

INTERVIEWING TECHNIQUES



Tips and techniques

Before the Interview

(Source of information: How to Ace Your Interview, by Valerie Lipow, Monster Retail Advisor)

The interview is the most important aspect of any job hunt. The impression you make on an employer will likely be the reason you do or do not get a job offer. Preparing in advance can help lower your stress level and help you perform better during the process.

Prepare

- ❖ **Research the company** Learn as much as you can. Use the information to demonstrate your knowledge and interest during the interview.
- ❖ **Rehearse Practice** Your facial expression, eye contact, handshake and body language. Review likely interview questions and practice answering them.
- ❖ **Catalog your skills** Bring a list with you, as necessary, and make sure you are ready to tell the interviewer what you have done, and what you can do for him/her.
- ❖ **Allow at least two hours for the interview** Some employers want to spend the best part of the day with you, have you meet a number of people, tour the facility, take pre-employment screening tests and so forth. It is a mistake to feel rushed, or to leave the impression you have more important things to do than participate in the interview.
- ❖ **Dress as though you are ready and enthusiastic to go to work** Professionals tend to dress professionally. Men usually wear ties, dress shoes and often a sport coat. Women always wear hosiery and dress shoes. Go easy on the trendy; avoid displaying anything-tattoos, nose rings, makeup, etc. that may take attention away from your skills and qualifications, unless you are interviewing at a place where everyone, managers, employees and customers alike dress in that style.
- ❖ **Go alone** Do not bring a friend or relative. If someone takes you to the interview, leave him outside the waiting room or business. Arrange to meet after the interview.
- ❖ **Arrive a few minutes early** Always make sure you allow extra time if you are unfamiliar with the location. Do not smoke or drink coffee right before the interview, spend a moment in the restroom to double check your appearance, run a comb through your hair, take a breath mint.

The Interview Went Well, Now What?

by *Therese Droste*

Monster Admin/Support Career Advisor

Summary

- ❖ Follow up email thank-you notes with a typed letter.
- ❖ Send Follow thank-you notes by snail mail for formal companies.
- ❖ Sum up the interview, and plug your skills in the letter.

The thank-you notes are a necessary tool for any job-hunting strategy. But should you send it by email or snail mail, handwritten or typed? In this fast-paced computer age, the question baffles even the most sophisticated job hunters. Follow these guidelines to help you through the maze.

Email Thank-You Notes

How did the company initially contact you? If you have always corresponded with them via email for setting up the interview and answering questions, then by all means send an email thank-you note as soon as you return from an interview. However, make sure to follow it up with a typed note to show that you are not Mr. or Ms. Casual. Email thank-you notes have one clear advantage over their snail mail counterpart: They can put your name in front of the interviewer on the same day -- sometimes within hours -- of your interview.

Snail Mail

If the company you interviewed with is formal and traditional, use snail mail to send your thank-you note. Should it be handwritten or typed? Typed is standard. Not only will you show that you are business-like, you'll also prove you know how to put together the salutation, format a letter and sign off. Executives want to know their administrative assistants can do this, since writing letters for your boss will be a big part of your job.

Handwritten notes are appropriate if you'd like to extend your thanks to others in the office that helped you out. For example, if a receptionist, assistant, office manager, or other person involved with the interviewing process was especially helpful -- say they took you to lunch or guided you from office to office -- then a handwritten note is a nice gesture to show your appreciation.

What to Say

More important is, what you say and how you say it. A standard thank-you note should accomplish several things:

- ❖ Thank the person for the opportunity to interview with the company.
- ❖ Recap some of the conversational highlights.
- ❖ Clarify any information you needed to check on for the interviewer.
- ❖ And most importantly, plug your skills. Use the last paragraph as the chance to state, "The job is a good for me because of XYZ, and my past experience in XYZ."

Interviewers have short memories. A thank-you note is your final chance to stand apart from all of the others who want the same position.

Successfully Closing the Interview

by Carole Martin

Summary

- ❖ How you close the interview depends on many factors.
- ❖ Different closes may be appropriate for different jobs.
- ❖ Tips on closing.

“So, when do I start?” A question like that is about as aggressive as you can get at the close of the interview. It may knock the interviewer for a loop and appears to be overly aggressive, but some people think of it as closing the sale. For some people it has worked. For others this approach may not feel comfortable, or have the same effect. Your comfort level with the close – whether you are aggressive, passive and polite or somewhere in between – will depend on your personality, the interview situation and the job for which you are applying.

Different Strokes for Different Folks

Mr. Feeney, the manager of a product development department, held second interviews with two qualified candidates. He was preparing to make a decision to determine which candidate to hire.

The first candidate, Phyllis, was a very savvy interviewer and had related some seasoned experience stories. At the end of the interview, however, Phyllis threw him when she said, “Well, I’m sold. When would you like me to start?” He explained he still had another candidate under consideration. Phyllis smiled and asked when she could expect to hear from him. He told her the decision would be made by Friday. She had said that she looked forward to hearing from him and working together in the future. Mr. Feeney was impressed by her confidence, but put off by her forwardness.

The other candidate, Gregory, had credentials and experience equal to Phyllis's. His interviewing style was on the low-key side. He asked a lot of questions about the future of the company. When the interview was over he stated the reason he was interested in the opportunity and why he considered himself a good fit for the job. He also asked when Mr. Feeney would be making a decision.

Mr. Feeney's decision will be based primarily on the position and the personality he is seeking. If he is looking for someone in the sales department, Phyllis probably has the better chance of getting the job due to her persuasive style. If, however, he is looking for someone who is more subdued, perhaps for an accounting position, Gregory's low-key style may be more suited. A person's personality and communication style are key factors in the interview decision.

Closing Points

Regardless of your style or how you choose to close the interview, there are some key points to keep in mind:

1. Leave your interviewer with the right picture of you. Think of at least five skills or traits you want remembered after the interview.
2. Ask if there is anything else you can provide, such as references, background information or work samples.
3. State your interest in the position. Don't be overly anxious, but act interested. Remember to mention the added value you can bring to the job.
4. Ask about the next step in the process. It's important for you to know the next step so you can follow up. Ask for the decision date.
5. Find out how to contact them. If you don't hear back, you will need to know who to contact and whether they will accept calls to check the status.

Closing the sale is important, but your closing should be tailored to the position, your personality and interviewing style and the interviewer. Keeping these things in mind will help you determine which closing is appropriate for you and the situation at hand.

COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What are your weaknesses?

This is the most dreaded question of all. Handle it by minimizing your weakness and emphasizing your strengths. Stay away from personal qualities and concentrate on professional traits.

2. Why should we hire you?

Summarize your experiences: "With five years' experience working in the financial industry and my proven record of saving the company money, I could make a big difference in your company. I am confident I would be a great addition to your team."

3. Why do you want to work here?

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you have given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening. For example, "I have selected key companies whose mission statements are in line with my values, where I know I could be excited about what the company does, and this company is very high on my list of desirable choices."

4. What are your goals?

Sometimes it is best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals rather than locking yourself into the distant future. For example, "My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company. My long-term goal will depend on where the company goes. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility."

5. When were you most satisfied in your job?

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. If you can relate an example of a job or project when you were excited, the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. "I was very satisfied in my last job, because I worked directly with the customers and their problems; that is an important part of the job for me."

6. What can you do for us that other candidates can't?

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills, and the ability to work independently or as part of a team. This allows me to be available to you in any capacity in which you need me."

7. What are three positive things your last boss would say about you?

It is time to pull out your old performance appraisals and boss' quotes. This is a great way to brag about yourself through someone else's words: "My boss has told me that I am the best designer he has ever had. He knows he can rely on me, and he likes my sense of humor."

8. What salary are you seeking?

It is to your advantage if the employer tells you the range first. Prepare by knowing the going rate in your area, and your bottom line or walk-away point. One possible answer would be: "I am sure when the time comes, we can agree on a reasonable amount. In what range do you typically pay someone with my background?"

INTERVIEWING TIPS

1. Show Enthusiasm

A firm handshake and plenty of eye contact demonstrates confidence. Speak distinctly in a confident voice, even though you may feel shaky.

2. Listen

One of the most neglected interviewing skills is listening. Make sure you are not only listening, but also reading between the lines. Sometimes what is not said is just as important as what is said.

3. Answer the Question Asked

Candidates often do not think about whether or not they actually are answering the questions asked by their interviewers. Make sure you understand what is being asked, and get further clarification if you are unsure.

4. Give Specific Examples

One specific example of your background is worth 50 vague stories. Prepare your stories before the interview. Give examples that highlight your successes and uniqueness. Your past behavior can indicate your future performance.

Examples:

- ❖ Could you tell me a little bit more about what the position involves? After they tell you, you can follow-up with a response about how your experience relates to what they are looking for.
- ❖ Do you have any other questions that I could clarify before I leave?
- ❖ When will you make a hiring decision?

THE DRILL

The following seven steps, or “two-minute drill,” will guide you toward a best-case interview scenario.

- ❖ Appearance counts. When you look good, you feel good. Make sure you look groomed and neat. If you were a book, would someone want to read more?
- ❖ Your clothes and accessories should be conservative and neutral, rather than wild and loud. Your clothes are your packaging and should not take attention away from the product.
- ❖ Nonverbal communication sometimes conveys a stronger message than verbal communication. When you slouch, whether sitting or standing, you are saying volumes about you and your confidence level. Sit up straight – like your mother always told you to. When you stand, make yourself as tall as possible: shoulders back and head held high.
- ❖ Eye contact and smiles can indicate a confident and upbeat attitude. You will notice that many job posting ask for enthusiasm and energy. This is a good opportunity to demonstrate your social and interpersonal skills as well as your excitement about the opportunity for which you are interviewing.
- ❖ The handshake sends a strong tactile message. Whether your hands are hot and sweaty or cold and clammy, you can try some tricks to control the temperature. To cool your hands, try running cold water on the insides of your wrists. Use hot water if your hands are cool. If you have particularly sweaty hands, try using a deodorant gel (antiperspirant) as a lotion.
- ❖ Your voice and the volume of your speech convey a strong impression. Whether the interview’s over the phone or face-to-face, you should speak with enthusiasm and energy. Use a firm voice to demonstrate your confidence.
- ❖ Your vocabulary reveals your communication skills and ability to interact with people, especially ones you have not met before. The words you choose will say something about you, as well as your knowledge of the industry. It is important to use “their” words and talk “their” talk.

INTERVIEWERS' PET PEEVES

You sit facing the interviewer, feeling like things are moving along nicely when all of a sudden the interview takes a drastic turn for the worse. What just happened? You may have hit one of the interviewer's pet peeves, one of those things that automatically trigger a negative response.

Here are seven of the most common peeves provided by experienced interviewers, along with some tips on how to avoid them:

1. **Smells: Too much of a good smell can be bad.**

Pat Riley, author of *Secrets of Breaking into Pharmaceutical Sales*, has a pet peeve story to relate. "Preparing for an interview is not like preparing for a date. I had one interview with a woman who doused herself with perfume (the same perfume my ex-girlfriend used to wear) right before stepping into the small interview booth. The perfume was overpowering and brought back bad memories."

2. **Communication: Too little leaves interviewers exasperated.**

"My number one interviewing pet peeve is an applicant who won't talk," says Steve Jones, a manager of client services for a software company in Dallas. "I try to ask open-ended questions and prod them for longer answers, but no luck. I've even mentioned to a few that I need more information so I can get an idea of where they are coming from—still no luck. I always end the interview saying, 'Now it's your turn to ask questions,' and still no luck; they don't have any. Oh well -next!"

3. **Communication: Too much can be too much.**

"Candidates who ramble are the ones who get to me," says Dotti Bousquet of Resource Group Staffing in West Hartford, Connecticut. "Last week, I was interviewing a candidate and asked her one question. The candidate talked and talked and talked for 45 minutes straight. I was unable to stop her. I had to say, 'let's wrap this up,' and I stood up while she continued to talk. I walked to the door of the office and opened it. She left, but continued to talk while walking out the door."

The lesson? "Candidates should stay focused, and answer the question asked—in less than two to three minutes," advises Bousquet.

4. Lack of focus: Results in losing the interviewer.

Typically, candidates are simply too intimidated by the process,” says Mark Fulop, project director for a large nonprofit agency. “Relating the answer given to one question back with another—and asking clarifying or follow-up questions—shows me that the candidate is confident and thinking about the whole picture instead of enduring an interrogation.”

5. Averting your eyes: One way to avert an offer.

“People who do not make any eye contact during the entire interview” irritate Gwen Sobiech, an agency recruiter in West Hartford, Connecticut “I realize some people are shy, but to never look at me once—they look down, around, everywhere, but not at me for the entire interview. I find that extremely annoying. I also tend to distrust someone who will not look at me when I’ve asked a question.”

If you are uncomfortable looking into someone’s eyes, look at his “third eye,” just above and between the person’s two eyes.

6. Slang and street speak: Leave them on the street.

“Poor communication skills really get to me,” says Robert Fodge of Power Brokers in Dover, Delaware. “What I mean by this is not merely their language fluency, but more about the use of language. Slang words and street speak just don’t have a place in most business environments. Also, candidates who say ‘um’, ‘like’, and ‘uh’ between every other word lose my attention very quickly.”

7. Deception: Little lies leave a big impression.

One major complaint among recruiters is when a candidate is not completely truthful; small lies are all too common in the world of recruitment. This includes not being completely forthcoming with relevant information, embellishing accomplishments, hiding jobs or leading the process on with no intention of ever following through. Building trust during the interview is key to getting an offer.