested only in "best-dollar offer."
9. Unwilling to start at bottom; expects too much too soon.
10. Lack of tact, lack of courtesy.

11. Lack of maturity, lack of social skills.
12. Condemnation of past employers.
13. Lack of vitality, indecision.
14. Fails to look interviewer in the eye.
15. Sloppy application.

16. "Merely shopping around"; seems undecided.
17. Wants job only for a short time.
18. Little sense of humor.
19. Lack of knowledge in field of specialization, no interest in work of the particular agency.
20. Parents or partner/spouse seem to be making decisions.

21. Emphasis on whom she/he knows.
22. Unwillingness to travel or relocate.
23. Cynical, lazy or expresses strong prejudices.
24. No interest in community activities.
25. Inability to take criticism.

26. Lack of appreciation of the value of experience.
27. Late to interview without good reason.
28. Attempts to gain sympathy because of personal or financial problems.
29. Asks no questions about the job.

QUESTIONS INTERVIEWERS FREQUENTLY ASK COLLEGE SENIORS

1. What are your long range and short range goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals? How are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What excites you most about this position?
3. What do you see yourself doing in five years?
4. Do you consider yourself to be a team player? Please provide examples.
5. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?

6. Why did you choose the career for which you are preparing?
7. Which is more important to you, the salary or the type of job?
8. What do you consider to be your greatest strength? Your greatest weakness?
9. How would you describe yourself?
10. How do you think a friend or professor, who knows you well, would describe you?

11. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
12. How has your college experience prepared you for this particular career?
13. Why should I hire you?
14. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful in this career?
15. How do you determine or evaluate success?

16. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our organization?
17. What qualities does a successful manager/supervisor possess?
18. Describe the ideal relationship between a supervisor and subordinates.
19. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
20. If you were hiring someone for this position, what qualities do you think would be important?

21. Why did you choose to attend Mary Washington College?
22. What led you to choose your field of major study?
23. If you could do so, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
24. Do you have plans for continued study? An advanced degree?
25. Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?

26. What have you learned from participation in extra-curricular activities?
27. In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
28. How do you work under pressure?
29. How would you describe the ideal job for you following graduation?
30. Why are you seeking a position with our organization?

31. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
32. Are you seeking employment with an organization of a certain size? Why?
33. What criteria are you using to evaluate the organization for which you would like to work?
34. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
35. Will you relocate? Does relocation bother you?

36. Are you willing to travel? If yes, what percentage of your time would you be most willing to travel?
37. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our organization is located?
38. Tell me about a major problem that you have encountered and how you dealt with it.
39. What have you learned from your mistakes?
40. What would you like to know about us?

QUESTIONS TO ASK INTERVIEWERS

Generally at the end of an interview, time is allotted for you to ask the interviewer a few questions. The questions that you ask may be different in each interview as they are dependent upon many factors, i.e., the position for

which you are applying, the organization, and the type of interview and interviewer you encountered. The best questions usually result from doing research on the organization.

Interviewers are wary of individuals who ask questions only because they feel it's "expected". Make certain that you have a genuine interest in the interviewer's response and that your question is not something basic that is covered in the organization's literature.

With all of this in mind, the following is a list of sample questions to ask in an interview. Although the best questions result from your individual research and concerns, these questions are a good starting point.

1. Would you please describe the responsibilities and duties of this position?
2. What characteristics do you most like to find in people in this position?
3. What do you consider ideal experience for this job?
4. Is there anything unusually demanding about this position?
5. What have been some of the best results produced by people in this position?
6. Would you describe the office environment in which I would be working?
7. Why is this position vacant?
8. Is there room for growth and upward mobility within the organization?
9. If yes, what would be a typical career path?
10. Would I be involved in a training program?
11. Who would be my supervisor? What is her/his management style?
12. What are the advantages and disadvantages of working for this organization? - In this position?
13. Is there an opportunity for creative innovation in this organization?
14. Are there any people who currently work for this organization who used to work in this position? May I talk with any of them?
15. How long have you worked for this organization? What have you liked most and least?
16. Do you promote from within?
17. Does the company support continuing education for employees? How does the company encourage this?