

HOW TO GIVE A GOOD JOB INTERVIEW

- Of course, the initial challenge is to be called to interview in the first place. This means that you need to **give your application form time and care**.
 - Don't write it; **type it**.
 - Don't make spelling mistakes; **ask a friend to check it**.
 - In my experience, it is utterly amazing the number of applicants who simply submit a standard curriculum vitae or resumé without making any effort whatsoever to **tailor the application to the organisation and the post**.
 - The organisation advertising the post should send you a person specification and/or short-listing criteria (if they don't, ask them). **You should address each and every point in the person specification or short-listing criteria** showing how you meet the requirements. This will maximise the chance of you being called to interview.
- The key to a good interview itself is **good preparation**:
 - **research thoroughly** the industry or sector, the company or organisation and the particular job, making particular use of the annual report & accounts, the web site and current newspaper articles;
 - **prepare an informal opening and closing statement** that emphasises why you want the job and why you think you are particularly well qualified to be chosen.
- On the day before the interview, **read your application form again**, since many of the interview questions are likely to draw on the content of your application and you need to remember what you have written and think about what might be raised as a result.
- On the morning of the interview, **check the newspapers and the Internet** for any last minute developments affecting the organisation you are visiting or the industry in which you are interested in working. This will prepare you for any questions on that development and give you an opportunity to mention it if appropriate.
- **Dress smartly**. Even if the dress code is casual for the organisation concerned, it always pays to be smart for the actual interview.
- **Be in good time**. Try to identify a local café so that, if you are really early, you can go for a drink and take a last look at your notes.
- It may seem totally obvious, but **switch off your mobile** or anything else (such as a pager or digital watch) that might make a noise. I once chaired an interview panel for a senior executive position and, in one of the interviews, the interviewee's mobile went off twice (he didn't get the job).
- If you are anxious about interviews, when you are actually called into the interview room, **take two or three slow, deep breaths** to calm your nerves and your breathing.
- **As you are introduced to the interviewers**, shake their hand firmly, look them in the eyes, and say that you are pleased to meet them. These first few seconds are so important in creating a favourable impression. Remember: you don't get a second chance to make a first impression.
- **Answer the questions in a confident, firm voice**. Don't mumble or rush or be too hesitant.

- **Answers should not be one word or one sentence, but equally should not go on too long.** If you have a lot to say, having made the main points, you could finish by saying: *"I could expand upon that, if you wish"*.
- When answering the questions, **maintain eye contact with the interviewer(s)**. If there are two interviewers, give them equal attention. If there are three or more, slowly sweep your eyes from side to side like a radar beam.
- In the answers to your questions, make selective and relevant use of the **information** from your preliminary researches and casually mention at least some of the **sources** you have used. For example: *"I was interested to see in your annual report ..."*, *"I noticed on your web site .."*, *"I was reading an article recently that said .."* This will impress the interviewer(s) with your knowledge, your research and your keenness.
- **Don't waffle.** If you don't know, say so.
- **Never, ever lie.**
- Almost certainly, the **opening question** will be a general one along the lines of: *"Will you tell us why you applied for this job/why you want this job/why you think you are suited for this job"*. You should be ready for this question by having mentally prepared a short statement that provides the three or four key points in your favour. Think about how you would expand on each point if asked to do so. If you are aware of the short-listing criteria for interview, this opening statement should address the specific requirements set out in the short-listing criteria.
- If the organisation concerned is a commercial one, this opening statement should **identify with the product or service** that is at the core of the company's activities. For instance, *"I'm excited by the possibilities that software presents for giving companies a really competitive edge"*.
- If the organisation concerned is a political, campaigning or voluntary one, this opening statement should **identify with the values** of the organisation. For instance, *"I've always believed in ... because ..."* or *"I really care about ... because ..."*
- If you are not asked this kind of opening question, you should **gently take control of the interview** by, as soon as possible, saying something like: *"Perhaps you would like to know why I applied for the job"*. You can then use your opening statement.
- Most of the questions you will be asked can be anticipated so, in advance of interview, **think about the likely questions**. Then plan how you would answer them, making notes in the form of two or three (or occasionally four) bulleted points which you should memorise - not word for word, but point by point.
- Many of the questions you will be asked will arise from what you have written in your application so, shortly before the interview date, **read over your application again** and think about how the interviewer(s) may wish to probe for further information.
- **Think of the worst question you could be asked.** Again plan how you would answer it. Then this question - and any other - is not going to be that tough for you.
- **Think of actual experiences that illustrate the qualities that you would bring to the job.** A good interviewer will not ask the obvious or leading question such as: *"Do you like teamwork?"* or *"Can you cope with stress?"*. A clever interviewer will instead ask: *"Can you give me an example of how you have worked in a team and tell me how you interacted with the other team members?"* or *"Can you tell me a time when you were under particular stress and explain to me how you handled or resolved it?"*
- A common - but silly - question is something along the lines of: *"Tell us three of your strengths and three of your weaknesses"*. Again be ready for this one by having planned mentally how you would respond. The **strengths** should be a reaffirmation of your opening statement. For example, *"I have these skills .."*, *"I have this experience .."*, *"I'm the kind of person who .."* As far as so-called **weaknesses** are concerned, do

not actually admit to any, but instead express so-called weaknesses as strengths. For example, *"I'm really stubborn about always being on time"*, *"I tend to be a bit too conscientious and want to get everything right"*, *"I'm really curious and always want to know more about things"*.

- Almost certainly, you will be asked a **final question** along the lines of: *"Is there anything else that you would like to tell us?"* Again you should be ready for this question by having mentally prepared a short statement that reaffirms the content of your opening statement, deals with any difficulties that have come up in the interview, and concludes by emphasizing how much you would like the job and how keen you would be if you obtained it.
- Again, if you are not asked this kind of closing question, you should **gently take control of the interview** by - before you leave - saying something like: *"Before I go, could I just emphasise why I am so keen to do this job"*. Then use your closing statement.
- **If you cannot answer a question to your satisfaction**, come back to it in your closing statement if you remember and you've thought of a better answer. Otherwise don't be afraid to phone up soon afterwards and say something like: *"I'm not sure that I explained myself too well in the interview. What I wanted to say was ..."* You will lose nothing by this. On the contrary, it will show keenness and it will remind them of you.
- At the **end of the interview**, you may be asked: *"Are there any questions that you would like to ask us about the company (or organisation) or the job?"* Once again, be ready for this and have one or two good questions ready. As far as the company or organisation is concerned, ask a question which shows interest in the future prospects. For example: *"Where are the growth opportunities for the company?"* or *"What do think will be the new markets that the company will want to enter in the next few years?"* or *"What are the key strategic objectives for the organisation in the next couple of years?"* As far as the job is concerned, again ask questions that show keenness and interest in the future. For instance: *"What are the training opportunities in this job?"* or *"How is the job likely to develop in the next year or two?"* or *"What chances are there for promotion in this post?"*
- Above all, **show some enthusiasm and keenness for the job**. However calculated the questions and however sophisticated the marking of the answers, most interviewers eventually make the final decision based on the overall impression and nothing makes a better impression than a positive demeanour.
- Follow all these tips and you should get the job! If all this does not work and you do not win the post, ask for a **debriefing** interview or telephone conversation. This will impress the company or organisation and stand you in good stead for any future applications to them. Also, if you approach this exercise open-mindedly, you will learn a lot and your next performance will be even better.
- Good luck!!!