INTERVIEW PREPARATION AND PROCESS

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INTRODUCTION

We have all experienced the feelings before, sweaty hands, a racing heart, nausea, anxiousness. Regardless of how our bodies react to stress the tendency to be nervous before a job interview is common. The good news is that there are certain ways we can educate ourselves on the interview process in order to reduce these unpleasant symptoms. This Interviewing Packet is designed to help you familiarize yourself with the processes involved in preparing for and performing well in an interview.

So what determines success in an interview anyway?
1. Appearance (cleanliness and clarity of your resume, application, clothes) 45%
2. Responsiveness (verbal answers, facial expressions, etc) 35%
3. Experience (how your skills match the employers needs) 10%
4. Other Details (mood and tone of the interview) 10%

100%

*Because everything except your hard skills and experience are UNDER YOUR CONTROL, you control 90% of the interviews’ successful outcome!

PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

What to Bring
- A notebook and pen
- Your master application, extra copies of your resume and reference list
- $ for gas, bus, parking, etc
- The business address, telephone number and name of your interviewer
- Your social security card and driver's license or state picture ID
- Any licenses, certificates, grades, etc that apply to the job (ex: Commercial Driver’s License, Food Handlers Permit)

How to Prepare
- REVIEW your resume and cover letter.
- PRACTICE shaking hands, making eye contact, and smiling.
- RE-read that job description! Do you know what qualities they are looking for?!
- GOOGLE the company/organization.
- PRACTICE answering interview questions.
- Know the exact job title you are applying for (e.g. administrative assistant, warehouse worker, etc.) and be able to explain why the company should hire you for the job.
- BRAINSTORM at least 2 questions you can ask in the interview. Write them down.
- Find out about the parking availability and directions to the employer IN ADVANCE.
- Plan to arrive EARLY. Plan your schedule and route so you arrive 10 to 15 minutes prior to the appointment time. You may also want to consider driving to the address BEFORE the interview so you will know exactly where you need to be.
Appearance
A very important part of the interview is **what you look like**. Do you look professional and neat? An employer might decide **that someone who does not care about her/his appearance will not care about the job**. Neat, clean and conservative is a safe standard for dress and grooming.

Rule of Thumb: **Dress a step above what the best employee for that job would wear.**

- Wear industry appropriate attire (e.g. suit, button up shirt and tie)
- Wear proper clothes for the job (clean and not wrinkled)
- Make sure clothes are business professional (i.e. no cleavage or skin above the knees should be visible)
- Don’t wear anything too strange or trendy
- Match your colors (neutral colors are recommended)
- Clean/ shine your shoes
- Iron clothes if needed
- Wear natural looking make-up (if applicable)
- Make sure your tie (if applicable) is professional
- Don’t wear too much jewelry and perfume/cologne
- Style and/or trim hair (and facial hair, if applicable)
- Make sure nails are clean and trimmed; neutral polish tones

THE INTERVIEW

Successful interviewing is more than just “knowing what to say.” Someone who is a good interviewee is aware of their words AND **how** they speak and their **body language**. If you appear **professional, calm** and **prepared**, you have a very good chance of getting the job.

Greeting
- The interview begins when you walk in the door; **smile** and **be polite** to everyone.
- Greet the interviewer in a friendly manner, look them in the eye and shake their hand firmly.
- Show proper respect for the interviewer. If she/he introduces herself or himself as Mr. Jones or Ms. Jones, they are asking you to use their last name. If they call themselves by their first name, such as Mike or Nancy, then it is ok to call them by their first name. Do not refer to them as “Buddy,” “Pal,” or “Honey.”

Nonverbal Communication
- More than 50% of your communication is nonverbal- **how** you say things matters more than **what** you say! **Isn't that incredible?!** How you stand and sit, walk, dress, and your facial movements, energy, gestures and eye contact are ALL nonverbal signals.
- Watch your posture; don’t slouch.
- Avoid yawning or fidgeting. Try not to appear nervous in any other way (even if you are!) Try to be aware of how you are sitting and what your hands are doing.
- Make eye contact, but don’t stare.
- Speak clearly, and loudly enough to be heard!
Responding to Questions
Before the interview, spend time researching the job and practice answering questions aloud. Identify and know how to talk about your strengths and weaknesses.

- Never interrupt the interviewer! Let them finish what they want to say.
- Answer all the employers’ questions accurately, honestly and directly.
- Listen actively! This means: make eye contact, nod and listen carefully to the words they are using. This will help you be less nervous AND you will be able to use the words that they chose (ex: “our ideal candidate is very timely”) to describe yourself later in the interview (ex:”I am a very timely person and employee”).
- Use concrete examples when talking about yourself and your work history. For example, if asked about how you resolve conflicts, don’t say: “I am always calm.” Instead, tell a work-related story demonstrating how you stay calm under pressure.
- Use the best, most correct English you can and do not curse/swear.
- Take your time with your answers. If you have more to say, say it!
- Avoid mentioning your personal problems. The interviewer is interested in your ability, not your troubles.
- Be positive in all your answers. Even a negative experience can have a positive outcome.
- When they ask about your weaknesses, don’t give a fake/insincere answer. Provide them with an honest, but not serious weakness and then tell them what you are doing to work on improving yourself. (See “Answering Tough Questions”, pg 7)
- Emphasize what you can do for the employer and how you can contribute to the business.
- When asked, be able to point out the value from training, work experience, unpaid work, hobbies and life experiences as they apply to the position you are seeking. Keep it work-related!

Interview Wrap-Up
MOST Interviews end with an opportunity for you to ask questions about the job and company. You should have questions prepared; make sure they reflect your research and help the employer to imagine you on the job.

- If you want the job, say so!
- Summarize why you are qualified. Mention a particular accomplishment or activity you have done that fits the job.
- Ask questions and make statements that demonstrate positive values (ex: ask about benefits, how overtime is compensated, team work, leadership and supervision, etc)
- Always ask for business cards or make sure you have contact information from everyone in the interview. This will help you write “thank you” notes afterward.
- Ask what the next step is in the hiring process. Will there be additional interviews? When will the hiring decision be made?
- Thank the employer!
- Immediately after the interview, think about what went well and what you could improve on so that you can be better prepared for the next interview.
INTERVIEW DO’S & DON’TS

- Don’t arrive late for the interview
- Don’t provide the employer with an incomplete or sloppy application form
- Don’t have a poor personal appearance
- Don’t chew gum
- Don’t smoke before the interview
- Don’t be over-aggressive
- Don’t provide too short or non-related responses
- Don’t place emphasis on money
- Don’t be rude or immature
- Don’t be stiff (have a sense of humor when appropriate)
- Don’t have a negative attitude about past employers
- Don’t look around when you are speaking or being spoken to (make direct eye contact at least 70% of the time)
- Do be confident!
- Do give concrete and work-related examples to the interview questions!
- Do practice your responses BEFOREHAND.
- Do express interest and enthusiasm!
- Do demonstrate that you can express information clearly.
- Do state that you have personal career goals.
- Do ask questions when you have the chance.
- Do thank the interviewer for his/her time.
- Do follow-up with a thank you note.

FOLLOW-UP

- Spend time evaluating the interview. What went well in the interview? How can you improve?
- Record your follow-up plans. Write the date and time for your next contact with the employer. Be sure you follow through on these plans.
- Send a “thank you” note to the interviewer(s) the same day that the interview took place. If possible, hand-write and send the thank-you card by mail. If you collected business cards during the interview you should have no problem finding the address and spelling names correctly.
- Follow-up in person or by phone if you have not heard back from the employer after one week. Express your appreciation for the interview again and let the employer know that you are sincerely interested in working for the company.

Quick Reflect: Should you talk down about a bad boss you once had?  
Y   N
Should you arrive EXACTLY when the interview was scheduled?  
Y   N
Is the interviewer the only person who gets to ask questions?  
Y   N
Should you be enthusiastic and ask for the job directly?  
Y   N
APPENDIX A: PRACTICE QUESTIONS

These are questions that we believe you are very likely to encounter, no matter what type of job you are applying for. It is HIGHLY recommended that you read these questions (or, better yet, have someone read them to you) and practice responding to them ALOUD.

We have grouped the questions into 6 major sections so that you can think about your work-related scenarios, stories, and examples and how those can be broadly applied.

Also, In APPENDIX B: Sample Questions to Ask, we provide you with some examples of what you will say when they ask the important and guaranteed: “Do you have any questions for me?”

Tell me about yourself, how others describe you and your education/background, etc…

• Tell me about yourself.
  o This is an open-ended question & an icebreaker in the interview. The important thing to remember is to keep the answer job related

• Tell me about a personal accomplishment for which you feel a tremendous sense of pride.
  o Give examples of ways in which you saved the employer time, money or developed an office procedure that improved efficiency.

• What personal traits make you stand out for this role?
  o This is another great opportunity for you to sell your skills. By giving examples of past accomplishments, the employer can visualize your contributions to his/her company.

• Tell me about your education.
  o Even though your resume includes this information, some employers like to have you expand on the subject. Mention your grade point average and good attendance record. Include all classes, seminars, workshops and on-the-job training you have attended that are linked to your goals.

• How do others describe you?
  o Another way for the employer to ask this would be, “How would you fit into this work group?” If you don’t know how you would answer this question, call some friends and/or ask people you have worked with how they would describe you.

• Whom do you admire and why?

Brag about yourself: your problem solving, teamwork, work achievements, leadership, etc

• Why should we hire you for this position?
  o Think about the position description and highlight the skills that they want

• Give an example where you showed leadership and initiative?

• Describe a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty

• Provide an example of a time when you offered a solution to a difficult problem
  o It is important to be able to show the process you go through when presented with a problem. State the problem and the steps you followed to reach the solution

• When have you had competing demands on your time and how did you handle them?

• What is your greatest strength?
This is the time to describe the skills you have identified that will most effectively “market” you as an employee.

- Name a particularly demanding goal that you have achieved.
- Give an example of when you were able to contribute to a team project.
- How have you handled a difficult working relationship?
- What have you done to build strong teams?
- Describe your problem solving approach.
- What do you feel is an acceptable attendance record?

- **Address your failures, weakness, and ‘learning moments’ (Honesty with a positive spin!)**
  - What is your greatest weakness?
    - Always turn this into a positive! State a weakness and turn it into a positive by showing how you overcame the weakness. “In the past, it has been difficult for me to accept criticism from my peers. However, I have learned to value and solicit this input and it has improved my job performance.”
  - Think about something you consider a failure in your life, and tell me why you think it happened?
    - Failure implies error; always emphasize the positive. For example, “I dropped out of school at age 17 to work for a fast-food employer. I later realized I could not make enough money to raise my family. I returned to school in the evenings and acquired clerical skills so I am now qualified to do this job”
  - If you could choose one thing to do over again, what would you choose and why?

- **Questions related to former jobs, bosses, coworkers, etc (Be careful to stay positive!)**
  - Describe your best/worst boss?
    - This could be a trap. Do not present a negative picture of any past employers. If given a choice, always talk about your best boss. If pressed to describe the worst boss, pick a work-related characteristic that can be stated in a positive way.
  - What did you least like about your previous job?
  - How did you get along with your former boss and co-workers?
  - What did you like best about your last job?
  - What didn’t you like about your last job?

- **Explore your ideal workplace (why do you want to work for them?) and their company (do your research!)**
  - How do you think you will fit into this organization?
    - This is the time to express your interest in the job and knowledge of the employer. The more you know about the operation the easier this question will be to answer.
  - What type of team allows you to thrive professionally?
  - What type of work environment do you prefer?
  - What attracted you to this position?
    - This will give the employer another gauge for measuring how well you will fit the job opening. Emphasize your skills that match with what their looking for.
- Why have you chosen this particular field?
  - This is one way to discover your enthusiasm and dedication to your career
- Why are you interested in working for this company/what do you know about this company?
  - This will show the employer that you have done your homework. State the positive things you have learned about the company and how they fit with your career goals. This shows the employer that you cared enough about the interview to prepare for it
- What is your vision of the “perfect” job?

**Time-based questions: how have you changed/grown, where do you see yourself in the future?**

- What have you done to develop or change in the last few years?
  - This shows a willingness to be challenged and to improve. Employers are looking for people who are willing to continue learning. Talk about formal and informal educational opportunities you have pursued. Mention books and periodicals you have read related to your field of interest
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
  - Telling the interviewer, “In this job” is not the best idea. Indicate that you hope to acquire sufficient skills and knowledge within that time to make a positive contribution to the company
- Why are you changing career paths now?

**The almost 100% guaranteed question: Do you have any questions for me?**

- Continue to the next page and read: APENDIX B: Sample Questions to Ask

**Answering Tough Questions**

Be prepared. Answering difficult questions that may reflect negatively on you can be answered by using the "sandwich model." In this sandwich, the bread is positive, the peanut butter and jelly is negative. So, you will start with a positive statement, then address the negative situation, and end with another positive statement about what you've done to overcome the problem. Ending with a positive statement leaves a positive impression. Practice answering these tough questions before the interview!

- Why were you let go?
  - My skills are in engineering. My employer decided those skills were no longer needed. Therefore, I've taken some training and upgraded my skills (specify) to meet the qualifications for this type of job
- It appears you haven't worked in the last five years.
  - I've been busy going to school full-time (specify), raising two children and managing my home. I'm now prepared and qualified for this job.
- Your application indicates that you have been convicted of a felony in the last 7 years. Tell me about your conviction.
APPENDIX B: SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

Be prepared to ask questions at the end of the interview. As you research the company, come up with at least five questions. Make sure that your questions are focused and turn them into a dialogue about your skills.

- What can I do between now and the start of the job to help me hit the ground running?
- What can I do to be considered a terrific performer compared to someone who is more average?
- How well is the position defined? Can its duties be expanded?
- Would you describe an average day on this job?
- What is the history of the position? Why is it vacant?
- What aspects of this job would you like to see performed better?
- What are the key challenges or problems of this position?
- Where can I go from here, assuming that I meet/exceed the job responsibilities?
- How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
- What are the employer’s short- and long-term objectives?
- What are some outside influences that affect company growth?
- Where does the company excel? What are its limitations?
- When and how will I be evaluated? What are the performance standards?
- With whom would I be working? Who would be my supervisor? Who would I supervise?
- What is the department’s environment like?
- When will you make the hiring decision? May I call you for the decision? When is a good time?
- What personal qualities or abilities are important to being successful in this job?
- What opportunities for advancement are there in this position?
- Do you have any concerns about me or my abilities that I can address now?
APPENDIX C: SAMPLE REFERENCE PAGE

Job Seeker
555 5th Ave N
Seattle, WA 55555
(206) 555-5555
jobseeker@yahoo.com

PROFESSIONAL REFERENCES

Ms. Ivana Helper
Manager
XYZ Job Company
(206) 555-1234
IHelper@jobco.com

Mr. Len Dahan
Executive Chef
Burger King
(253) 555-7890
LDahan@bk.com

Mr. Willie B. Boss
Supervisor
247 Mini Mart
(206) 555-1212
WBBoss@247.com

(*Note: Always format your reference page to match your resume)
APPENDIX D: SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

Your Name
Address
City, State ZIP
Phone Number
Email
Date

Recipient Name
Job Title
Company Name
Address

Dear Mr./Ms. __________: 

1st paragraph: Thank the employer for meeting with you and mention the position title that you interviewed for.

2nd paragraph: State why you think you should get the job and why you want to work for the company you interviewed with. This is also a good time to mention anything memorable that was said during the interview.

3rd paragraph: Tell the employer that you appreciate their consideration for the position you applied to. Add anything else that you find important to say.

Sincerely,

Your Name