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INTERVIEW TECHNIQUES

It doesn't matter if you've been to one or one hundred interviews, they are invariably daunting experiences. With thorough preparation though, as well as knowing a few tips and tricks to help you through, you should find that any interview loses its fear factor and instead turns into a great opportunity to sell yourself to the company you are applying to.

After all, there is no need to doubt your credentials for the job. The company has already received, reviewed and approved the CV you sent to them, so you can be sure that your skills fit the job nicely. Now it is all about selling yourself, and reassuring the potential employers that you are the right person for the role they have available.



PREP FOR SUCCESS AND COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Anyone walking into an interview without completing the necessary preparation is almost certainly destined for failure. Preparation is key, and will be the deciding factor when it comes to whether you impress the interviewers or not. There are many different things you should look into before an interview - and make sure you do so weeks beforehand, and not just the day before! Some absolute must do jobs for your preparation are:

- **Understand the role.** If you are applying for a role, it is vital you know what it entails, what skills are needed to complete it and why your specific skill set is a perfect fit for the role at hand. Read the description very, very carefully, as some roles might entail more aspects than you might otherwise think.
- **Research the company.** Find out absolutely everything you possibly can about the company. This includes the industries they work in, the specific working methods that they've adopted, what type of customers they serve - anything and everything, essentially. In order to find this, take a look on their website, read all the literature they send you and look on independent sites too, such as Wikipedia. They won't expect you to know everything about the inner workings of the company, but showing you've made an effort will impress them hugely.
- **Plan your day.** Before you wake up on the morning of the interview, you should have everything in place to ensure that it goes smoothly. This means you need to have the route planned (leaving plenty of time for hold-ups), have all documentation ready to pick up and all contact details for the company, should you run into issues while trying to get there. Also, make sure that they are able to contact you

- charge your phone overnight and make sure emails are synched properly with the phone too.

- **Make a great impression.** When you attend an interview, you should be dressed as smartly as possible. For men, a suit and tie are a must, while women should wear smart trousers or skirt and also a smart blouse or shirt. Keep colours neutral as well. In addition, shave properly, don't wear too much jewellery (a wedding ring is ideally all that you should wear) and avoid smothering yourself in lots of spray. If driving, make sure you don't wear your suit jacket in the car - if you do, the back will get creased and spoil the perfect look you are aiming for.
- **Second guess their questions.** We all know that second guessing is not always the best idea, but when it comes to interviews there are certain questions you can safely assume they'll ask. There's a whole section below on the specific questions you could be asked, but when it comes to preparation, think long and hard about the questions you could be asked, practice answering them perfectly - perhaps by getting a friend or family member to adopt the role of interviewer - and practice giving answers that are more than one or two words. Of course, there will be questions asked that you haven't thought of, but you'll be far happier going in knowing that you can at least answer a few of them professionally and confidently.
- **Work on how you present yourself.** Not many people realise that it is not what you say that forms peoples' impressions, but how you act. Those entering the room meekly, providing a weak handshake and avoid eye-contact immediately mark themselves out as poor candidates - so if you are guilty of these, practice until you get it right!

Some other things to ensure you do on interview day include smiling and presenting yourself as a happy person, not sitting back defensively in the chair and keeping your hands still - people who fidget are immediately marked as unconfident.

Common Interview Questions

In the previous section, we stated that there are a number of questions employers are highly likely to ask you, and that you need to practise them before you attend the interview. Employers aren't stupid, and they know that some questions that they ask are common ones - so failing to answer these correctly shows them that you are not the kind of person who prepares properly, and therefore not the kind of person they want working for them. Below you'll find some of these common questions, along with how to answer them effectively.

Q: Why do you want to work here?

A: Employers want to know what attracted you to this role. Great answers to give to this question include more responsibility, better career progression or because the role is something that you hold a keen interest in. You should most definitely avoid giving answers such as more money or that it is closer to home though!

Q: What made you leave your last job?

A: They need to find this out to ensure that the reasons for leaving won't be replicated in their company, but you should be honest - if you left for good reasons, they won't have any issues with your answer. Answers such as career progression and extra responsibility, but answers such as "I hated my boss" or "I wasn't being paid enough" are definite ones to avoid. Don't be nasty about the previous company either, as



this just shows a personality trait that the potential employer will not like at all.

Q: Can you describe yourself to us?

A: This doesn't mean "blond, 5'8', blue eyes" but instead the different traits that you possess - traits that you should tailor to the job at hand. These are personal to everyone, so we can't give exact answers, but make sure you think long and hard about this question before you attend - many of the answers will tie in with the personal statement on your CV.

Q: What are your strengths?

A: This is probably the easiest question you can be asked, as you should already know exactly what you are good at. Perhaps the most challenging part of the answer is ensuring that you provide examples that will relate to the role they are offering. Make sure you don't sound too cocky though, as nobody likes someone with a huge ego.

Q: What are your weaknesses?

A: The question that everyone hates, because it seems that whatever you say, you are talking down your chances of getting the job. The key here is to highlight an area that you are working on. For example, you might say that your knowledge of a certain subject is not fantastic, but you are currently completing a course to bring it up to scratch. Never mention undesirable personal traits though, such as being late or having poor personal hygiene, as these are things that the employer will think you are not likely to ever change. Weaknesses are fine, as long as you are trying to turn them around.

The Dreaded Question...

There is one question above all others that people hate though, and it is also possibly the most important question you will be asked throughout the interview. Imagine the scene: you walk into the room and say your hellos, before then sitting down. Then they hit you with it:

"So, tell us about yourself."

There's so much to say and not much time to say it. So what do you include? What do you leave out? How long do you spend talking on this question? It's such an important question that we've got a whole guide to it below...

Firstly, you should start by introducing yourself - your name, where you currently live, and what job you currently have. Then you can move on to the key attributes that make you suitable for the position. For example, you could say:

"While at university I completed a dissertation on the effects of marketing, which I know will directly impact on the way I will work in your organisation."

This is not the time to tell them about your hobbies and pastimes though - in fact, there really isn't a time to mention these through the whole interview.

Once you have told them about your personal strengths, you can then move on to giving them a summary of your career to date. This will be the main aspect of this question, so make sure you have prepared well and thought about what you are going to say - focussing on the ways in which each job complements the job you are applying for.

While summarising your career, make sure you include plenty of examples of good work you have completed. For

example, if you are applying for a sales role, you could say something like:

"In my job at ABC Company, I implemented a new script for all telephone operators, with the goal of gaining more leads per day. This script resulted in leads going up by 20%, and contributed directly to an increase in sales for the company."

As an Apprentice it is likely you won't have much work history yet, so examples from school/university, or work experience can be used. Any examples from voluntary work, such as Scouts or Girl Guides, would also be good to include, especially as they show you to be a person willing to give their time for good causes.

Once you have summarised your career, you are pretty much finished with this question. It is important to avoid any confusion regarding whether the answer is finished though, so try this: finish with a direct question to the interviewer. For example, you might say:

"...and the results were praised by my manager. Are there currently any scripts used by telephone operators here?"

The final thing to say about this question is this: you are telling them about yourself, but the real trick is to ensure that all of your answers relate to qualities the interviewer is looking for. You will almost certainly be asked this question, so make sure you spend a considerable amount of time thinking about your response prior to the interview starting.

HAVE YOU GOT ANY QUESTIONS?

At the end of 99% of interviews, the interviewer will ask you if you have anything you'd like to ask. It is absolutely vital that you ask something - that you show an interest in the way that company works and demonstrate that you are already thinking about what it would be like to work for them. Some of the best questions you can ask include:

- **What is the best aspect of this job? And what is the worst?**
- **Are there many opportunities for progression?**
- **Do staff members get sent on training courses to improve their career progression and understanding?**
- **What areas of the company are you looking to particularly strengthen in the near future?**
- **Is there anything you are concerned about in relation to my interview?**

The final question is a particularly good one to ask, as it allows you to readdress any areas that you might have faltered on throughout the course of the interview. Don't be afraid to respond to any of the answers they give to you - a conversation can often be struck up here and prove that you are good at talking to people, as well as listening to what they have to say.

It is also important to make sure you don't ask a few questions, as they will paint you in a bad light. These include:

- **What is the salary?**
- **How much holiday will I get?**
- **If I leave, how much notice do I have to give?**

When it is Time to Leave

What is the lasting impression an employer will have of you? The chances are it will be the final few minutes of the interview, so you must make sure you nail this part perfectly. Always make sure you are polite as you leave and that you shake their hand professionally, while asking them when you will hear from them. Make sure you only leave when prompted though - don't ask "is the interview over now?" as this makes it look like you can't wait to get out of there!

Many people don't realise that there is still time to make a good impression, even when you have left the room. A great tactic is to write a letter to the company after the interview, thanking them for their time. Within the letter, you can also take the time to remind them about why you are so well-suited to the role. It might not make any difference, but a nice gesture like this can do no harm either.



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