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MRSLC'S Interview Handbook

IDEAS AND TIPS FOR TURNING INTERVIEWS INTO OFFERS

1 Interview Objective

The interviewer will examine:

- Your work history
- Educational background
- Your strengths and accomplishments
- Your cultural fit within their organization

An Interviewer has just one objective:
To decide whether or not to make you a job offer.

***PLEASE NOTE:** In addition to traditional evaluations, it is equally important to the interviewer to evaluate your level of motivation, values, attitude and personality. Chemistry can be just as important as qualifications. In fact, statistics show that candidates need only meet 60% of the qualifications required, if the chemistry is right.*

In other words, the interviewer wants to find out if you're the right person for the job, what your potential is for promotion and whether or not you will fit into the company environment.

While it's true that an interview is an important screening tool for companies, it also allows you to learn those things you need to know about the position and the company so that you can make an intelligent decision about the job. Always approach an interview focused on your objective: **GETTING A JOB OFFER.**

As with many situations - PREPARATION is the key to success. The job market is very competitive and, in all likelihood, you will not be the only qualified candidate for a position. The deciding factor may simply be the way you present your skills and qualifications, relevant to the position, and how well you conduct yourself during the interview.

2 Telephone Interviewing

2.1 Pass a Phone or Video Screening

Perhaps you're a pro at selling yourself face-to-face. How comfortable, though, are you at interviewing over the phone?

Telephone screening and video conferencing (such as Skype) interviews are now commonplace as companies seek to cut hiring costs and streamline the selection process. A hiring manager can spend an hour and half screening three candidates over the phone or video, and then invite the most impressive one(s) to the company for a lengthier interview.

John Young, president of First American Rehab, a health care company based in Athens, Georgia, personally interviews as many as 50 candidates a week over the phone. "Telephone prescreening is extremely cost effective," he says, "because 75% to 80% of the people you talk to can be easily eliminated."

Given this trend, your job search may involve more telephone and/or video interviewing. Whether you are talking to headhunters or company recruiters, the more convincingly you make your case over the phone will determine further interest in you as a job candidate.

Phone interviewing is unique. You can't count on visual stimuli such as good looks or a power suit, eye contact or body language, to aid in your presentation. Neither can you rely on visual signals to interpret the response of the interviewer. In this context, faceless conversation takes on an added dimension of importance. Both strengths and weaknesses, as conveyed by voice, are magnified through the phone. Your voice personifies everything about you.

The following techniques will help you prepare for and handle any phone interview situations, especially with company officials:

2.2 Preparation Is Key

The success of a telephone interview begins with mental preparation and setting the stage with the interviewer. The first order of business is to establish a clear time frame for the conversation. By mutual agreement, this should be **AT LEAST** 30 to 60 minutes when both parties can be free of interruptions and distractions. Avoid driving while doing the telephone interview and try to use a landline vs. your cell phone, if available. Eliminate background noises, such as children, dogs, cell phone, television etc. (turn off your cell phone and avoid your computer).

If you're currently employed, arrange for a phone interview in the evening rather than during the workday. Confidentiality and discretion may be at risk if you interview during working hours. You never know who might barge into your office unannounced or overhear something by accident. In the privacy of your home, you can be more at ease and in control of your surroundings. Another option would be a telephone interview during your lunch hour if you were able to go to a secure, private and quiet location during that time.

Being clear on the interview format gives you an edge in preparation. Before the actual interview, it will help to know the topics to be covered, objectives to attain and the basic information regarding the position to be discussed. It also helps to rehearse. Try to think as the employer: what key information is the interviewer looking for? What questions are likely to be asked? What things do you hope he doesn't ask?

George Walther, president of TelExcel in Seattle, Washington, is a consultant and speaker on the subject of improving telephone interviewing effectiveness. "From my experience, I would say that 98% of business executives can assess the candidate's personality after thirteen seconds, with no visual information," he says. "Furthermore, initial voice impression tends to be reinforced by the content of continued conversation." In other words, you need to sound like a winner quickly to sustain the listener's interest in you.

It's also advisable to prepare for possible scenarios that might unfold. Hypothesize a bit - suppose the interviewer asks questions that make you feel uncomfortable. How do you handle that? Suppose he rambles, is easily sidetracked and doesn't allow you to sell yourself. How do you subtly take control of the conversation and target pertinent issues? As a worst case scenario - suppose the interviewer doesn't call at the agreed time. If it's an evening interview, and you have other engagements, how long should you wait by the phone? If it's a daytime interview, should you assume the interviewer "forgot" and call him directly? Or do you await his call at some other, unspecified time?

Solution: DON'T PANIC! The employer will call to set up a new time if he had some crisis. If you are working with a recruiter, he will handle the problem and schedule an alternate time.

Finally, clear a work area near the phone and keep the following tools handy to aid your fact gathering and information sharing:

- A copy of the version of the resume sent to the interviewer.
- A note pad and pen.
- Five or six carefully worded questions you'll want to ask the interviewer.
- A list of your key accomplishments.
- Company literature with pertinent sections highlighted (company profile, products, news etc.).
- Your calendar/schedule.
- A watch or clock to track the length of the interview.

2.3 Phone Personality

Here are some practical tips to enhance your phone "personality" and overall presentation:

Treat the phone interview seriously – just as seriously as you would a face-to-face interview. A phone interview may seem informal at first. Don't get caught with your guard down. Be just as prepared for a phone interview. This is a critical step to either be taken out of the running or moved forward to the next step.

Shower, groom and dress up – at least a little. Focus on your appearance as you would for a face-to-face interview. From a psychological standpoint you will be in the correct frame of mind for the interview.

Stand up. Research has shown that you project yourself better when you are standing and you will sound better too – motion creates emotion. And you will feel more knowledgeable and confident.

Talk directly into the mouthpiece. Hold the receiver approximately three inches from the mouth, not below your chin or above your nose. Speak in a relaxed, conversational style as though the other person was in the same room, not on the other side of the planet.

Pay attention to the interviewer's voice patterns. Does he speak slowly or rapidly? Try to match the cadence so that the conversation flows smoothly. According to Mr. Walther at TelExcel, the average person speaks at a rate of 160 words per minute. Adjust your speaking rate, voice volume and phrasing to be more in rhythm with the interviewer.

Sound upbeat. If you had a lousy day and came home to find your spouse and kids arguing, put it out of your mind. Genuine enthusiasm is contagious! Smile to show a sense of humor and to help you sound excited. After all, the interviewer may have had a bad day too.

Be a conversationalist. Listen carefully to get the big picture and to avoid saying something that indicates any momentary mental distraction. Allow the interviewer to complete questions without you finishing his train of thought or blurting out answers prematurely.

Handle any trick questions in stride. The interviewer may throw in several to test your alertness or mental keenness. Showing verbal adeptness is a sign of how quickly you can "think on your feet." Be cautious: the interviewer may say something that puzzles you or that you firmly disagree with, but you should show enough respect to voice your thoughts in a professional manner. A defensive posture or argumentative tone is the surest way to alienate the interviewer and eliminate your candidacy.

VIDEO INTERVIEWS: For video conference interviews you should be conscious of the fact that, while you are not actually in person, the interviewer will still be establishing a first impression. You should be dressed as though you were at a physical interview and well groomed. You should be in a quiet space, without disruptions, and should prepare for the video interview, as you would a telephone or in person interview. It is also recommended that you test the equipment that you will be using to avoid any technical problems during the interview. For more information, you can also use the internet for tips on video interviewing.

2.4 Telephone Discussion

Establishing rapport at the beginning of the phone conversation sets a favorable tone. During the first few minutes, mention something that shows commonality of interest or similarity in background. This helps both parties feel more comfortable as the conversation progresses.

Get to know the person behind the voice. Does he show a sense of humor? Is she direct and forthright in supplying information? Does his speech sound "canned" or does it exhibit freshness of thought and expression? Just as importantly, does she actively listen to you or merely wait for the chance to ask her next question? The interviewer may be a personnel official or a hiring manager. If the individual is someone with whom you will be working, pay all the more attention to her explanation of the job and what potential it offers.

Your prepared list of questions will indicate that you have given careful thought to the prospect of joining the firm. Even though you don't know everything about the position at this point, convey the impression that it's something you are interested in, competent at handling and that you have done some research.

Only in a face-to-face interview can you totally sell yourself. The purpose of the phone interview is to identify areas of mutual interest that warrant further investigation. In other words, wet their curiosity and give them good reasons for wanting to invite you to the company location.

Basically, what the interviewer needs to hear and conclude is that you can get the job done. Mentally, he is making the connection between the company's problems and you as a problem solver. Don't overwhelm him with facts and figures. He's only going to remember so much.

You can best make your point by reciting memorable stories that document your ability to analyze a dilemma, weigh alternative responses and choose the appropriate action. By selectively highlighting turnaround situations you spearheaded, you are communicating a willingness to tackle similar problems for his company.

As you glance over your notes and keep an eye on the clock, there may be additional important points to cover in the pre-allotted time frame. Tactfully take control and introduce the subject matter that needs to be discussed or further elaborated.

As the conversation winds down, become less talkative and give more thought to what you say. Your final words will generally have greater impact and be remembered longer. Careful word choice and voice inflections will under-score the significance of your remarks. By contrast, a machine-gun volley of words will likely put the listener on the defensive or turn him off altogether.

2.5 Home Stretch

After 30 minutes, both parties should know how much of a "fit" there is. Provided the job interests you, express your desire to proceed to the next step: a company visit/face-to-face meeting.

The interviewer may extend an invitation at that point. With calendar nearby, suggest several available days and times that agree with your agenda. Should the phone interview go well but end without a specific invitation to visit the company, state your desire to investigate the opportunity further. Example: "I'd be very interested in such a challenging position. I would be available to come in for a personal interview and discuss my abilities in greater detail on (day)."

He may then mention the likelihood of an onsite interview once he confers with other officials. Your assertiveness will be remembered. If you hear nothing within 48 hours, follow up with a call to your recruiter.

A final concern: the interviewer may ask a salary range that you're expecting (don't introduce the issue yourself). It's best to mention that at this point you are not altogether certain what the job is really worth. Example: "I would feel more comfortable discussing a salary figure after meeting the key people I would be working with and knowing more about the position." If the interviewer continues to pressure you for a figure, specifically ask, "What salary range are you working within?" Chances are 50/50 that he will tell you.

Respond by indicating that your desired salary is in that range (if that is correct). If the dollars are a little low, don't despair or defend what you feel you are worth. On the phone, your job is to entice a buyer, not to close a sale.

End the conversation on a positive note. Thank the interviewer for the information shared and again let her know that you look forward to visiting his/her company. After all, if the position discussed is not the ideal job for you, something else might be. Improved telephone interviewing techniques can really give you a competitive edge.

3 Interview Preparation

3.1 Know Yourself

- Can you visualize yourself in the position you are interviewing for?
- Know what is written on your resume – be prepared to explain/defend statements made.
- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What are your short and long-term goals?
- Can you evaluate yourself in terms of the position you seek?
- Can you answer the question - "Why should they hire me?"
- What have your career accomplishments been?
- What are your reasons for job changes?
- What are your motivations for making a change?
- What has been your salary history and/or what are your expectations?
- Am I willing to relocate myself and my family for a new job opportunity?

Remember that you're there to sell yourself and secure a job offer!

3.2 Research the Company, Competitors, Products and Industry

- Visit the company website to: view company history, review annual reports & press releases, current product portfolio, new product introductions, recent executive appointments etc.
- Know the company's products and services, as well as their current competitors and target market(s).
- Visit industry websites and publications for additional information on the company and their history.
- Don't forget about word of mouth and your own industry knowledge.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is attractive to you and a good fit for your career aspirations.
- Utilize social and professional networking sites (such as: Facebook, LinkedIn, Naymz, Jigsaw, etc.) to gather additional company information, background information on the interviewer(s) and/or hiring authority, discover who has recently joined and/or left the organization and who you may already know within the company (i.e. former colleagues, friends, industry contacts etc.).

3.3 Suggested Interview Documents

Let's face it, in today's market your ability to be memorable in an interview has never been more important. Interviewers are partial to prepared interviewees and those who go the extra mile.

Want to stand out? Try bringing some of the following suggested documents, some of which can really **WOW** an interviewer:

Resume

- Review your resume thoroughly and be prepared to discuss all points.
- Bring enough copies of your resume – if you are interviewing with one person bring two copies. Likewise, if you are interviewing with 3 people bring **AT LEAST 5** copies, etc. It is better to be over-prepared than under-prepared!
- Resumes should be printed out on quality resume paper and stored in a separate folder so that the paper does not wrinkle.
- Always bring a resume copy identical to the one supplied to the interviewer to avoid discrepancies.

Documentation of Your Accomplishments

- Bring along samples of your work, if possible (i.e. printed materials, publications, presentations, models, portfolios, patents, programs etc.). **Never discuss or show proprietary information.**
- Copies of any certification documents and/or licenses.
- Letters of Recommendation.
- Also bring any supporting documentation – such as letters proving attainment of goals, memos, previous performance reviews, contest wins, rankings or awards based on performance, etc.

Mini-Stories

- Have a copy of your “Mini-Stories” at hand for reference (see section 3.6)

References

- Use AT LEAST three former supervisors who are familiar with your work (you can also include colleagues, subordinates and customers, in addition to superiors).
- Include their name and company as well as home, cell and/or work phone numbers. Also, an email, if possible.
- Always consult with references for their approval and to ensure that their remarks are positive and to make them aware that possible employers will be calling them.
- Bring an additional copy for yourself, in the event that you have to fill out an employment application.

Questions

- Prepare a list of questions for the interviewer, for your reference, and bring them with you.

Other Items

- Preferably bring a leather portfolio to carry your resume, a notebook, pen, and other documentation required for your interview. A portfolio is preferable to a bag or briefcase.
- Print out interesting facts about the company (i.e. the “About Us” section, news releases etc).
- Competitor information or a list of competitors.
- Prepare and review your questions, as well as specific responses.
- Bring directions to the interview location as well as the interviewer's phone number in case you're running late.
- 30/60/90 Day Business Plans, Routing Plans, Competitor Analysis, Potential Customer and/or Vendor Lists, etc., are some additional documents that can set you apart in an interview.

3.4 Interview Timing

- Arrive **NO** earlier than fifteen minutes before the interview (but no later than five minutes prior to the interview). Arriving too early can be just as bothersome as arriving late and can be considered disruptive.
- Allow adequate time for traffic, parking and a last minute appearance check. If possible, scout out the location the day before the interview to avoid last minute problems.
- Review your notes, take a deep breath and go in with confidence.
- If asked, complete an application. Complete the application in full and leave no blanks. Do not write, "see resume" as a response to any application question. Respond to "expected salary" questions as "open" and "current salary" questions truthfully. List references if requested.

*Remember that the interview starts the minute you leave your home or office. That means absolutely **NO EATING, DRINKING, or SMOKING** in the car. Invariably it will end up on your clothing somehow. Drive carefully in and around the company parking lot. Be sure to park in visitor parking and check in at the front desk. Be friendly and smile at **EVERYONE** you encounter upon entering and exiting the building. You never know who will have influence whether you do or do not receive an offer, including the receptionist.*

3.5 Interview Appearance

- Hair should be clean, well groomed and freshly trimmed. Stick to a conservative style for the interview.
- Choose subtle low-key colors over bright fashion colors, as they can be distracting and too bold.
- A black, navy blue or dark gray suit is appropriate for most positions. Be sure it's cleaned and pressed.
- Avoid revealing skirts and shirts. Skirts should be at or below knee-level.
- Shirts/Blouses should be subtle, freshly laundered and well pressed.
- A quiet look with a subtle design and a hint of red is suitable for a first interview. Avoid loud colors and busy designs.
- Avoid exotic hairstyles and excessive makeup. Hair should be neat, clean and brushed with your jacket off. Makeup should be light and natural looking. Facial hair should also be well-groomed.
- Jewelry should be kept minimal, limited and subtle. Watch and wedding or class rings are acceptable.
- Avoid strong colognes, perfumes and fragrances.
- Shoes that are black/brown and freshly polished (including the heels) are a safe choice for an interview. Socks should be black or blue and worn over the calf.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- **DO NOT** chew gum or hard candy in the interview. Avoid coffee and smoking.
- *Do not take cell phones, pagers or other electronic devices with you into an interview. Laptops are acceptable, in some circumstances.*

3.6 Interview Process

A typical sequence of events is:

- Interview with personnel (general questions, review of the company and their benefits).
- Interview with the immediate supervisor and peers.
- Interview with the hiring authority (manager, executives, etc.).
- Conclusion.
- Candidate Evaluation Period.
- Offer.

**People hire people!
Be yourself, be prepared, and
be confident!**

REMEMBER TO:

- Maintain a high energy level and be enthusiastic. Sit up with your back straight and use positive body language. Stay engaged.
- Shake hands firmly, smile and maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises – talk about it, but do not fake knowledge.
- Be yourself. Poise, confidence and self respect are of great importance.
- SMILE/LAUGH – let your personality come through.

Personnel will usually provide company information and available benefits. Thorough review and questions concerning benefits should be addressed after the interview and are more appropriate for the offer stage. Remember, the interviewers are trying to see how you can contribute to their company and focusing on benefits can be a turn-off.

Conduct yourself with confidence and determination to get the job. You have other options, of course, and your interviewer knows this, but he/she wants to think that you want **a job with this company**. Don't play coy. Sell yourself. This is your first meeting with the company and the position, as well as future promotions, depends on your presentation. Are you going to sell them on the idea of hiring you, or will they sell you on the idea that this job is not for you? You must present a positive attitude to the prospective employer. You must NOT seem disinterested or appear to be job shopping.

The interview should be a two way conversation. Be prepared to ask questions of the interviewers. This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision following the interview(s). The questions you have prepared can and should be asked to all of the different people you meet with.

Remember that the objective of the interview is to obtain an offer. During the interview, you must gather enough information concerning the position to make a decision.

***Remember:** The interviewer is looking for someone who will fit into their culture and who is excited for AND wants to join THEIR organization! Show them that by using these suggestions, as it will be to your advantage. It's okay to be nervous – it's human nature to have the fear of not getting something that we want - but concentrating on some of these things can cut the tension and make an otherwise uncomfortable situation a successful one!*

4 Interview Questions & Responses

You should give complete but brief and relaxed answers to questions. Be sure to stay on subject and ANSWER THE QUESTION at hand. When possible use questions as a basis for developing information that you want to make sure is presented. Continue to sell yourself in a positive way.

- Describe jobs in terms of duties and responsibilities (i.e. major daily tasks, # direct reports etc.).
- Give indicators of good performance, such as raises, sales volume, promotions etc.
- Refer to your “**Mini-Stories**” (short descriptions of your previous experiences – see section 3.6) involving problems or challenges and how you were able to solve or overcome them. Describe the results you achieved (STAR).
- Write out answers to these typical interviewing questions and practice your responses (*TIP: Use the internet for suggested responses to common interview questions*).
- Prepare a “key scorecard matrix” and/or a list of documented accomplishments and have that in front of you for reference.

4.1 Exploring - Background Questions

Tell me about yourself.

- Answer these questions in terms of the qualifications required of the position, as opposed to your personal life and perceived personality.
- Keep responses concise, brief and TO THE POINT.
- Avoid being derogatory or negative about previous jobs and bosses. Explain job changes, but don't "bash" your previous companies or managers.
- "Tell-me-about-yourself" means, "Tell me about your qualifications." Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications and what you can bring to the table. Start with education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.)

What are your greatest strengths?

- Interviewers like to hear abstract qualities. Loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, fast learner, organized, technical skills, politeness and promptness etc., expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid the simple generalization "like people." It's not a good answer.

What are your greatest weaknesses or areas for improvement?

- Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not the time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state "not being able to go to work on Mondays", or "coming in late", etc.). Present your weaknesses as professional strengths, (i.e. "Sometimes I work too hard to make sure things are done accurately" or "I get frustrated when others don't pull their weight" or "I have a tendency to be a perfectionist").

4.2 Personality Questions

What do you do in your spare time?

- Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Your answer gives you dimension. Name some hobbies and interests. Not only will this shape you and your personality in the eyes of the interviewer, but can also establish a common ground between you and the interviewer (i.e. perhaps you like to golf and the interviewer is a member of his/her local golf club). It can give you something to talk about and make the conversation more at ease.

What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended?

- Talk about books, sports and movies that show you are well rounded and have balance in your life.

Are you creative?

- Yes and give examples of the areas where you feel your creativity shines. Is it creative strategizing? Is it creative writing? Is it creating new selling techniques? Is it creating methods for employee retention? Don't think of creative just as being visual, but how your creative side fits with your skill set and the job.

4.3 Motive Questions

Answer motive questions enthusiastically. Show the interviewer that you are interested in the position and that you really want the job. Remember to maintain eye contact and be sincere.

How can you contribute to this company?

- Be positive and sell yourself! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

Why should they hire you for this position?

- Explain your qualifications and how they "fit" the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it's the type of work that you would enjoy. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

Why do you want to work for our firm?

- Prior to the interview and as part of the preparation process, you should have done your due diligence and research on the company, so this should be an easy one. Make a compliment about what company, its location or its people. Other positive remarks might be about the company's product or service, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement.

Where do you hope to be in five years?

- Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years and that their investment in you will pay. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you'll be more successful than they are or want their job. But do show a strong desire for promotions and additional responsibility.

What interests you most about this position?

- Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one or two word answer, such as "the challenge" or "the opportunity," will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company and position requirements.

How long do you plan to be with this company?

- As with marriage, most employers expect a till-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field", is a reasonable response.

What are your career goals?

Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:

- Short term – "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
- Long term - "After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

What are you doing to achieve your goals?

- "I look at continued learning as the key to success. I've continued my education. As you see from my resume, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organizations in my field."

4.4 Job Satisfaction Questions

Why did you leave your previous employer?

- **NEVER** speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

What did you like most about your previous job?**What did you like least about your previous job?**

- An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek, what you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

Why are you looking for another job?

- Again, be positive: "I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at _____ Corporation. There are a lot of good people over there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth, and recognition. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real and visible contributions and advance my career."

What do you think your employer's obligations are to you?

- Interviewers listen for employees who want a positive, enthusiastic, company atmosphere, with the opportunity to advance. Such a person, they surmise, has motivation and staying power.

Are you applying for any other jobs?

- Be truthful in your answer and show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective. Make it known that your talents are applicable to other businesses and that you have explored ways to maximize your potential and are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don't give an indication that you are just shopping.

4.5 Past Performance Questions

"Mini-Stories" (see the STAR/Behavioral Based Interviewing section below for more information on "Mini-Stories") are wonderful tools in assisting Candidates to focus on their presentations when responding to a number of these typical questions:

What kinds of decisions are most difficult for you?

- Again, be truthful and admit that not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit, so as not to instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you possibly can, so you can make the best decision possible.

What causes you to lose your temper?

- Everybody has a low boiling point on some particular issue. Pick one of yours - something safe and reasonable. People, who are late to meetings, blame shifting, broken appointments and office "back-stabbing" are suitable responses. Don't say that you never fly off the handle. You won't be believed.

What are your greatest accomplishments?

- Be ready to recant one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

How do you feel about a younger male/female boss?

- A question like this usually means that your boss will either be younger or of the opposite sex or both. Be certain that if you register any concern, you will probably not be hired. Explain that their age or sex is of no importance to you. You are only interested in their capability and what you can learn from them.

What kind of worker are you?

- Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

4.6 Behavior Based Questions (STAR Formatted)

These questions are designed to elicit patterns of accomplishments relevant to the employer's situation. These questions are based on the belief that past performance is a good predictor of how that person will behave in similar situations in the future.

Some examples of STAR (or Behavior Based) Interviewing questions include:

- Give an example of when you were faced with a challenge but were able to overcome it?
- Give an example of when you needed to improve a process, how did you go about doing that?
- Give an example when you worked as part of a team, what role did you take?
- Give an example when you had a conflict with a customer / Dr. / co-worker / Boss, how did you handle it and what was the outcome?
- Give an example of when you had to go across departments to get something done?
- Give an example of a project you had to work on where multiple people were involved?
- Give an example of when you had to persuade someone to your way of thinking?
- If you have 2 different groups with different opinions how did you get them to agree?
- What has been your favorite accomplishment and why?
- What do you like most / least about your job?
- Give an example of a time when you had to "give up" on something?
- Give an example of a project you did that you did well?
- Give an example of a project you worked on and you came upon some barriers?
- Give an example of a project you completed with a time sensitive deadline?
- Give an example of time when you had to be flexible?
- Give an example when you thought something was going to happen and then things changed and it didn't?
- Give an example of a project, policy, or procedure that you implemented or suggested and what was the outcome?
- Give an example when your persistence paid off?
- Describe a situation where you failed to reach a goal and how that affected you?
- Have you ever had to make an unpopular decision / announcement? Describe it and tell me how you handled it?
- Give an example when you had to convince someone to change when they didn't want to change?

TIP: Consider using the Internet to find additional potential questions to help you prepare

Tell stories of how YOU personally have:

- Demonstrated leadership
- Solved a problem
- Increased profits
- Saved money/time for the company
- Increased morale
- Implemented changes, policies, procedures etc.
- Made a good decision or poor decision and what was learned from it
- Handled a change
- Handled obstacles
- Handled criticism
- Worked as part of a team

4.7 “Mini-Story”/Elevator Speeches Development

Preparing “Mini-Stories” in advance assists not only in recollection of past accomplishments which relate to the position or qualifications, but enables Candidates to be focused on the interview and interaction with the interviewer(s), rather than searching for appropriate responses to the questions. Outstanding Candidates are best presented in an interview when they are prepared with brief “Mini-Stories,” in which they describe in brief, bulleted-short sentence(s), outlines of your accomplishments and previous experiences. It is by far and away best to describe your contributions and experiences that most closely correlate with the position under consideration and should be brought with you to the interview for reference.

“Mini-Stories” are a MUST for every interview, but since Behavioral Based Interviewing (see section 3.6 for more details on behavioral interviewing) is becoming more and more popular, in addition to traditional interview styles, it is in your best interest to prepare your answers in the STAR (situation, task, action and result) format. This interview style assumes the best indication of future performance is your past behaviors.

The key to answering these types of questions, while there is no “right” or “wrong” answer, is to be very **SPECIFIC** in your responses vs. giving generalized answers. You should prepare at least 5-7 “Mini-Stories” addressing :

4.7.1 THE SITUATION(S)

Choose specific situations, which YOU have directly been involved with, not generalized examples.

Ex. I spent months chasing Mr. Customer and couldn't get their business due to pricing issues...

4.7.2 THE TASK(S)

Explain briefly the tasks associated with that situation.

Ex. I took the initiative to find a way to provide better pricing and...

4.7.3 THE ACTION(S)

Describe the action you took to meet, overcome, resolve or complete the task.

Ex. In an effort to land Mr. Customer, I approached my manager to determine if we had flexibility with our current pricing and how we could be more competitive from a pricing stand point. Together we put together a mutually beneficial price structure...

2.3.4 THE RESULT(S)

Describe the result of your efforts, positive or negative.

Ex. So, I approached Mr. Customer with our newly, adjusted prices and was able to bring them on as a new account.

Another example...

“My department was having trouble meeting deadlines for our customer. Since we were consistently short on the required deadline, our customer threatened to pull out. I was tasked with streamlining our production process to better meet the required timelines and save revenue. I formulated a new process, which included __, __ & __, all and all shortening production time by _____. This not only saved us time and our customer, but through this customer 's praise, we gained ___ new customers, which in turn increased revenue by _____”.

4.8 Salary Questions

- Salary discussions should be avoided, if possible. Do not bring up salary, benefits or vacations.

What type of salary do you have in mind?

- Do not state a starting figure. A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find that I am the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer."

What is your current salary?

- Answer truthfully. Remember that "salary" includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits and vacations, as well as sick days and personal days. You should know how your package is broken out (i.e. the base salary, the bonus potential etc.). Be honest because some employers will require verification of your W2 or 1099. Also, if you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect to receive.

4.9 Other questions you should be prepared to answer truthfully:

- Are you willing to relocate?
- May we check your references?
- May we verify your income?

Answer a question to the best of your ability and then relax. If there is a period of silence before the interviewer asks the next question, stay calm. Interviewers often use silence to see if you can handle stress and maintain poise.

5 Interview Questions for the Candidate

Your interviews, however, should be a two-way conversation. You **MUST** ask questions and take an active role in the interview. This demonstrates the importance you place on your work and career and also illustrates your level of interest in learning more. Asking questions gives you a chance to demonstrate your depth of knowledge in the field, as well as to establish an easy flow of conversation and relaxed atmosphere between you and the interviewer. Building this kind of rapport is always a plus in an interview.

Having well prepared questions will make you more confident and make a lasting impression on the Interviewer

Remember, you are not just there for the interviewer to determine if YOU are right for the position, but also if the position/company is right for you. That being said, your questions can help you determine if this job is a good match for you and your career aspirations. Some of your questions should evolve from research you've done on the company in preparing for the interview and others to gain further knowledge.

Below are some guidelines for your questions, as well as some examples:

- Don't cross-examine the employer.
- Ask questions requiring an explanation (open-ended questions). Questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.
- Don't interrupt when the employer is answering YOUR question.
- Ask job-relevant questions. Focus on the job, the company, products, services, growth opportunity, future potential and people.
- Prior to the interview, write out your list of Interest Questions and take them with you. Ask about your potential peers, subordinates and superiors. Take notes.
- Ask the employer how he/she got where they are today.

5.1 Interest Questions

Why do you want someone for this job?

- Force the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by one of his current employees. The answer may give you a valuable job description and also bring out some of the opportunities/challenges that the position will offer.

5.2 Job Satisfaction Questions

Ask questions that relate to the responsibilities, importance and authority of the position, as well as those investigating the rewards for a job well done and the long-range career opportunities.

- Where do you see me long term with your company (paint the picture)?
- How is performance measured and rewarded within your organization?
- Do you have a history of promoting from within?
- What do you see as the future growth potential for someone in this role?
- How do you retain your employees?
- What keeps you at ABC Company?
- Do you see opportunity for increasing responsibilities within this role in the future?

5.3 Past Performance Questions

Why isn't this position being filled from within the company?

- Prior to the interview, you will likely have some indication/information regarding the reason for the open position. You may want to further expand on the reasons that the company is not promoting someone or advertising the position from within. Use this as an opportunity to gain further insight into the organization, skill levels of your peers and subordinates, etc.

How many people have held this job in the last five years?

Were they promoted or did they leave the company?

- If the turnover has been high, you have a right to suspect that the job may leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you could expect to be promoted quickly.

Tell me about your background.

How did you get started in the company?

- A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

5.4 Additional Questions

- What would my duties and responsibilities be in this role?
- What are the most difficult aspects of the position?
- What problems/challenges exist that would need immediate attention upon starting the position?
- Describe a typical day on the job.
- Describe the department's/company's growth in the next 2 years.
- What is the philosophy on training and development here?
- Has there been downsizing within the company? How is/was it handled?
- How do you think I'd fit into the job and into your organization?

- What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?
- Who would I be working for and with?
- What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?
- What is the person doing whom used to hold this position?
- Tell me about your top performer. What is that person doing to set themselves apart from their peers?
- What could I do to stand out in my first 60 days on the job?
- What is your management style?
- When would you need me to start?
- May I see my work area?
- May I meet some of my future coworkers

6 Interview Conclusion - Phone or Face-to-Face

Closing at the conclusion of the interview is crucial. If you are sincerely interested in the position and are satisfied with the answers given, you should express your desire for the position/next steps and ask the interviewer if he/she feels that you are qualified for the position, as well as identify any red flags or concerns. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification and provide additional information. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully.

Ask for the Opportunity & Position. Make a positive statement about the position, the company and/or the interviewer. Emphasize that this is exactly the type of opportunity you've been looking for and would like to be offered the position or an opportunity to move on to the next step in the interview process. Ask when you should expect an answer and try to gain commitment from the interviewer. A typical conclusion might be:

"Thank you for this meeting _____. I like what I've heard today and I'd like to join your team. I know I'd be an asset to you/your department because you need someone who can _____ and _____. As you know, I have (match your qualifications with the employer's "hot buttons"). Before I leave, do you have any more questions about my background or qualifications or can I supply you with any more information? On a scale of 1 to 5, how do I compare to the other candidates you've interviewed? I can start as soon as you need me." Pause and await their response.

The farewell should also include a smile, direct eye contact, a firm but gentle handshake.

Some other closing statements can include:

- I am very interested in moving forward in your interview process, is there any additional information that I can provide to you to make you feel comfortable recommending me for the next step?
- I have been impressed with what I have heard so far and am definitely interested in the opportunity you have available. Do you have any questions or concerns about my abilities to do this job?
- This opportunity sounds like a great fit for me and my career aspirations. I am excited to move on to the next step, do you have any doubts about me or my qualifications that would prevent you from moving me forward in your process?
- I would like to be considered for this position and feel it is a mutually beneficial match. Have I answered all of your questions clearly enough? Is there any reason you wouldn't move me forward?
- I am excited about your company and the opportunity that you have described today. I would like to be considered as a candidate for the next step. Do you think that I am a good fit for your position?
- I feel this is a great opportunity for me, both in career and culture, and feel very comfortable with everything I have been told so far in the interview process. How do you see someone like me fitting into your organization?

7 Interview Follow-Up

It is always a good idea to send a short note of appreciation to thank the employer or interviewer for their time. Since we now live in a virtual world, you should send the thank you note via email immediately following the interview. A hand written note to accompany the email is certainly nice, but no longer the standard. You should use the thank you as an opportunity to reiterate your interest in the position and the company as well as your ability to do the job. This is a good way to keep your name current in the interviewer's mind and demonstrate your follow up skills and interest. This small step will set you apart from the other candidates being considered for the position. You should send a thank you note after every interview, regardless of how many times you have already spoken with or met the interviewer.

(TIP: You can also send a "precursor" email to the interviewer confirming the meeting/conversation to make yourself memorable!)

Following is a sample thank you letter that you can adapt to fit your specifics:

1. ADDRESS LINE

- The full company name and address (no abbreviations) as well as the full name of the interviewer and his/her complete title.

2. GREETING

- "Dear Mr./Ms. (last name):"
- "Miss" or "Mrs." should not be used unless you are sure that person does so. Do not use a first name in the greeting unless you have established a strong rapport.

3. OPENING

- "It was a pleasure meeting with you (day) to discuss the opening in (department) with (company)."
- "I appreciated meeting with (name) and yourself in your office on (day) to discuss the (title) position with (company)."
- "Thank you for taking the time to see me regarding the opening in (department)."

Again, comment or add something discussed during the interview that will allow you to restate your qualifications and confidence in performing the job.

4. BODY

- "From our discussion, and the fine reputation of your organization, it appears that the (title) position would enable me to fully use my background in _____."
- "I was particularly impressed with the professionalism evident throughout my visit. (Company) appears to have the kind of environment I have been seeking."
- "The atmosphere at (company) seems to strongly favor individual involvement, and I would undoubtedly be able to contribute significantly to its goals."

5. CLOSING

- "While I have been considering other opportunities, I have deferred a decision until I hear from you. Therefore, your prompt reply would be greatly appreciated."
- "It's an exciting opportunity, and I look forward to hearing your decision very soon."
- "The (title) position and (company) are exactly what I have been seeking, and I hope to hear from you within the next week."

6. SALUTATION

- "Sincerely,"
- "Very truly yours,"
- "Best regards,"

8 Position Offer & Acceptance

Clients in today's market generally proceed at a pace which does not typically move at the speed that we would prefer but rest assured if an interview has taken place there is a complete and detailed evaluation taking place. We at Management Recruiters of St. Lawrence County (MRSLC) certainly have a vested interest in the process and we are working closely with the client in this process as well as the preparation of an offer. Clients' desires vary as to how offers are generally handled but typically they prefer to work through your MRSLC recruiter. We will then, in turn, work closely with you in working through the particulars to the point of making an appropriate acceptance.

9 Resignation Letter

Informing your current employer of your resignation takes tact and discretion. If they inquire as to whom your new job is with, it is best to tell them that you cannot disclose that information until your new employer announces it within his/her own organization. The following sample letter is suitable correspondence to announce your resignation. **However, do not resign until you have a written offer.**

(Date)

Dear _____,

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation as (Title) for (Company) to become effective as of (Date). I have accepted a position in (Location). I believe this position will offer me more challenge and opportunity for advancement as well as allow me to broaden my own experience and knowledge.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and efforts in my training and advancement during the past (Time). The support and concern shown by you and the rest of the management team has been deeply appreciated. I leave (Company) with no animosity or ill will and wish you and your company continued success.

My decision is irrevocable and any counter offers extended by you and/or (Company) will be rejected.

Sincerely,
(Your Name)

10 Eleven Reasons for Rejection Following an Interview

1. **Poor attitude.** Many candidates come across as arrogant during an interview. While employers can afford to be self centered, candidates cannot. Doing this can instantly turn the employer off.
2. **Appearance.** Many candidates do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are so important and are quickly made in the first three to five minutes. Review the suggestions in reference to appropriate interview appearance and be conscious of maintaining a clean and professional demeanor.
3. **Lack of research.** It's obvious to the employer/interviewer when candidates haven't researched the job, company or industry prior to the interview. Visit the company's website, utilize search engines to find additional information, reach out to industry contacts and thought leaders, find out competitor information and who their vendors and customers are.
4. **Not having questions to ask.** Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position and also keeps the conversation flowing. Prepare a *list of intelligent questions in advance and bring them with you to the interview.*
5. **Not readily knowing the answers to interviewers' questions.** Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as a recent termination or an employment gap. Practicing with your spouse or a friend before the interview will help you to frame intelligent responses. You can also research typical interview questions and have answers prepared ahead of time.
6. **Relying too much on resumes.** Employers hire people, not paper. Although a resume can list qualifications and skills, it's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsive team player. Remember chemistry is equally important to qualifications.
7. **Too much humility.** Being conditioned not to brag, candidates are sometimes reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them. Don't be afraid to "toot your own horn" (to a point – be careful not to over sell yourself).
8. **Not relating skills to employers' needs.** A list of sterling accomplishments means little if you can't relate them to a company's requirements. Reiterate your skills and convince the employer that you can "do the same for them".
9. **Handling salary issues ineptly.** Candidates often ask about salary and benefit packages too early. If they believe an employer is interested, they may demand inappropriate amounts and price themselves out of the jobs. Candidates who ask for too little undervalue themselves or appear desperate.
10. **Lack of career direction.** Job hunters who aren't clear about their career goals often can't spot or commit to appropriate opportunities. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.
11. **Job shopping.** Some applicants, particularly those in certain high-tech, sales and marketing fields, will admit they're just "shopping" for opportunities and have little intention of changing jobs. This wastes time and leaves a bad impression with employers they may need to contact in the future.

