



## General Tips and Advice for Candidates for Interview

*An overview of the interview process with general advice, pointers and reminders*

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## **Interviews: General advice and reminders**

### **1. Maintain Professionalism at all Times**

Generally speaking, interviewers tend to believe that people behave in interviews the same way as they do at work. Whilst this is evidently not true, because the interview is an unusual and highly charged environment, it does confirm that you should never become confrontational with the interviewer. The golden rule in an interview is never to argue, but to talk them round. If you disagree with something that your interviewer says, check your understanding first. Ask a question or questions to clarify their meaning as this demonstrates that you are keen to understand the precise facts, ahead of making your point. Whilst the interviewer is in control during an interview, this does not mean that you should agree with everything they say. Some questions may be asked to see how you handle disagreement and you do not want to appear weak or characterless. When you are stating your opinion, do so in a way that is polite and gracious. This demonstrates that you do not see any major issue, you simply have different views. This is how the interviewer will picture you behaving in the working environment.

### **2. Empathize with the Interviewer**

People like people who remind them of themselves. This gives rise to various tactics in both verbal and non-verbal communication. If you find yourself disagreeing with the interviewer you can counteract the effect by expressing surprise, as if you expected to agree with them. This reinforces the similarities between you and highlights the point of contention as an unusual event. Just ahead of disagreeing, say that you are surprised and reinforce this with your body language, perhaps raising your eyebrows and looking a little perplexed.

Here are some examples of how to start this process:

'I'm surprised; I've always thought that.....'

'That's interesting, because my experience leads me to believe....'

'Really, I know quite a few people say that, but I ....'

'Well, it's funny that you say that because.....'

Whilst it is good to show understanding and empathy towards the interviewer this should never run the risk of being seen as false, or the interviewer will deduce that you are attempting to ingratiate yourself with them.

### **3. Prepare Your Questions**

It is quite acceptable to have a prepared list of questions. In fact many interviewers will consider it a lack of interest or understanding if you do not have any questions. Some may use the questions you ask as part of their assessment of you. You should write your questions in order of priority so that you ensure you ask the most important ones first. Intelligent and unique questions can leave a positive impression on the interviewer and help to set you apart from the other candidates.

Useful question topics include:

- What are the key tasks and responsibilities of the job?
- How will performance and success be measured?
- How are performance reviews conducted?
- What are the attitudes and expectations of the line manager?
- What scope is there for promotion within the company?
- What are training and development opportunities?
- What are the other expectations of the employer, such as travel etc
- Why is the position vacant and why is it not filled internally?
- What will be the major challenges facing the successful applicant?
- What is the decision-making process for this recruitment project?

#### **4. Manage Your Question Session**

At the point you start asking questions, you are effectively taking charge of the proceedings for the first time. Remember that you need to reinforce the impression that you would be a positive addition to the organisation's team, so remain friendly and react positively to their replies. When asking your questions don't interrogate the interviewer. Only ask questions that you think the interviewer is capable of answering. Asking inappropriate questions can lead to embarrassment and cause a rift between you. An example of this would be asking detailed technical questions of an interviewer from the HR department. Don't ask questions that could have easily been answered by your own research ahead of the meeting. For example, asking about the organisation's geographical offices or an overview of their product lines would be the type of question that a bright and inquisitive candidate should know before attending interview. You must use your judgement to decide when to bring your questions to a close. Be aware of the time and the interviewer's body language - if they start shuffling, clock watching or looking uncomfortable the time has come to wrap up quickly.

#### **5. Factors Affecting Salary Negotiations**

It is up to you to ensure that the employer recognises your value and the contribution you can make to the organisation. Remember, once you accept an offer, your salary is unlikely to change significantly until you get promoted. The actual negotiation process depends on the following factors:

- The goals and interests of the parties.
- The personalities of the people involved.
- The persuasive ability of each party.

In any negotiation, your two major objectives are:

- To change the other party's impression of the strength of your position.
- To change the other party's impression of the strength of their position.

Most candidates are overly concerned with the power of the employer and the extent of the competition for the job. It is quite common for candidates to psyche themselves into a weak position by focusing on their misconceptions of these two critical issues.

## **6. Assessing the Whole Package**

If their opening offer is unacceptable then you could make comments such as "I'll have to go away and consider if I can justify that salary to myself" or "I'm not sure if that's a very competitive salary". This will indicate that they should consider an immediate improvement or the negotiations may stall. Sometimes, a surprisingly effective tactic is to look the interviewer straight in the eye and ask, "Is that the best you can offer?" Not all remuneration is made as payment. Some benefits do have a genuine value, while others may even leave you out of pocket in the long-run. Be well informed about common 'sweeteners' such as company cars, share options, profit share and pensions. Many of these are based on performance or the buoyancy of the economy. Finally, take the time to consider and accept the right offer. Don't be afraid to turn down an offer and move on to another interview with added confidence. Beware of fancy titles, unrealistic targets/objectives, open promises and so-called 'opportunities for promotion'.

## **7. Leave a Positive Final Impression**

The interviewer will make it clear when the interview is over. Remember, let them take the lead; stay seated until they stand up. However, you can start gathering your personal items together, to avoid any awkward pauses. Avoid taking a last drink, as this can appear a bit nervous and rushed. Now is the time to create a positive impression, by using a parting shot that you have committed to memory. For example you could say something like 'It's been a pleasure meeting you and finding out more about what you do here'. Unless they have already made it clear you must clarify precisely what happens next - a further interview, psychological tests, a medical, etc. You also need to establish what timeframe they are working to. Without this information you will be left in limbo, not knowing what happens next, or if and when to approach them for an update. Requesting this information not only helps you to prepare for the next phase but it also shows them that you are professional and organised; you are demonstrating precisely the sort of approach that they will value in a candidate.

## **8. Key Final Questions to Ask**

Key questions to ask, as the interview closes, include:

- When will I hear from you?
- How will I be informed?
- Do you need any more information from me?
- Is there anyone else I should speak to?
- Are there any reasons I will not progress to the next stage/offer? If there is a reservation it is much better to find out when you have the opportunity to address it face to face with the interviewer than after you have left.

## **9. Learn From Every Interview**

You should always review your interview experience as soon as possible after the interview. Treat every interview as a learning experience, so that you can continue improving your performance. Ask yourself questions such as:

- Were you asked questions that caught you by surprise?
- Why did these questions surprise you?
- Could you have answered some questions better?
- How do you think you handled the non-verbal communication aspect?
- What kind of rapport did you manage to establish with the interviewer?

This approach will also help you to cope better with interview rejections, as you will still see that you gained something positive from them. Even if you do get the job, you will be better prepared to handle your next promotion!



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