

## **EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING**

### **Your Preparation, Performance and Follow Up**

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Many applicants for work think their main goal in an interview is to sell themselves, to convince someone to hire them. But what happens if their match with the work and organization is not good for them?

In other words, while being hired can be a practical or ego-satisfying outcome, it may not be the best one for the applicant or employer, especially for the longer run. In fact, the chances for a good work experience, let alone satisfaction and success, can be weakened. And think about the time lost by a detour from work or an employer closer to what you truly want.

**So before scheduling an interview**, ask yourself: “Would I want to:

- do this work, as I understand it, for the foreseeable future,
- in this organization,
- with these people,
- for this pay, opportunities for advancement and fringe benefits?”

If you have significant reservations, don't waste your own or the interviewer's time – unless there are benefits beyond just practicing. They may include mutually-useful networking, strong need for an immediate paycheck or probability of work within the same organization that's a better match.

**Goals and preparation.** Presuming the work and situation are good fits, what should your goals be for an interview? The opportunity in this responsibility is to be *apparent*, to be seen accurately and positively. In your answers, integrate information that lets the interviewer(s) know:

- what you can do for them, including how your background fits their needs
- how your strengths and experience can support their efforts and goals
- how your longer-term professional goals would mesh and contribute

To prepare for an interview, rehearse using a tape recorder, or preferably a camcorder to capture your body language too. Ideally, work with a colleague or friend to practice answering challenging as well as prosaic questions. Or do it on your own. In either case, listen to your responses, noting what's effective and specifying how you can do better. Attend to the quality and concreteness of the information you provide and how you organize it. Notice also your tone of voice, confidence and clarity. Effective use of silence as in “This is an important question; let me consider it for a few seconds.” is also important.

**Here are examples of questions for practice.** After adapting them to your situation and adding your own ideas, choose at least five to eight that you'd find difficult to answer.

1. Describe what you have done to take an idea to fruition.
2. How do you respond when you're asked to do something for which you feel unprepared? Overqualified?

3. Tell me how you handled a situation in which you worked under a great deal of pressure.
4. What have you done when you had to work with a difficult boss or colleague?
5. Persuade me of something you believe in or something that's important to you.
6. How have you created new opportunities for yourself, either at work or in another setting?
7. How would you describe the way you work in a team? Your leadership style?
8. What do you find difficult to do and why?
9. During the last two years, how have you improved your skills and why?
10. As the new person in a work situation, how would you earn the respect of subordinates, colleagues and supervisors in the first month? After six months? After a year?
11. What is unique about yourself?
12. Revisiting a significant action that you regret, what would you do differently now?
13. Describe how you have influenced or led others: the circumstances, people and outcome.
14. Why do you think you will be a good match with this particular work? This organization?
15. How do you define success, failure and working too hard, in specific terms?
16. If you could have (or do) anything, what would it be?
17. Do you have heroes? If not, how come? If so, name one or two and describe why have you chosen them.
18. What is your proudest accomplishment? What is your comparable aim for the future?
19. What do you imagine people at your last job think of you and why?

Several of these questions are examples of behavioral interviewing. This process is an increasingly used, yet long-known approach to assessing potential employees. The applicant's descriptions of behaviors and experiences give a sense of his or her appropriateness for the work and culture as well as potential for success. Answers to hypothetical questions are analyzed for their fit with preferred skills and behaviors. One way to organize your responses is to briefly describe the situation, action you took and outcomes. For deeper understanding of the process, explore it in Google and at <http://www.uwstout.edu/place/behavior.html>.

In addition to being clear about what you want to accomplish in the interview and rehearsing your responses, **here are other ways to prepare for your interview:**

- Do research with contacts, periodicals and the Internet on the work situation and organization in advance.
- Find out what you can about the interviewer, interview process, time allotted, and other candidates, without being intrusive.
- Determine and prepare in advance what you want to wear. Find a balance between reflecting your authentic style and looking appropriate for the situation.
- Confirm a few days earlier the timing and location of the interview, as well as directions, if you need them.

### **During the interview:**

- Give specific examples of your skills, experience, goals and even passions.
- Be prepared to tell several short stories of a no more than several minutes each to emphasize your essential messages and provide examples from your past. Make them as powerful, relevant and interesting as possible.
- Keep your responses relatively short – in general, to about two to three minutes.

- Stop once and a while to make sure you understand what the interviewer seeks, either by paraphrasing what was said or asking if you've provided the information wanted.
- Be alert to nonverbal cues from the interviewer such as engagement or boredom.
- Attend to and enhance what you say with your body language, eye contact and tone of voice.
- Be as explicit as possible about what *you* seek in the work itself, your colleagues and other aspects, as the situation warrants and permits.
- Ask, toward the end, a few questions related to what you need to know to make a decision about the work and organization. Typically they'd start with "what" and "how." The information you seek probably won't be available elsewhere.
- Request feedback on how the interview went, if appropriate. At least, mention your appreciation for the opportunity and specific aspects of the interview.
- Find out about the timing for feedback to applicants and/or time frame the employer has for filling the job.

***Note: You are interviewing them too! In addition to the information you obtain, be alert to such matters as how they treat you, their level of professionalism, implicit values and assumptions, effectiveness of organization and clarity of communication. What vibes do they give off? Do you feel comfortable there? Do you like the people you meet?***

**After the interview**, there is more to do than perhaps just feeling relieved.

- Immediately afterwards while your memory for details is sharp, assess your performance and impressions of the process and people involved. Identify what gives you pride and what you'd do differently in the future. Finally, imagine how you'd feel working in the situation, going to work there every day.
- Shortly afterwards, send a well-focused, pithy, engaging thank you that specifies the positive aspects of the experience. When appropriate, add what's important that will help the interviewer better interpret your responses. Provide anything absolutely crucial that you omitted. Mention a few of your strong points related to the work. Emphasize why you're interested. Perhaps, add a separate "think piece" with diplomatic, concrete suggestions about how the organization or area where you'd work could be strengthened.

Send an e-mail, if appropriate for the culture. But seriously consider a typed or handwritten letter, if your writing is clear; use classy, simple paper. Send it via overnight mail. Let what you write reflect your own style while tailoring it to the situation. Of course, if you have serious reservations about wanting the work, use your thank you to explain them.

- If you haven't heard anything a few weeks later than the feedback timing you've determined at the interview, consider calling the lowest level person involved to get a sense of what's unfolding. Inquiring at that level could avoid your pestering people you don't want to alienate. Continue to use your discretion and charm.

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