

# INTERVIEWING

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The company representative just called you to set up an interview. So now what?

A great deal of work went into getting the interview. A bit more work will lead to getting the job offer.

**Telephones and message systems:** Things to keep in mind when you call and when you are called:

- Before you call, outline what you want to say to avoid babbling to a receptionist or message system.
- When leaving a recorded message, speak slowly and clearly, spell your name if it is uncommon and repeat phone numbers twice.
- Your message machine/voice mail should have a brief, clear businesslike announcement.

### Before the Interview

1. **LOGISTICS:** Prepare by obtaining the following items. The person setting up the interview should provide them for you.
  - The name of the person to ask for upon arrival for the interview
  - A complete job description
  - An interview schedule
  - Exact directions to the location of the interview, including the room number
  - Parking information
  - Do a trial run to the interview location, be sure where the building is, what parking is available, and how long it takes to get there.
2. **RESEARCH:** Your research process began while writing your cover letter. Review the information about the company you already have and see if you can find some more information. Additional resources (many of these resources are located at Lemieux Library) :
  - The Internet
  - Trade Journals
  - Business Directories
  - Magazine/Newspaper Articles
  - Annual Reports
  - Professional Associations
  - Informational Interviews
  - Faculty members
3. **ANSWERS:** The main question the interviewer wants answered is "Why should I hire you?" Prepare with the following activities:
  - Write out answers to possible questions -- see interview question examples in this guide.

*Before the Interview, cont.*

- Know the qualities, skills and characteristics you want to emphasize.
  - Be ready to answer questions by relating a story to the interviewer. Describe skills or abilities that help you succeed; describe one of your accomplishments; describe how you have benefited your employer, team or yourself.
  - Participate in a mock interview at Career Services or the Albers Placement Center to practice answering interview questions.
4. **QUESTIONS:** Prepare questions to ask your interviewer(s). Remember that your questions are part of your interview. Asking questions serves two purposes:
- It shows that you are interested in the company and the position. It demonstrates that you are not just going through the motions by interviewing.
  - The answers provide you with the necessary information to decide whether or not the position is right for you. A suggested list of good questions to ask an employer is provided in this guide.

### The Day of the Interview

- Prepare those items you may need with you:
  - ◇ copies of your resume
  - ◇ copies of your reference list
  - ◇ letters of recommendation
  - ◇ samples of class projects or writing samples
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early.
- Be kind and respectful to the administrative assistants and receptionists -- they are often very influential people in the office.
- Greet each person you meet with a firm handshake -- practice your handshake. If seated when introduced to someone, stand up.
- Be confident and courteous when you introduce yourself. Remember you only get one chance to make a good first impression.

### Professional Tips

- Get plenty of sleep the night before
- Dress appropriately -- suit and tie for men, skirt or pant suit for women (business professional)
- Don't wear strong cologne, aftershave or hairspray, flashy jewelry, or too much make-up
- Don't smoke before or during your interview
- Pay attention to your hands & nails--make sure they are clean & trimmed, and avoid dramatic polish
- Hair should be clean and neat; long hair should be pulled back.
- Polish your shoes

## During the Interview

- Be enthusiastic and confident in yourself. Smile and be friendly.
- Be concise in your answers, don't ramble. Your answers should be about 2-minutes long.
- Don't dodge questions. If you don't know the answer, be honest and try to answer as best you can.
- If you don't understand a question, ask for clarification.
- Avoid using "um", "uh", "like", etc. while speaking.
- Maintain good eye contact with all your interviewers. If you are being interviewed by more than one person at once, make sure that you look at and speak to everyone in the room.
- Try to pay attention to and stop nervous "ticks." For example, shaking your legs or feet, fiddling with your pen, adjusting clothing, etc.
- Avoid negative answers. For instance, if you're asked why you chose Seattle University, do not criticize other schools. Also, never ever speak negatively about a current or previous employer.
- If you are invited for a meal as part of the interview follow these hints:
  - ◇ Do not order the most expensive item on the menu.
  - ◇ Do not order alcohol, even if others at the lunch or dinner do.
  - ◇ Do not order messy food items (i.e. spaghetti), or items you typically eat with your hands (i.e. fried chicken). Ordering a sandwich is okay.
  - ◇ Do not talk with your mouth full. If a question is asked just as you take a bite, the interviewer(s) will wait for an answer until after you've swallowed. Taking small bites will help.
  - ◇ A junior member of the staff often takes candidates to a meal. Do not assume that this person is any less important in determining the outcome of the interview as the most senior member of the staff.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE MORE DINING ETIQUETTE ADVICE, ATTEND THE SEATTLE UNIVERSITY ETIQUETTE DINNER THAT OCCURS EVERY FALL QUARTER! VISIT CAREER SERVICES FOR MORE INFORMATION

## Ending the Interview

There are several things you can do to ensure that your interview ends well.

- Be prepared to ask questions. About 3-4 questions is appropriate.
- Be prepared to respond to the question: "Is there anything else about you we should know before making our decision?"
- Ask for a business card from each person with whom you spoke.
- End with the same confidence and enthusiasm with which you started the interview.
- Firmly shake each person's hand.
- Thank the interviewer(s) for the opportunity to meet with them.

## After the Interview

Often times there will be other candidates interviewing after you or there will be a time lag between your interview and when a decision is made. The tips listed below can help you remain a front runner.

- Send a thank you note to each person from the interview. Thank you notes can either be emailed, typed or hand-written depending on your preference.
- Be patient; in some cases it is okay to make a follow-up telephone call to inquire about your status as a candidate for the position. If you were told the timeline for a decision, call to follow-up a couple days after the decision was to be made to inquire about the process. Be diplomatic and very courteous.
- **If you get a job offer:**
  - ◇ It's okay to take some time deciding; most employers want you to think about the offer before making a decision. If they do not mention a timeline for you to accept or decline, ask when they would like your final decision.
  - ◇ This is the time when salary and benefits should be discussed.
  - ◇ Many times you will need to accept an offer in writing or sign a contract. The job is not yours until you have a written agreement.
- If you do not get a job offer, remain gracious and positive. You never know what connections this employer may have elsewhere in the industry or what future positions may come open. The current job market is very fast moving; the person receiving the offer for the job may not accept the position or may not work out. Either way, you may still have a chance of being hired.
- A last word of caution. **DO NOT TAKE THE HIRING PROCESS PERSONALLY.** Not being hired is not a sign of failure or rejection. It only means you haven't found the right fit for YOU (yet).

## Types of Interview Questions

### *Traditional Interview Questions*

By rehearsing interview questions, you'll become more familiar with your own qualifications and will be well prepared to demonstrate how you can benefit an employer.

- **"Tell me about yourself."**  
Make a short, organized statement of your education, professional achievements and professional goals. Then, briefly describe your qualifications for the job and the contributions you could make to the organization.
- **"Why do you want to work here?" or "What about our company interests you?"**  
Few questions are more important than these, so it is important to answer them clearly and with enthusiasm. Show the interviewer your interest in the company. Share what you learned about the job, the company and the industry through your own research. Talk about how your professional skills will benefit the company. Your answer should never be simply "money" or "it's a great company." The interviewer will wonder if you really care about the job.

### Traditional Interview Questions, cont.

- **"Why did you leave your last job?"**  
The interviewer may want to know if you had any problems on your last job. If you did not have any problems, simply give a reason, such as relocated away from job; lay off; temporary job; no possibility of advancement; wanted a job better suited to your skills. If you did have problems, be honest. Show that you can accept responsibility and learn from your mistakes. You should explain any problems you had with an employer, but don't describe that employer in negative terms. Demonstrate that it was a learning experience that has made you a stronger professional.
- **"What are your best skills?"**  
If you have sufficiently researched the organization, you should be able to imagine what skills the company values. List them, and then give examples that demonstrate these skills.
- **"What are your weaknesses?"**  
Be positive—turn a weakness into a strength. For example, you might say: "I often worry too much over my work. Sometimes I work late to make sure the job is done well." Or describe how you're working to improve your weakness in a positive way. Focus on skills rather than characteristics and say how you are developing new competencies.
- **"Do you prefer to work by yourself or with others?"**  
The ideal answer is one of flexibility. However, be honest. Give examples describing how you have worked in both situations.
- **"What are your career goals?" or "What are your future plans?"**  
The interviewer wants to know if your plans and the company's goals are compatible. Let him know that you are ambitious enough to plan ahead. Talk about your desire to learn more and improve your performance, and be specific as possible about how you will meet the goals you have set for yourself.
- **"What salary are you expecting?"**  
You probably don't want to answer this one directly. Instead, deflect the question back to the interviewer by saying something like: "I am not sure. What is the average salary range for this position?" Let the employer make the first offer.

### Behavioral Interview Questions

Most employers now do behavioral interviews. This type of interview is considered the next best thing to direct observation of a person at work, and is based on the theory that past performance predicts future performance.

Many firms have identified the skills and qualities of their successful employees. The questions asked are designed to find out if you have demonstrated these skills in the past. Examples of the desired qualities/skills are: initiative, leadership, problem solving, teamwork, etc.

#### To prepare for a behavioral interview you should:

- Know yourself: who are you, what you value, your priorities, where you want to be in 5 or 10 years.

Here are some other job interview questions you might want to rehearse:

#### Your Qualifications

- ◇ What can you do for us that someone else can't do?
- ◇ What qualifications do you have that relate to the position?
- ◇ What have been your greatest accomplishments?
- ◇ What motivates you in your work?
- ◇ What have you been doing since your last job?
- ◇ What qualities do you find important in a coworker?

#### Your Career Goals

- ◇ What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- ◇ How will you judge yourself successful?
- ◇ What type of position are you interested in?
- ◇ How will this job fit in your career plans?
- ◇ What do you expect from this job?
- ◇ Do you have a location preference?
- ◇ Can you travel?
- ◇ What hours can you work?
- ◇ When could you start?

#### Your Work Experience

- ◇ What have you learned from your past jobs?
- ◇ What were your biggest responsibilities?
- ◇ What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
- ◇ What did you like most/least about your last job?
- ◇ Whom may we contact for references?

#### Your Education

- ◇ How your education has prepared you for this position?
- ◇ Why did you choose your major?
- ◇ Do you plan to continue your education?

### Behavioral Interview Questions, cont.

- Know your resume: what you have done, what your role was in the success of the company, what and how you contributed.
- Think of a few stories or scenarios beforehand that you could pull examples from when explaining your skills or previous accomplishments.
- Be prepared to tell the story behind your accomplishments using the STAR format (see following page)
- Be able to relate specific examples of when you've demonstrated a skill, strength, or trait.

#### During the interview:

- Listen carefully to each question.
- Take your time to think out your response; don't feel you have to rush.
- Ask for clarification.
- Ask for feedback: "Am I answering your question? Am I on the right track?"
- Make sure your responses are specific.
- Stick to describing your role in the situation, unless you are otherwise directed.

## Behavioral Interview Questions, cont.

- Be sure to answer the question asked, not one you have already answered.
- Extremely personal examples may not be appropriate for an interview...try to relate situations that occurred on the job or in school.
- Be honest and be yourself.
- Sometimes you will not have the exact experience asked for in the questions. You can use a hypothetical example or think of related situation that you have experienced before.

### Sample Behavior Interview Questions

#### Tell me about a time when you...

1. Worked effectively under pressure.
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
3. Were creative in solving a problem.
4. Worked with a colleague who was not completing his or her share of the work?.
5. Were unable to complete a project on time.
6. Persuaded team members to do things your way.
7. Wrote a report that was well received.
8. Anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
9. Had to make an important decision with limited facts.
10. Were forced to make an unpopular decision.
11. Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
12. Were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
13. Were disappointed in your behavior.
14. Used your political savvy to push a program through that you really believed in.
15. Had to deal with an irate customer.
16. Delegated a project effectively.
17. Surmounted a major obstacle.
18. Set your sights too high (or too low).
19. Prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
20. Got bogged down in the details of a project.
22. Made a bad decision.
23. Had to fire a friend.
24. Worked with people who were very different from you
25. Had a difficult customer service experience that you had to handle

#### Remember to frame your response using the STAR method:

- S = Situation** (describe the situation; set the stage for the story)  
**T = Task** (describe the task at hand or what you were trying to accomplish)  
**A = Action** (what action did you take in the situation)  
**R = Result** (what was the outcome or what resulted from your action)

## Asking Questions During an Interview

At most interviews, you will be invited to ask questions of your interviewer. This is an important opportunity for you to learn more about the employer, and for the interviewer to further evaluate you as a job candidate. Through your questions, show your knowledge, competencies, and enthusiasm.

### Common Questions to Ask During an Interview

1. Can you please tell me how your career has developed at XYZ Corp? Would someone entering the firm today have similar opportunities?
2. If I work hard and prove my value to the firm, where might I be in five years?
3. Can you describe the training that is involved with this job?
4. Can you describe what a typical day is like in this job?
5. What career paths have others generally followed after completing the program?
6. How does the position and the department contribute to the overall company mission and philosophy?
7. What characteristics best describe individuals who are successful in this position?
8. What other positions and/or departments will I collaborate with most?
9. To whom does this position report?"
10. How much decision-making authority and autonomy are given to new employees"
11. How will my performance be evaluated? How often?
12. What are the opportunities for advancement?
13. Does your organization encourage its employees to pursue additional education?
14. How would you describe the organization's culture or environment?
15. What makes your organization different from its competitors?

### Questions to Avoid Asking During an Interview

There are questions you want to avoid asking in an interview that might raise a red flag for the interviewer and signal that you may not be right for the job. You also want to avoid asking negative questions. Here are some examples:

1. What does your company do?
2. Can I work from 8am-5pm?
3. Can you guarantee me that I will still have a job a year from now?
4. The job description mentions weekend work. Would I really have to do that?
5. Where do I stand as a candidate?
6. Why has your company been doing so poorly in the stock market?
7. Do you offer free parking?
8. Do you reimburse the cost of getting an MBA?
9. Can you tell me about your retirement plan and benefits?
10. How much vacation time would I receive in this job?

**Good luck and don't forget to send a thank you note!**