

INTERVIEW SUCCESS

A Useful Hints & Tips Guide for Candidates

You have been selected to attend an interview. This guide is designed to give you confidence during the interview process.

PREPARE YOURSELF

Understanding yourself is the first step when preparing for the interview. If you have spent time objectively considering what you have to offer to a prospective employer you will feel more comfortable presenting these strengths, skills and aptitudes to an interviewer.

Taking the time to think through the following areas will help you to understand yourself better. Completing the exercises yourself and asking for the opinions of someone you trust will also help you to be objective and consider other people's perceptions of you:

- Your skills and aptitudes
- Your strengths
- Your achievements
- Your areas for improvement
- The whole picture

The interview is an opportunity to stand out and be noticed. An interviewer will often see many candidates in one day. The one who will be remembered is the one who had something interesting to say and left a definite impression.

Your Skills and Aptitudes

An interviewer will be looking to establish your skills and aptitudes and to what extent these match what they are looking for. You should aim to expand upon your CV or application, focusing on when and in what context you have performed well and the skills and aptitudes you have applied or gained in the process.

Remember that you may have acquired or developed skills and aptitudes outside of the work environment, possibly whilst pursuing interests or whilst raising a family. Write down all the skills and aptitudes you believe you possess. Then consider which of these are likely to be most useful in carrying out the job for which you are being interviewed.

Once you have identified these relevant skills and aptitudes, it is important that you feel able and confident to present them in an interview. You may find it helpful to practice by saying them out loud to yourself as this enables you to get used to talking about yourself without feeling embarrassed or apologetic. Practice in front of a mirror or with a friend who can give you encouragement and positive feedback.

Your Strengths

The interviewer will be interested in how you will perform the job not just whether you have the ability to do so. Your skills show *what* you can do and your strengths show *how* you

do them. Use the following list to help you identify your strengths. Think about the following traits and give yourself a rating on a scale of 1-3 to show how often you believe you demonstrate the strength:

1= frequently 2= occasionally 3= never

The list is not exhaustive and you should add any other strengths you believe you have. Remember that if you believe you possess certain strengths, simply stating “I am an enthusiastic person” in an interview is unlikely to be convincing. Use the same list to think of specific examples when you have actively demonstrated these qualities either in a work environment or in your personal life:

Assertive

- Conscientious
- Creative
- Determined
- Displays initiative
- Enthusiastic
- Flexible
- Quick to learn
- Self-motivated
- Self-reliant

Your Achievements

To help you consider your achievements, make a list of all your accomplishments, not just the important ones, but everything that other people should know about. This can be difficult so the list below gives you some ideas to work from.

- Your academic record from school, college or university
- Your qualifications, professional or technical
- A difficulty you have overcome
- A significant problem you have solved
- A skill you have mastered
- A sporting accomplishment
- A way in which you have improved results
- An example of when you led or supervised a group
- An initiative you came up with

- Any other area which you have studied

Your Areas for Improvement

You may be asked about your weaknesses or limitations at interview. It can help to think of these areas for improvement and look for the positive ways to present them. For example, if you know you can take longer to accomplish some tasks, view this from a positive slant and present to the interviewer that you are conscientious and like to avoid errors. This is a way of being realistic about ways in which you still need to develop whilst looking for the positive. Remember no candidate is perfect and all of us can improve in some way.

The Whole Picture

You have now given thought to your skills, strengths and achievements and been realistic about your areas for improvement. By putting all these together you will have a whole picture of the sort of person you are. You may find it useful to write down a number of phrases that you can then aim to use in the interview setting to present yourself positively. Again remember to give specific examples and always look to slant these examples to match the post for which you are going to be interviewed.

Summary

An interview is often described as a “selling” exercise, in which you sell your skills, experience and personality to the interviewer. Your challenge is to persuade an interviewer that you are worth “buying”. Remember that if the Company recruits you they have taken a decision to make a long term investment in you and it is in their interests to make the right choice.

DO YOUR RESEARCH

Now that you have prepared yourself, the next stage of your preparation should be geared towards the interview you will be attending. The more research you can do, the better prepared you will be and the bigger advantage you will have over other candidates. The key areas to research are:

- The interview
- The job
- The company

The Interview

Your James Newbury Appointment’s consultant will provide you with the date, time and location of your interview in order that you can plan your route and travel arrangements. If you are unsure of the location or journey, you may want to do a “trial” run before the day of the interview to make sure you can arrive in plenty of time.

The Job

It is essential that you know as much as you can about the job for which you are going to be interviewed. Make time to discuss this with your James Newbury Consultant, prior to your appointment.

If you have been sent a job description prior to the interview, make sure you read this through several times and that you have an understanding of what the job will involve. If you know anyone who does the same or similar role, talk to them to obtain first-hand information about the job.

The Company

At the interview you are likely to be asked what you know about the company. This can be one of the easiest ways to demonstrate that you have taken the time and trouble to find out about the company and therefore stand out from other candidates. You should try to find out as much as possible from as many different sources as you can. Aim to discover in what areas and markets the company operates, its size, structure and geographical locations, when the company was formed, a brief history, how well the company is doing in terms of profitability or its reputation, who are its competitors.

The company itself, possibly through its marketing or customer services departments will usually be able to send you information. Ask for general company literature, brochures, factsheets and annual reports. Other potential sources of information are:

- directories and databases (available through public libraries), personal contacts, newspaper articles, trade press, the Internet and especially the company's own website.

Your James Newbury Consultant will aim to provide you with as much information as possible.

AT THE INTERVIEW

We all tend to make initial judgements about other people within the first few minutes of meeting them. Although many people who conduct interviews are trained not to make too much of those first few minutes, your initial impact will still be important if you want to create the right impression.

Your appearance can show the interviewer a good deal about your self-image and it is important to dress appropriately for the interview you are attending. Overdressing can be as much a danger and it is preferable to appear well groomed but comfortable, rather than extremely impressive but ill at ease.

Through non-verbal communication, we can end up revealing far more than we may be aware. Although in the interview you will be concentrating on what you are going to say, you should be aware of how you say it and the type of body language you are displaying.

Research shows:

Words account for 35% of the message

Tone of voice and body language 65% of the message

It is important to remember that the interview should be a two way discussion and in any day to day discussion you would have with friends or family you would be relaxed and

would naturally indicate your interest in the person to whom you were speaking. Whilst an interview may be a more formal style of discussion, an interviewer will still appreciate it if you give your full attention to them. Try to appear comfortable and relaxed and give signals that you are listening by nodding, smiling and looking interested.

It is advisable to take a notepad with you with a list of prepared questions you would like to ask. It is also worth noting that a key positive signal to an interviewer is the act of note taking; you are showing an interest in what they have to say.

ANSWER QUESTIONS

As we have said, an interview should be a two way discussion and as with any discussion there will be questions asked by both parties. An interviewer may ask the same sort of questions to each candidate so they can compare answers. It is possible to anticipate and prepare for many of the questions you will be asked in advance as most interviews are conducted along similar lines. Questions are likely to fall into the following categories:

- You as a person
- Your work history, skills and experience
- The company
- The job

Listed below are some questions that are frequently asked at interview. Read through the comments and prepare your own responses to the questions and any others you anticipate may come up. Once you have written your responses, read them through and perhaps share them with a close friend to see if you can improve them. Try to keep your responses positive but as natural as you can.

You as a Person

These questions aim to get you talking about yourself and are often “open” questions that require more than a one word response. You can use this to your advantage by directing the response in the way you want. However be aware of how long you talk for and take your cue from the interviewer’s responses and body language.

“Tell me about yourself” - An interviewer will often use this as the opening question. It is meant to encourage you to start talking whilst the interviewer “tunes in” to what you are saying. The problem can be that without any parameters many candidates say too much. An interviewer will often expect a 5 or 10 minute summary of your work history or main achievements rather than any in depth descriptive information.

Try to establish how much information the interviewer is looking for by asking the questions **“shall I begin from when I left full time education?”** or **“would you like me to give a 5 minute summary of my employment history to date?”**

“What do you think are your strengths?” - As mentioned earlier your strengths should reflect how you perform a job whereas your skills and aptitudes show what you are capable of doing. Try to avoid giving a list but give key strengths and provide examples when you have demonstrated these, preferably in the workplace.

“What are your weaknesses?” Interpret weaknesses as areas you would like to improve upon. Having prepared yourself as outlined, be brief about the area itself but give examples of how you have already overcome that weakness in certain situations.

“What can you do for us that someone else can’t?” - This is an opportunity to stand out as different from other candidates. Incorporate some of your strengths and focus on your personality as well as what you are capable of doing.

“What do you do outside work?” - This type of question often comes near the end of the interview and is an indication that the interviewer is interested in you as a person not just as a potential employee. Try to give a brief answer that shows you have a variety of interests and pursuits.

“Work History, Skills and Experience” - An interviewer will use these questions to establish what you have done in the past as well as what you are capable of doing. An interviewer may have set questions to ask or may be guided by your CV or application form.

“Why are you leaving/did you leave your present position?” -You need to avoid becoming defensive or negative at this point. If you have left your previous position under difficult circumstances, focus on the opportunities for development and improvement this has given you rather than the problems you have experienced in the past. You should avoid criticising previous employers or people you worked with.

“In your current/last position what do/did you enjoy the most?” - Try to give aspects of your current or previous job that are likely to feature in the job for which you are being interviewed. Try and give reasons why you enjoyed certain aspects. It will appear more positive if you can think of ways in which these aspects of the job developed your skills and aptitudes or enhanced your strengths.

“In your current/last position what do/did you not enjoy?” - It is best to only give one aspect of the job that you enjoyed the least and if possible give the ways in which you coped with them. For example if at times in your job there were not enough things to do and you were bored, you might have used the time to improve upon systems or developed your knowledge in other areas.

“What contribution did you make in your current/last position?” - Remember from your preparation earlier that an achievement does not have to be major or highly visible for it to have made a difference.

“What do you know about this Company?” -The interviewer will be looking for what you have found out about the company as well as questioning your motives for wanting to join them. Make sure your response shows that you have done some research but try not to inundate the interviewer with facts and figures. If you have been unable to find out as much as you would have liked, it is better to tell the interviewer of the ways you tried to find out information.

“Why do you want to work for us?” - It is worth spending some time thinking through several reasons why you want to work for the company. Try to ensure that some of the reasons are in the company’s interest and not purely to serve your own purposes. Think about what the company is looking for and will need from the person they appoint and try and relate this to what you have to offer.

“How long would you like to have a career with us?” - Most interviewers will know that employees no longer start and finish their career with the same organisation. However a company invests in employees when they recruit them and like any investment they will want to see some return. Try to show how your career could continue with the company for some years and outline what would encourage you to stay.

“What sort of person do you think we are looking for?”- An interviewer will often use this question to discover your level of understanding about the company and its priorities. In your preparation about the company you will have given some thought to this and hopefully discovered the type of person that is likely to fit in and succeed in their organisation. Again, your James Newbury Appointments Consultant will assist you with the above.

“Tell me your understanding of this Job?” - An interviewer will use these types of questions to discover why and how you would do the job and what you could bring to it not that you are able to just do it as well as the fact that you **want** this job not just need a job.

“Why should we appoint you?” - From your preparation you will have a clear idea of your strengths and now is the time to elaborate on these and not list your skills or previous

experiences. Remember to match your strengths to those the interviewer is likely to be looking for.

“What do you look for in a job?”- Again you should try and ensure that your answers reflect what is on offer in the opportunity in question.

“What do you think you would enjoy the most about this position?” - Try and give the key feature of the job and remember to say why you would enjoy it, preferably showing how it would allow you to demonstrate your strengths and so benefit the company.

“What do you think you would enjoy the least about this position?”- It may be more diplomatic to say that at this stage you don't feel you know enough about the role to give an answer to this. If you are pushed to give an answer, try to pick an aspect that you would be able to enjoy once you have learnt more about it.

Here are some additional questions that you may be asked:

- What interested you most about our products or services?
- Why did you choose your particular field of work?
- Which job did you like best? Which least? Why?
- What do you want to avoid in your next job?
- What praise have you received for good work?
- What criticisms have you received in your job? How did you feel about that?
- Did you make any changes in your last position? How do you think these changes benefited the company or yourself?
- Do you prefer to work under pressure or in a more relaxed environment?
- Do you like routine work? Regular hours?
- How long have you been looking for work? How have you gone about it?
- Are you willing to relocate? Would this cause you any undue difficulty?
- Would you accept a job requiring travel?
- What qualifications do you have that make you feel you will be successful in this position?
- To what style of management do you respond best?
- How do you manage people? Describe your style, method and relationship?
- What size of organisation would you like to work in? Why?
- What kind of job would you like to have in 5 years?
- How do you handle direction? Do you like minimal direction or do you feel secure with greater supervision?
- Describe your working relationship with your previous employers.
- Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?.
- What do you really enjoy about your work?
- What are you good at?
- What is your greatest success/achievement/accomplishment?
- What do you feel uncomfortable with?

- What makes you angry/annoyed/furious/upset?
- Who has influenced you the most?
- How would your boss describe you?

ASK QUESTIONS

You will usually have an opportunity to ask questions at the end of the interview if it has not been possible to ask them as the interview has gone along. Remember that the interview should be a two way process which means that it is just as important for you to obtain information as it is for the interviewer. Without asking questions, if a further interview or the job is offered to you, you may not have all the relevant information to make your decision.

You could ask the interviewer to expand upon things that have been mentioned in brief or to cover areas that have not been raised. You can also use this time to ask about the next step in the selection process. What questions you ask will depend on what has already been covered and how much information you had prior to the interview. By asking questions you are demonstrating to the interviewer that you are interested in the job and the company and that you want to know more. The questions attached give you some ideas.

QUESTIONS TO ASK AT INTERVIEW

There comes a point, in every interview when you are asked, **'Have you any questions?'** The worst response you can give is 'No'! It pays to think through some questions you may like to ask. The best questions are the ones you think of, because they are important to you. The following list is not intended as a script, but as food for thought.

Use a notepad to write down your questions and take the notebook into the interview. Nerves will rob you of your memory. The notebook can act as a reminder. You should prepare a minimum of three questions before you attend your interview that you want to ask about the following:

1. the job and your appropriateness for it - The following questions are designed to get at the fundamental needs of the job from different angles. When you receive the answer to any of these questions, relate briefly what you can do or have done in similar situations.

- What are the immediate priorities?
- What obstacles might I encounter?
- How can the successful candidate best contribute to the objectives of this department?
- Is this a new position? If so, why was it created? If not created, why was it vacated?
- What was the previous employees approach to the job? What were his/her major successes?
- What changes would you like to see in the way this job is performed?
- Can you describe your ideal candidate to me?
- Have any internal candidates been considered? If they have been rejected, why?

- How valuable would it be for a candidate to have 'x' skills or experience? (Choose a skill you are good at). Don't volunteer information about what you can do without first asking how useful or important this skill would be.
- What do you consider to be my major strengths for this position? Are there any drawbacks in your view?
- What are some of the important personal traits the successful candidate should have in order to fit effectively into your corporate culture?
- Where would you see a successful person in this position progressing to in the organisation?
- If you recruited me, how would I know what you thought of my progress and development in the role?

2. The People

- Would you mind telling me about your career to date with the company?
- What can you tell me about the people I will be working under –how do they manage/work? Also peers, subordinates?
- How would you describe the management style of the company?
- The Company as a whole – its culture, its plans?

Generally avoid questions you should have been able to answer with a little prior research.