

HINTS FOR THE PERFECT STRESS-FREE INTERVIEW:

Strange as it may seem, research suggests that interviewing is one of the most unreliable management techniques. The majority of managers and senior executives have not been trained in interviewing skills. This can work to your advantage: you can train yourself to show your very best side and your accomplishments. It is important always to tell the truth in an interview, but with forethought, rehearsal and good preparation, you can present what you have to offer in the most positive and attractive way.

Managers and senior personnel are often less prepared than the average jobseeker, partly because it's not something they often do and partly because they do not feel the need to 'rehearse' like jobseekers do. However, remember that an interview is a conversation, so do not talk more than 60% of the time. If that sounds extreme, remember that most jobs are lost through something you say and not something you don't, therefore you need to make the interview an interactive process.

Preparation:

The key to success lies in the amount of preparation you carry out prior to the interview. 'The amount of people who turn up at a senior level without looking at the Web site is astounding' says Graham Thompson, Recruitment Manager at Jaguar and Land Rover. 'Sometimes they don't even know what the cars are in the Jaguar product line'. It's important to know what a company does, as well as its strategy, structure and objectives, and such knowledge can make the difference between success and failure in an interview. If necessary, write your questions for the interviewer down and prepare them thoroughly. During the interview it is appropriate to write some notes, but it will be distracting to the interviewer if you are writing constantly. Have clear objectives before attending the interview:

- To be better prepared than the competition
- To get onto the final shortlist
- Look at the website – think of the business and its issues as a whole and not just the division you have applied for e.g. international issues, environment, changes in market place, stock exchange fluctuations, etc.
- Study the company literature. Make a note of the chairman, MDs' names - know who the key personnel are
- Ask your consultant to provide detailed information on the person who will be interviewing you, and download the last set of accounts from Company House
- Prepare a range of questions to ask, using your research of the company and knowledge of the industry. Topics could cover – growth plans, business structure, areas of current business concern and possible future concerns, training programmes, study support etc.
- Avoid asking about benefits such as holiday or car allowance. These can be discussed at the second stage and your consultant will be able to brief you
- Be prepared for personal questions, and always respond firmly and politely
- Work through answers to likely questions, especially those about your strengths and weaknesses

Connecting futures

Accountancy, Senior & Executive Finance, Public Practice and Human Resources Recruitment

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Dress to impress:

You need to look professional and mature, so be traditional rather than avant-garde. Dark colours are more powerful than lighter colours. If possible, visit the hairdressers a couple of days in advance so you look neat and tidy. When it comes to jewellery, less is more – you don't want to jingle like a cattle bell during the interview. Men should wear conservative ties that complement their suit. Wear polished shoes and clean your fingernails. If you smoke, refrain until the interview has ended to avoid the smell on your clothes. Wait until you are off the client's premises and out of sight before lighting up.

Apparel aside, you need a good handshake too. No one is going to offer you a job on the basis of a shake alone, but a good friendly and firm handshake will contribute to the overall impression you wish to create. Too hard will seem aggressive but too soft will undermine your strength of character, so make it firm but not too much, and make eye contact at the same time. Keep a hanky handy as stress can make you perspire more.

THE INTERVIEW:

Body language and non-verbal clues:

What we say with our bodies is very powerful, contributing over 60% of the credibility of what people say, and you can increase your likelihood of success by ensuring that you give out positive non-verbal clues. Sit as far back in the chair as possible but keep your posture forward. A 'low leg' cross-position is appropriate. Do not tap your feet, wring your hands together, or shuffle nervously in your seat. The main positive NVCs are as follows:

- A high smile rate
- Nodding while the interviewer is speaking
- Leaning forward (but not invading the interviewer's personal space)
- A high level of eye contact
- But be careful not to overdo things!

Research carried out in 1978 identified a positive relationship between qualification for a position and eye contact. Those that had good qualifications but made no eye contact were considered to lack self-confidence and be less suitable. Would you put someone in a job that appeared to lack confidence?

Three basic types of questions:

Interviewers ask themselves three basic types of questions, which are the major concerns of the selector:

- **Can this person do the job?** This question is about experience, track record, and achievements – in short, what you have done. About 60% of a professional interviewer's time with you will be spent on assessing you. It's up to you to take any questions and respond in such a way that you can deliver relevant information about your skills and experience.
- **Will this person do the job?** How hard working are you? Will you be loyal to the company? Do you need constant pushing to complete work or are you motivated? In short, all the aspects that convince your potential employer that you will do more than just fulfil your contract. It is that additional commitment to personal excellence, which indicates not only that you are able to do something but also the positive way that you will do it.
- **Will this person fit in?** It doesn't matter how good you are, if you do not fit the company image then you are unlikely to get the job. The more senior you are in an organisation, the more important fitting in becomes. At an interview, provided you agree with the company value system of your potential employers, it is very important for you to take whatever opportunities they may give you to show how you can fit in.

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Frequently asked interview questions:

No two interviews will ever follow the same format. There are however a number of key questions that are commonly asked during the interview process:

- Why do you want this job?
- What do you know about our organisation?
- What are your major achievements?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- What do you look for in a manager?
- What motivates you?
- Describe a difficult situation and what you did about it?
- How do you deal with conflict in the workplace?
- Why are you dissatisfied with your present job?
- Why have you stayed so long/so briefly with your present company?
- What makes you think you can be successful with us?
- How long do you expect to stay with us?
- Why do you want to leave your present firm?
- Do you prefer working alone or within a team?
- What do you think of your current manager?

Example questions to ask the interviewer:

You don't want to bombard your interviewer with questions, but it's often a good idea to show them that you're really thinking about the role and the company.

- What can you tell me about the team I would be working with?
- What activities could I engage in and how might that help me on the job if I'm hired?
- What would you hope that I would achieve in the first six months?
- What's the most important thing I can do to help within my first three months?
- What are the company's plans for the future?
- Who in the company would review my performance?
- What training or development opportunities are there for someone in this role?
- How do you encourage staff to progress within the company?
- What is the typical career path for someone in this role?
- What's the next step in the selection process?

Closing technique:

Usually the interviewer will thank you for your time and ask if you have any further questions. Don't ask more questions unless there is something vital to be resolved. Read the body language of the interviewer – if they are busy shuffling papers and fidgeting in their seats, they probably have another meeting to attend and do not want to spend unnecessary time repeating themselves.

It's best to sum up with: "It's been an interesting meeting. I think you have just about covered everything and I would like to acknowledge that I am very interested in the role because..." This is your opportunity to show the interviewer that you have listened to and taken on board the relevant points during the interview. Keep it brief.

After the interview:

Inform your consultant why you were or were not interested in the position; give facts rather than "it's a great company to work for". No matter how good an interviewee you become, you will not win a job offer every time. Don't despair; you can't win them all, but you can learn not to make avoidable mistakes and to promote yourself effectively at the next interview. Good luck!

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RESIGNING:

It is true to say that your present company has helped you professionally and as a result you may feel uncomfortable resigning. You will be leaving colleagues who may have become friends and you may even see some of them out of work socially. These people may have been instrumental in advancing your career and this makes you feel uneasy.

Your company will be sorry to lose you. You may have contributed to their sales and profits. You may be in the middle of an important project that requires your talents. Your manager's reactions may run to anger, frustration and possibly even pure terror. He is thinking: "Who's going to do the work? We are all putting in long hours. If I push harder, others may leave." They may also be taking into account the costs involved in replacing you, both in time and agency fees. Considerations at this stage include:

The counter offer:

It is natural to resist change and disruption. Your company will want to keep you and may attempt to do so with a counter offer. They may come up with the following suggestions:

- They were going to promote you within six months
- They will match or even better your offer and put it into effect the next day
- They say do not make a decision now but to get back to them in a week and discuss it

Implications of the counter offer:

Stop and ask yourself the following questions:

- The new position offered me the best environment to fulfil my career needs
- If I stay will my loyalty be questioned?
- This rise makes me expensive for the position that I am in. Will this affect future salary increases?
- Will my colleagues still consider me part of the team?

Within 90% of cases where a person accepts a counter offer, they are made redundant or looking for a new job again within six months. Most people within the top tier of management would leave their jobs if a head hunter called them with the right opportunity. If money is involved and you receive an immediate pay rise, this money has to come from someone's budget, which is most likely to be from your next budgeted increase.

The professional manager will make a career decision objectively. It will be free of the emotional pressures one is likely to feel when being urged to reconsider. Everyone will offer advice, but you should depend primarily upon your own judgment because quite simply you are the only one who can fully understand all the implications. Remember, the counter offer is only a belated recognition of the contribution you have made to your company. Move ahead with the goal of making yourself as valuable to your new employer as you were to your current employer.

The resignation letter:

Keep it short and devoid of emotion. Don't forget you will need a good reference! Thank your employer for the support and opportunities that you have received and for the career enrichment that you have enjoyed, but then add that it is in your best career interests to pursue opportunities elsewhere.

Example below...

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Dear ...

Please accept this letter as formal notification of my resignation as of today's date, Wednesday 13th February 2013. I have decided that it is time to move on and I have accepted a position elsewhere. This was not an easy decision and took a lot of consideration. However, I am confident that my new role will help me to move towards some of the goals I have for my career.

Please be assured that I will do all I can to assist in the smooth transfer of my responsibility before leaving. I wish both you and (Company Name) every good fortune and I would like to thank you for having me as part of your team.

Yours sincerely,

DATA PROTECTION STATEMENT:

Goldhawk Associates Limited is registered under the Data Protection Act 1998. Details of your application, plus copies of your CV and any associated records, are held electronically on our computer server and in hard copy at our premises in Maidstone. All information held by Goldhawk Associates Limited will be treated in strictest confidence.

You will be advised of any planned marketing activity that is to include your details, e.g. a targeted mail shot to potential employers or if you are to be included as part of our monthly mailing. In both circumstances, your personal details will not form any part of the data released.

We will always contact you prior to submitting your details to any client, and we will endeavour to ensure that you receive as much information as we are at liberty to give you.

From time to time, we may use the data that we hold to update you with regard to services or events either we would consider be beneficial to you. Please let us know if you would prefer not to receive information in this way.

AGREEMENT WITH WORK SEEKERS:

Following your recent correspondence we write to confirm how we are to provide you recruitment services.

- Goldhawk Associates are to provide you permanent recruitment services that is to say
- we will act as an agency as defined under The Employment Agencies Act 1973.
- You authorise Goldhawk Associates to seek work on your behalf and consent to your
- personal data and CV being forwarded to clients.
- In our recent correspondence you informed us that you wish us to seek employment
- within the field of finance.

Thank you for selecting Goldhawk Associates. Should you have any queries, or require any further information on the services we provide please call head office on 01622 697750.

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