Guidelines for Interviewing

TIPS ON INTERVIEWING

1. **BE ON TIME.** This means ten to fifteen minutes early.

2. **KNOW THE INTERVIEWER'S NAME AND HOW TO PRONOUNCE IT.** Know whether you should use Mr., Ms., Miss, or Mrs. If you don't know the proper usage, ask the receptionist or switchboard operator.

3. **BRING A SPARE COPY OF YOUR RÉSUMÉ IN A BRIEFCASE OR FOLDER.** This demonstrates that you are prepared. It also gives the interviewer something on which to take notes.

4. **EXPECT TO SPEND SOME TIME DEVELOPING RAPPORT**. Personal chemistry is a main ingredient in the hiring process. Try to get comfortable with one another. This will help the rest of the interview go well.

5. **WATCH YOUR NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION.** Pay attention to your physical posture. Maintain appropriate eye-contact (don't stare). Attempt to keep a reasonable distance from the other person; don't "invade" his/her space. Feel free to place your chair at an angle in order to get comfortable.

6. **DO NOT BE EMBARRASSED BY NERVOUSNESS.** Interviewers are human and are can get nervous too. In fact, nervousness is a good sign; it shows that you are taking the interview seriously. Avoid nervous mannerisms such as tapping your fingers or feet, playing with pens, etc.

7. **DO NOT PLAY COMEDIAN OR TRY TO ENTERTAIN THE INTERVIEWER.**

8. **DO NOT EXAGGERATE OR LIE.** It may come back to haunt you.

9. **FOLLOW THE INTERVIEWER'S LEAD.** Don't try to take over the interview. Stick to the subject at hand, but don't dwell too long on one point. It is better to deal with many questions than just one or two in-depth, unless that's where the interview leads.

10. **BE PREPARED FOR PERSONAL QUESTIONS, EVEN SOME INAPPROPRIATE ONES.** Some interviewers may not be aware of what they can ask, legally. Anticipate how you will handle personal questions without blowing your cool.

11. **BE SURE YOU UNDERSTAND THE QUESTION.** Feel free to ask for clarification.

12. **EMPHASIZE THE POSITIVE.** Act natural and dwell on the positive. Be frank and honest, but never apologize for lack of experience or weaknesses. Be self-confident, but don't be overconfident or cocky.

13. **PAY ATTENTION TO YOUR TIMING OF ANSWERS.** Use silence and intentional pauses to your advantage. Time is occasionally needed to think and to reflect.

14. **DO NOT INTERRUPT THE EMPLOYER.** A few interruptions are natural, but if you catch yourself always doing it, be careful.

15. **WAIT FOR AN OFFER TO TALK ABOUT SALARY.** Let the interviewer bring up this subject.

16. **EMPHASIZE WHAT YOU CAN DO FOR THE ORGANIZATION.** This means emphasizing your transferable skills. Employers are concerned most with what you can do for them. Focus on your ability to learn quickly and easily, your communication skills, interpersonal abilities, analytical thinking talents, and other skills developed while in college.

17. **DO NOT TRY TO GIVE "THE ANSWER" THE INTERVIEWER WANTS.** Most recruiters and employers know a "set answer" when they hear one.

18. **BRING A PEN AND PAPER. BUT DON'T TAKE NOTES DURING THE INTERVIEW.** Immediately following the interview, write down as much as you can remember, as well as jotting down your feelings and impressions. After a number of interviews you will be glad you didn't trust your memory to remember everything.

19. **AVOID DEBATE.** Arguing with an interviewer will shorten the interview...and your chances.

20. **NEVER SLIGHT A FORMER EMPLOYER, COLLEAGUE, TEACHER OR INSTITUTION.** It only reflects on you. If there were problems with previous experiences, try to put your answers in the positive rather than the negative. If you slight a former employer, the interviewer may assume that you will someday do the same to him or her.

21. **DO NOT OVERPLAY YOUR TECHNICAL KNOWLEDGE.** Avoid sounding rehearsed.

22. **TRY TO BE AS SPECIFIC AS POSSIBLE.** Never say "I'll do anything!" Take charge of your own life or someone else will take charge of it for you.

23. **WATCH YOUR GRAMMAR.** Employers are interested in candidates who can express themselves properly. Even if you have to slow down to correct yourself, do it!

24. **HAVE SOME QUESTIONS PREPARED.** When asked for comments or questions, have some. This shows that you're prepared.

25. **DO NOT BRING IN A PILE OF EXHIBITS OR SAMPLES UNLESS ASKED.**

26. **IF YOU ARE IN IOWA CITY, IOWA AND APPLYING FOR A JOB IN BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS, SUGGEST A HALF-HOUR TELEPHONE INTERVIEW.** Some employers, particularly non-profit, have hired candidates after examining written materials and talking on the phone for a while. It's the next best thing to being there. Even a preliminary telephone interview can help you assess whether or not it would be worth your time and expense to travel for a personal interview.

27. **DO NOT EXPECT AN OFFER ON THE SPOT.** Offers usually follow the interview, sometimes two or three weeks later. If, by any fluke, you would be offered the position on the spot, it is appropriate for you to ask for one or two days thinking time before responding.

28. **BE CAREFUL WITH THE CLOSING.** If you are not good at closing conversations, don't linger. End quickly and courteously.

29. **MOST IMPORTANT OF ALL: BE YOURSELF.** You don't want to get hired on the basis of something you're not. You want to be hired for who you are. You!

What You Should Know

Δ WHAT EMPLOYERS REALLY WANT TO KNOW

1. Can you do the job?
2. Do you have a good work attitude? How motivated, team oriented and conscientious of an employee will you be?
3. How interested are you in this kind of work? Recruiters can get an idea of your interest in a field by how focused your career plans are. Good indicators are how your summer and part time job experience related to your career plans.
4. Will you fit into the company? This is determined by a combination of your manner, background and appearance. Questions a recruiter might ask to decide your fit might be: 1) What kinds of people do you feel comfortable with? 2) What kind of environment do you work best in?
5. Do you really want to work for this company? One of the biggest turn-offs for recruiters are students who aren't sure why they want to work for a company.

Δ WHAT EMPLOYERS LOOK FOR

Decent Grades
Recruiters often use G.P.A. criterion as a way of screening out less desirable job candidates. To some, good grades indicate that the applicant is motivated and goal-oriented.

Communication and Interpersonal Skills
According to recruiters and employers, the ability to communicate effectively with others and get along with a variety of different types of personalities are two of the most desirable qualities in job candidates.

Enthusiasm
It is not enough just to have the right qualifications. An employer needs to know that you are willing to give 100 percent to your job. Interviewers are impressed by candidates who are alert, responsive and energetic.

Flexibility
Employers need to know that the people they hire can expand and change as their companies do. Applicants who are receptive to new ideas and concepts are highly valued by employers.

Leadership
Even in entry-level positions most employers look for evidence of leadership qualities. Successful companies need self-starters who are not afraid to take responsibility for doing the best job possible.

A High Energy Level
A candidate's willingness to work hard matters a great deal. Employers want to know that you are committed to devoting the prime hours of your day to the job.

Maturity
This is an illusive quality that employers almost always mention in connection with first job hires. Maturity essentially means knowing how to handle yourself in a business situation. Misplaced humorous remarks, giggling at inappropriate moments or being indiscreet about company information are telltale signs of immaturity.

Δ PREDICTORS FOR SUCCESS

1. Ambition & motivation
2. Grades
3. Related work experience
4. Creativity & intelligence
5. Teamwork capabilities
6. Good personality (outgoing)
7. Initiative & responsibility
8. Job "fit"
9. Specific courses
10. Adaptability
11. Leadership ability
12. Ability to communicate
13. Work habits
14. Positive attitude
15. Clarity of goals

Δ REASONS FOR REJECTION

1. Poor personal appearance
2. "Know it all" attitude
3. Inability to express oneself clearly - poor voice, diction, grammar
4. Lack of planning for career - no purpose or goals
5. Lack of interest and enthusiasm - passive and indifferent
6. Lack of confidence and poise-nervousness, ill-at-ease
7. Overemphasis on money
8. Poor scholastic record
9. Unwilling to start at the bottom
10. Making excuses, evasiveness, hedging about unfavorable factors in one’s record
11. Lack of tact
12. Lack of courtesy, ill mannered
13. Condemnation of past employers
14. Lack of vitality
15. Failing to look the interviewer in the eye
16. Limp, “dead fish” handshake

Δ WHAT THE INTERVIEWER EXPECTS FROM YOU

1. A professional attitude and appearance
2. An indication that you know about the organization
3. A clear idea of what you want to do
4. The ability to "sell yourself" and your ability to do the job

Stages of the Interview

STAGE ONE: INTRODUCTORY PHASE (2-5 minutes)

- Shake hands with the interviewer
- Use the interviewer's name
- Assure that the interviewer has your résumé
- Project a positive attitude; show enthusiasm

STAGE TWO: QUALIFICATION ASSESSMENT (15-20 minutes)

- Questions regarding goals, objectives, education, experience, interests, activities
- Listen actively
- Watch cues from the interviewer for feedback
- Show pride in your past performance
- Your answers should be complete, clear, concise and true
- Do not give only "yes" or "no" answers

STAGE THREE: ORGANIZATIONAL INFORMATION PHASE (10-20 minutes)

- Listen
- Clarify any questions you have about the job or organization
- Prepare five or six questions to ask the interviewer

STAGE FOUR: TERMINATION PHASE (1-2 minutes)

- Briefly summarize your strongest qualifications
- Express enthusiasm for the job
- Make certain you understand the next step
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time

Questions An Employer May Ask

Δ QUESTIONS ABOUT YOURSELF

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your major strengths?
3. What is a weakness that you have, and what are you doing to correct it?
4. What can you do that someone else can't?
5. Why should I hire you over other candidates?
6. What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you will be successful in your field?
7. What were the three most important events (decisions) of your life?
8. Are you a leader?
9. What do you do in your leisure time?
10. Tell me about an accomplishment in which you take pride.
11. What magazines or books do you read? Why?
12. What qualities do you admire in others?

Δ QUESTIONS ABOUT CAREER GOALS OR PLANS

1. Where do you hope to be in five (ten) years?
2. How much money do you hope to earn at age 30? 35?
3. What does success mean to you?
4. What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your chosen field?
5. What is your career goal?

Δ QUESTIONS ABOUT SCHOOL/EDUCATION

1. How does your education relate to our needs?
2. What were your favorite and least favorite subjects in school?
3. What kinds of professors did you like?
4. What is your G.P.A.?
5. Why did you major in _____? Did you always plan to major in _____?
6. Why did you go to _____ (school)?
7. If you were starting all over, what courses would you take?
8. What percentage of your college expenses did you earn and pay for?
9. Do you have plans for graduate work?
10. Are your grades an indication of your academic achievements?

Δ QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE ORGANIZATION/COMPANY/JOB BEING APPLIED FOR

1. What position in our company/organization do you want?
2. Would you make a good _____? (e.g. sales rep., advisor, editor, etc.)
3. Why do you want to work for us? Why are you interviewing with us?
4. Why should I hire you?
5. In addition to the literature we sent out, what other sources did you use to find out about our company/organization?
6. Why are you interested in this field?
7. How long do you intend to stay with our _____ (company/organization)?
8. What would be your greatest contribution to our operation?
9. Can you handle the responsibilities of this position?
10. In what area of the country would you prefer to work?
11. What qualifications do you have that would make you successful with us?
12. What are the disadvantages of this field?

Δ PREVIOUS WORK EXPERIENCE QUESTIONS

1. What has annoyed you about people that you have worked with?
2. What have you learned from some of your past jobs?
3. Do you work well under pressure?
4. Do you prefer a large or small company/organization? Why?
5. What jobs have you enjoyed the most? The least? Why?
6. Do you like routine work?
7. How often, and in what way, did you communicate with your subordinates and superiors?
8. Do you like regular hours?
9. What specific skills acquired or used in previous jobs relate to this position?
10. How do you handle criticism?
11. What do you think determines a person's progress in a company?
12. Do you like to travel?
13. What kinds of jobs have you held? How were they obtained? Why did you leave?
14. What kind of boss do you prefer?

Questions That You May Ask An Employer

***CAUTION*:** When employers have supplied you with literature about the company/organization before the interview, they expect you to read it, study it and formulate questions from it. Asking questions that could have been answered by reading the brochure *wastes the interviewer's time* and does not speak well of you. If the literature does not give you the answer, the following questions are fair game:

1. What kinds of people do you usually look for? What sort of person are you looking for to fill this particular position?
2. Can you tell me about your own experience with the company/organization?
3. What have you liked most and least about working for _____?
4. What happens during the training program?
5. What was your first job in your career?
6. What does it take to advance in your field?
7. Do women have an equal chance to enter your field? Minorities?
8. What aspects of your job provide you with the most satisfaction? The least?
9. Has your company hired Northwestern graduates before? How have they done?
10. How do you rate your competition?
11. What do you consider to be your organization's three most important assets?
12. What do you see ahead for your company/organization in the next ten years?
13. What are your plans for expanding the _____ department?
14. Is this a newly created position or is someone being replaced?
15. What percentage of higher positions are filled by promotion?
16. Is it possible to transfer between different departments or different geographical regions?
17. How will I be evaluated?
18. How would I spend a typical day?
19. Does your company encourage further education?
20. What characteristics do achievers in this company seem to share?
21. Where does this position fit into the departmental/organizational structure?