

INTERVIEW PREPARATION TOOLKIT



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INTERVIEW PREPARATION

One of the best ways to separate yourself from the competition is to be prepared!

You made it to the interview, now what? The hiring manager(s) have already seen the hard facts of your resume. The actual interview is a subtler, more subjective aspect of the job-hunting process. During each interview, every person you meet will be forming an opinion of you and gauging your compatibility with the needs of the organization and more importantly their ability to work with you within that role. Bottom line – you're trying to make a good impression!

Here is a list to help you prepare your thoughts and questions:

- Know why you're interested in the job/company and why you would want to work there.
- Research the company – know what you are walking into.
- Research the interviewers you will meet. Try to understand their role within the organization and try to relate your answers to their area of expertise.
- Review the job description so you can speak to how your background, experience and skills meet their needs.
- Assess your strengths, weaknesses and major accomplishments.
- Prepare your questions about the position.
- Make sure you are ready to make a professional presentation – both in appearance and in verbiage.
- Your resume should accurately reflect your education and work experience. It should be organized and logically laid out with no typos or other errors. Have it professionally critiqued.
- Compose a thank-you letter that you can send immediately after your interviews. Thank the interviewer for the opportunity and ask for the job. This is important even if you think you may not be interested in the position. You want to leave a positive impression.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

With every interaction, you should be sincere, polite, and enthusiastic about your knowledge of the company and the industry. Your resume may well have shown examples of your skills as a team player, but now you need to convince them that you fit their team. To make the best impression possible, you need to be prepared, know what to expect, and how to handle it if things do not go quite as you had planned.

- Make sure you understand the questions (ask for clarification if you are unsure).
- Respond concisely – don't ramble – when people are nervous, they tend to over explain.
- Avoid "yes" or "no" answers. Expand on your answer to allow the interviewer to get to know you.
- Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly.
- Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is looking for.
- As you answer questions, avoid the use of negative terms, and DO NOT be negative about past employers.
- Answer questions with specific examples – avoid generalities.
- Evaluate the position for which you are interviewing. Be sure you are a good fit for the level of job. If you convey interest in a higher-level position, the company may be concerned you will not be content with the position you are interviewing for.
- Do not bring up salary or benefits unless the interviewer brings them up. Know what an appropriate salary range should be.
- If you are interested in the job, let them know that and summarize why you believe you are a good fit.

A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW?

Behavioral interviewing is based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior. This style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance among hiring managers. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision. By focusing on the applicant's past actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service. Prepare short descriptions of each situation and be ready to give details if asked. Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end. Be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result. Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable). Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. Be specific. Do not generalize about multiple events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

As with any sort of interview, there are common behavioral "themes" or "performance dimensions" that most recruiters are likely to be interested in. These include (but are not limited to) leadership, interpersonal communication, multi-tasking, management and cognitive skills, agility (e.g., personal flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity), motivation, decisiveness, and commitment.

A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW?

Preparation is the key to successfully navigating this process. Questions will relate to the key attributes required for the job. They will ask about challenges, competencies and successes. Before an interview be sure to have an inventory of your accomplishments, challenges and successes that relate to the position. Listen carefully to the questions and use active listening to make sure you understand before answering if there is any doubt. Your answers should be complete and concise. You can always ask the interviewer if your answer covered the question adequately. Here is the basic pattern in which to answer behavioral questions:

Question - Tell me a time when you...

Answer Pattern – **S-T-A-R** (1 to 3 minutes)

Situation/Task – What was the situation or problem/challenge? – (one or two sentence description)

Action – What did you do? (one or two sentence description)

Result – What happened? How did it turn out? (one or two sentence description)

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

- Describe what you would say if asked to talk about yourself in a group of 15 people.
- If someone told you that you had made an error, describe how you would react and what you would say in your defense (could site an industry specific scenario).
- Describe a time someone asked you for assistance with a matter that was outside the parameters of your job description, what did you do?
- Describe a time when you performed a task outside your perceived responsibilities. What was the task? Why did you perceive it to be outside your responsibilities? What was the outcome?

SAMPLE QUESTIONS

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions Con't.

- Describe a time you were angry about an unfair decision. How did you react?
- In an environment where deadlines and priorities change frequently and rapidly, how do you handle it (or cope)? Give an example.
- How do you know when you are stressed? What do you do to de-stress? Give an example.
- Tell me about a time when you were a part of a talented team. What was your part in making the team effective?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to deal with a difficult co-worker. How did you handle the situation?
- Think of a time when you were absent from work. How did your co-workers or your team respond?
- Can you tell me about a time during your previous employment when you suggested a better way to perform a process?
- Tell me about a personal or career goal that you have accomplished and why that was important to you.
- Give an example of a time when you were trying to meet a deadline, you were interrupted, and did not make the deadline. How did you respond?
- What strengths did you rely on in your last position to make you successful in your work?
- What do you do when you know you are right, and your boss disagrees with you? Give me an example of when this has happened in your career.
- Tell me about a situation you wish that you had handled differently based on the outcome. What was the situation? What would you change when faced with a similar situation?

PANEL INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Panel interviews are popular because of the need to be time effective and efficient. They are helpful for the hiring team because all those involved in the hiring decision can meet, question, and later discuss each candidate. Unfortunately, a panel interview can be stressful for jobseekers because they feel outnumbered. It's important to remember that you're a viable candidate, or they would not have scheduled the interview. Stay positive, remain calm, and answer each question thoroughly and concisely.

Bring a Cheat Sheet

As you prepare for any interview, you should bring a list of highlights you would like to mention during the interview. Your interview "cheat sheet" should focus on an outline of key assets you will bring to the position.

Take Names and Use Them

It's important to know who is interviewing you, so ask their names and write them down within your notes – in order of where each is seated. Don't be afraid to use their names or ask questions throughout the process.

Take Notes

During the process, members of the panel will mention points that you need to remember. Make small notations of each person's concerns or specific questions as the interview progresses. Use these for reference in later parts of the interview. As a bonus, adding these insights to your thank-you letter will help set you apart from other candidates and reflect your attentiveness.

Make Eye Contact

Eye contact during a panel interview is challenging. Try your best to look individuals in the eye and focus on speaking to each person equally, focusing primarily on the one who asked the question.

QUESTIONING THE INTERVIEWER

Even if you don't ask any questions during an interview, interviewers will usually ask you if you have any questions at the end. How you respond will affect their evaluation of you. So be prepared to ask insightful questions about the organization.

- Make a list of your questions. Try to emphasize questions where you were unable to find answers while doing your research.

Good topics to touch on include:

- The competitive environment in which the organization operates
- Executive management styles
- Company culture
- What obstacles the organization anticipates in meeting its goals
- How the organization's goals have changed over the past 3 years
- What obstacles were commonly met in reaching corporate goals
- What resources are available from the company (and what must be found elsewhere) to reach position objectives

Generally, it is best to avoid asking about compensation or benefits. Questions in this area make you seem more interested in what they can do for you and less enthusiastic about the position. Be sure you ask some questions, so you don't appear passive in pursuing the opportunity.

A Few Last Reminders:

- Line up your references in advance and have them ready in case they are requested.
- Follow up immediately with thank you emails to everyone that you interview with.
- Your goal should be to make them want to give you an offer. Don't get so focused on gathering information for yourself that you have forgotten to sell your abilities. Do your best to give them a positive impression of you. This is critical even if you ultimately are not interested in the position.

INTERVIEW PREP WORKSHEET

Interview Prep Worksheet Instructions

This interview prep worksheet is designed to help you give the best interview you can. The number one reason a candidate bombs an interview has nothing to do with their skills, it has to do with how they prepare. During an interview, you will begin to feel a certain amount of stress. When you become stressed you will start to lose your ability to access your long-term memory. An interviewer will ask you for details about something on your resume from 3 years ago, and your brain quite simply will not let you access those memories.

This worksheet will help you prepare for these types of questions. Start with the left-hand side of the document. First, go through your last three positions and write down every accomplishment you can remember from those 3 positions. Focus specifically on three areas – namely – where did you **MAKE** the company money? Where did you **SAVE** the company money? And finally, where did you **IMPROVE A PROCESS OR PROCEDURE?**

Once you've done that, focus on the right-hand side of the page. Look at each individual accomplishment and make notes on what happened with that accomplishment. Specifically, address these issues: Whose buy-in did you have to get for the accomplishment? What hurdles did you overcome? Were you on time and on budget? What were your actual results vs. expected results? What would you do differently next time?

Using this worksheet will help you sort through complete and concise answers that will allow you to clearly define your skills and answer interview questions thoroughly. Remember that answers need to be between 1-3 minutes in length. Make sure your answers are a direct answer or comparable to the question being asked. When giving these answers use both the words "I" and "we" in your examples. The inclusion of both words reinforces you are a team player who can also function under your own initiative.

SIX INTERVIEW MISTAKES

by Michael Neece, founder of Interview Mastery
Monster Contributing Writer

It's tough to avoid typical interview traps if you're unsure what they are. Here are a half dozen to watch out for.

1. Confusing an Interview with an Interrogation.

Most candidates expect to be interrogated. An interrogation occurs when one person asks all the questions and the other gives the answers. An interview is a business conversation in which both people ask and respond to questions. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator.

2. Making a So-Called Weakness Seem Positive.

Interviewers frequently ask candidates, "What are your weaknesses?" Conventional interview wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness like "I'm a perfectionist," and turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed, because they've probably heard the same answer a hundred times. If you are asked this question, highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviewers do not care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.

3. Failing to Ask Questions.

Every interview concludes with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions prepared indicates you are not interested and not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed by the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask. "I think a good question is, 'Can you tell me about your career?'" says Kent Kirch, director of global recruiting at Deloitte. "Everybody likes to talk about themselves, so you're probably pretty safe asking that question."

4. Researching the Company But Not Yourself.

Candidates intellectually prepare by researching the company. Most job seekers do not research themselves by taking inventory of their experience, knowledge, and skills. Formulating a talent inventory prepares you to immediately respond to any question about your experience. You must be prepared to discuss any part of your background. Creating your talent inventory refreshes your memory and helps you immediately remember experiences you would otherwise have forgotten during the interview.

5. Leaving Your Cell Phone On.

We may live in a wired, always-available society, but a ringing cell phone is not appropriate for an interview. Turn it off before you enter the company.

6. Waiting for a Call.

Time is your enemy after the interview. After you send a thank-you email and note to every interviewer, follow up a couple of days later with either a question or additional information. Contact the person who can hire you -- not the HR department. HR is famous for not returning calls. Additional information can be details about your talents, a recent competitor's press release or industry trends. Your intention is to keep everyone's memory of you fresh.

We hope this interview prep kit will help you feel confident to have the best interview possible as you're searching for your next role.

At WilliamCharles we are interested in building long-term relationships with talented professionals who align with our areas of focus. Our approach is to listen and understand your goals and expectations. The right fit is a win-win for both our client company and for the professional they hire. While we can't promise to find you a new position, we are interested in connecting with you and keeping you in mind for future opportunities. We understand the critical importance of making good career decisions. We invite you to submit your resume on our website.

Best of luck!

WilliamCharles Search Group is a boutique executive search and professional recruiting firm providing services to companies across a variety of industries. Our focus is on leadership positions up to the C suite including President/CEO. Our work is concentrated in finance, human resources, operations/supply chain, sales/marketing and administration. Our most common clients are private, family owned, private equity owned and ESOP companies. We work extensively in West Michigan but also have demonstrated experience nationally and globally through a network of partners.

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