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interview tips - for you

The style and structure of interviews has not changed too dramatically over the last decade. Yes, there has been more usage of psychometric tests, on-line questionnaires and so forth, but one thing is for sure every interview has one intention and that is to find the most suitable candidate based on skills, knowledge, expertise, willingness and manageability.

Before the interview

- Find out as much as you can about the job and the company, using the web, gossip, trade press etc., distinguish facts from judgements, remember that one person's idea of a fun job can be someone else's hell on earth!
- Immerse yourself in your CV; rehearse talking through your career, particularly any achievements and success to date. It is also worth noting that employers are always interested in candidates who can solve problems, therefore, think of examples which have added value to your existing employer. On paper, you may look the best candidate by a mile but if you cannot communicate effectively your career to date, do not expect a second interview.
- Read the job description thoroughly, matching your skills, knowledge and expertise to the requirements of the job and company. Recall all the positive things to date about current and past employers, managers and colleagues - never convey negatives about past experiences or people.
- Check and double check the location, route and travel time. If necessary and time allowing try a dummy run before your interview taking in availability for parking or any potential bottlenecks.
- Finally, take contact numbers just in case you are detained along the way.

Attire

- Let's keep this short and simple; if you don't look the part by failing to dress appropriately do not expect to be invited back for a second interview.
- This may sound harsh, but the moment we set eyes upon someone for the first time (and we all do it) our mind forms opinions and judgments with lightning speed. The same applies to employers who will reject unsuitability dressed applicants without a second thought. It is worth remembering that the correct image at an interview will give you a real edge over your competition. Your image will also leave a lasting impression.
- For the design and advertising world these rules can be a little more relaxed but try to remember that the image you want to convey is one of reliability, trustworthiness and attention to detail.

Prepare for typically asked questions

We mentioned earlier that the format of interviews has not really changed over the years and the same applies to the type of questions you will be asked. Be prepared for the occasional strange question but remember that all questions are designed to test your poise, character, temperament and communication skills. There are a whole host of questions you could possibly be asked, the following are some of the most common. Think about your answers but don't give a textbook response.

- Talk me through your career?
- Tell me about yourself?
- Why should I hire you?
- Why are you looking to leave?
- What is your biggest achievement to date?
- How would your current manager describe you?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- Why do you want this job?

At the first interview

- You've read the job description thoroughly, researched the organisation and immersed yourself in your CV again. Now you're ready to knock 'em dead and remember the more prepared and rehearsed you are, the less nervous you will feel.
- You should arrive at the location early and the interview on time. Arriving too early indicates poor timing and can possibly interrupt an interview schedule and late is not an option.
- If you fail on the above two points, you will have a mountain to climb and there will be a strong chance the interviewer will not take you seriously. On the flip side, candidates who are prepared and courteous will be well on the way to a successful interview. Research indicates that HR professionals in the UK will have made up their minds within the first six minutes.
- On your arrival, compose yourself, introduce yourself to the receptionist and give the name of the person you are meeting and take a few minutes to read any company literature that is available. To give yourself a psychological edge, remember that it takes two to conduct the interview and fill the job. The pressure is on the employer to find the most suitable person and you can take any job you want.
- Ask questions which show that you have done your homework before the interview. It will demonstrate that you already have an interest in the role/organisation and you are not there for interview practice.
- DO NOT - Sit down until you are asked to, show anxiety and boredom, flick imaginary pieces of dust off your clothes or sit with your arms folded. Most of all do not ask about hours, holidays, salary benefits or the possibility of having your own office!
- At no point interrupt the interviewer or give over elaborate answers. Stick to the facts and be honest. An individual who demonstrates humility and integrity is instantly likeable.
- At the end of the interview, thank the interviewer for his/her time and if you are interested in the role/company let them know enthusiastically, you would be amazed how many people don't!

After the interview

Let us know immediately how you feel, especially if you are certain the job is or is not for you. The company can then be contacted whilst you are fresh in their minds and before opinions have hardened. A 'maybe, probably not' verdict can be sometimes converted to a second interview and job offer!

Think the opportunity through; double check any statements made which surprised you; decide whether it really meshes in with your career aims. If it doesn't, let us know quickly and with reasons why, it may be that you might meet the client again in different circumstances, so it is important that everyone retains an impression of you as a credible and professional applicant.

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The second interview

At this stage, a company will have narrowed the shortlist down to 1, 2 or possibly 3 candidates, sometimes you might be the only person that has been invited back. Even with the field narrowing, it's important to ensure that you stand out above your competition.

- Do not be complacent & do not neglect the performance of your first meeting. Think about what made you shine at the first interview and plan to do more of the same. In some respects you will need to be more informed about the role and company and how you will add value. Be even more prepared & think about any questions you had difficulty in answering at the first interview and plan how you can handle these better at this stage.
- Please be aware that your second interview will most likely be more intense with more questions to answer and more people to meet, therefore, think about new information you can bring to the interview i.e. new accomplishments, more reasons why you are relevant for the role and new evidence of what you can do for your new employer.
- Don't be surprised, if the second interview is a series of mini interviews in both individual and group formats. You may interview with department heads, line managers and more important your prospective team members. You will also meet people who are not trained interviewers, therefore be prepared for a lot of questions which you will need to answer as enthusiastically as possible.
- Always remember, there is no right or wrong answer, people are trying to get a feel for your personality and they want to make sure you will compliment the team and fit into the company culture.
- Also be mindful that if you aren't a good fit you probably won't be happy working there anyway. Remember, this is also your opportunity to determine whether the company is a good fit for you as well. Please make sure you take in the immediate environment, the atmosphere of the company and general attitude of your potential new colleagues.
- Do be prepared to ask more questions. You will definitely have more opportunity to ask questions in the second interview and will be expected to make more in depth inquiries than you did at the first interview. Questions about the role, future direction of the company, opportunities for career development and training are advisable. It is not advisable to ask about your Christmas bonus, holidays, or the possibility of your own office! All of this will be outlined in your offer letter and related terms and conditions.
- Money/Salary - probably be the most awkward part of the interview, not just for you but also for the interviewer. At some stage, you will be asked about your salary expectations and this is where you can potentially win or lose the chance of gaining an offer. The most sensible response is to outline your current salary and benefits package and to give some indication of what you are possibly looking for. Do not over inflate your expectations and stick to the salary guide you have been given and leave the door open for negotiation. Impress on your interviewer that it is the role and company which appeals to you most as opposed to money been the main motivating factor for your interest.
- Please remember that if you are unsure about anything to contact your consultant, we have extensive experience of helping people through the process of second and sometimes third interviews and are more than willing to give you advice if needed. Most of all, good luck and remember it is a two way thing, the company wants the right person and you want you want to be sure you are making the right career move

The offer

After days, weeks or maybe months of searching for your ideal role, you have now achieved your objective and there will be three types of offer that you will receive.

- The one that you will probably decline due to a disparity between your expectations and what your potential new employer thinks you are worth.
- An offer which is within your desired salary bands and seriously worth considering.
- The one that will make you smile and go to heaven.

Whichever it is, firstly, give yourself a pat on the back. You've beaten off all your competitors but now is the time to take a step back and think things through carefully.

Yes, money is important - it pays the bills but there are other elements you may want to consider.

- Does it still appeal to you as much as it did at the first interview?
- Is the best possible offer you can get?
- Will the company, role, people in your department, add value to your career and personal development?
- Is the reputation and culture of the company in line with your expectations?

The most common form of negotiation will be about money. If you still want the job, it is probably not ideal to make a list of demands but to reiterate your interest and explain in detail why you feel the salary needs a boost. If conducted in a sensible and constructive manner will gain your respect from your new employer and it is always best to find some sort of middle ground. The best decisions are always made on some sort of rationale and instinct.

Once you have made your decision, accept the job verbally and if possible outline a possible start date. We always advise not to resign until you have the offer in writing.

Resigning is never easy, it is best to notify your current employer in writing and hand it to your boss and attempt to discuss things diplomatically and calmly. It makes life easier to leave on pleasant terms as you never know what will happen in the future. Always remember that your consultant is on the end of the phone if you need to talk.

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