

How to Sell Yourself in an Interview

A JOB INTERVIEW is your chance to show an employer what he or she will get if you're hired. That is why it is essential to be well prepared. Preparing means knowing about the industry, the employer, and yourself. It means paying attention to details like personal appearance, punctuality and demeanor.

Preparing for the Interview

Researching Companies

Before you begin to think about how you will dress for the interview, you should do your homework. Gather as much information about the employer as you can. Not only will you appear informed and intelligent, it will also help you make a decision if a job offer is eventually made.

Researching Yourself

You might want to prepare for answering questions by listing some of your attributes. Talk to former co-workers with whom you worked closely and ask them to list some traits about you that they most admired -- work related, of course. Try to find some faults as well. You won't, obviously, spontaneously tell a prospective employer about these faults, but you may be asked to talk about them. One question that sometimes comes up in an interview is "What is something that has been a problem for you at work?" By studying your faults, you will be able to choose one that is somewhat innocuous or could be turned around into a positive.

Practice, Practice, And Then Practice Some More

You want to seem somewhat spontaneous, but you also want to appear self-confident. The way to do that is to rehearse, not exactly what you will say, but how you will say it. A great method is to rehearse in front of a video camera. Study your posture, the way you make eye contact, and your body language. If you don't have a video camera, a mirror will do. Have a friend do mock interviews with you. The more you repeat a scenario, the more comfortable you will begin to feel.

Succeeding on the Interview

Dressing For The Interview

Appearance is very important and whether we like it or not, it is the first thing people notice about us. You should match your dress to employees in the workplace in which you are interviewing and probably take it up a notch. For example, employees wearing suits means prospective employees in suits; employees in dress pants and dress shirts or skirts and blouses means prospective employees should still wear suits. If dress is very casual, those being interviewed should wear dress pants and dress shirts or skirts and blouses. To get a good feel for how people in a particular environment dress, visit the parking lot or loiter in front of the building at the start or end of the workday. Don't choose a Friday, since many offices have "casual Fridays."

Good grooming is essential. Your hair should be neat and stylish. Your nails should be well manicured and clean. Men's nails should be short. Women's nails should be of a reasonable length and polished in a neutral color. Also for women, makeup shouldn't be heavy. Perfume or cologne should be avoided as some people find certain scents offensive.

Establishing Rapport

Since the interviewer's job is to make sure that not only your skills, but your personality as well, is a good match. You must establish rapport with the person or persons interviewing you. That begins the instant you walk in the door. Let the interviewer set the tone. Nothing is as awkward as offering your hand and having the gesture not returned by the other person. Therefore you should wait for the interviewer to offer his or her hand first, but be ready to offer your hand immediately. Some experts suggest talking at the same rate and tone as the interviewer. For example, if the interviewer is speaking softly, so should you.

Body Language

They say that body language gives more away about us than speech. Eye contact is very important but make sure it looks natural. A smiling, relaxed face is very inviting. Hands resting casually in your lap rather than arms folded across your chest also is more inviting. If you normally move your hands around a lot when you speak, tone it down some. You don't want to look too stiff, but you don't want to look like you're a bundle of nervous energy.

Answering Questions

When it comes down to it, isn't this the main point of the interview? Speak slowly and clearly. Pause before you answer a question. Your answers will seem less rehearsed and it will give you a chance to collect your thoughts. Keep in mind that a very brief pause may seem like an eternity to you. It's not.

Prepare answers to some basic questions. There are several books that list questions and sample answers. There are also some online resources that do the same. Don't memorize the actual answers but become familiar with how you will answer the questions.

Asking Questions

Usually toward the end of the interview, the person conducting it will ask you if you have any questions. You should have some. You should ask about what a typical day would entail. You could also ask what special projects you would be working on. As in every other aspect of the job search, you are trying to show the employer how you can fill their needs. By asking about a typical day on the job or special projects, you are putting yourself in the job and showing the employer how you will satisfy the employer's needs. Don't ask about salary, benefits, or vacations, as those all imply "what will you, the employer, do for me?"

Illegal Questions

We have all heard horror stories of interviewers asking job candidates inappropriate questions, such as those about marital status, age, and family status. These questions should not be asked, but it is up to you whether to answer them. Often, interviewers are not aware of the legal issues involved. If you feel uncomfortable answering them, you can change the subject. If you feel these questions are being asked with intent to discriminate, you can let the employer know you cannot answer. Remember that the employer will probably find some reason not to hire you. Whether you pursue the matter legally is a personal choice. Keep in mind, though, that an unethical employer is not one with whom you want to be affiliated.

Money Questions

Money is a very sensitive topic. As discussed earlier, the candidate shouldn't bring it up. However, the interviewer may bring it up first. He or she may ask what salary you hope to earn. You must prepare for this question before the interview. Find out what others in the same position are earning. Always give a range, not an exact number. This will help keep you from pricing yourself out of a job. You don't want the employer to think they can't afford you, but you also don't want them to think you are a cheap commodity.

After the Interview Following Up

This is something that is too often neglected. It's the thank you note or follow-up letter. It is your chance to reiterate something you mentioned on the interview or bring up something you forgot to mention. It is also a nice gesture and a simple matter of politeness.

You should try to send a note to each person who took part in your interview. If you don't remember the name of each person, call the receptionist for some help. Keep your note brief. Make sure it is typed. Someone at a workshop once asked me if the thank you note would make you look like you were "kissing up" to the employer. I don't believe so. I do believe that it sets you apart from everyone else who forgot to or chose not to do this.

