Launch

Interviews and Salary Negotiations

25 Tips for Interviewing

The interviewing stage of your job search is the most critical. Your success or failure in obtaining a position is often determined at the interview. However, anyone can learn to interview well, since most mistakes can be anticipated and corrected. Learn the following top 25 interviewing techniques to give you a winning edge.

1. Bring extra copies of your resume to the interview.
   Nothing shows less preparation and readiness than being asked for another copy of your resume and not having one. Come prepared with extra copies of your resume. You may be asked to interview with more than one person and it demonstrates professionalism and preparedness to anticipate needing extra copies.

2. Dress conservatively and professionally.
   What you wear to an interview can make a tremendous difference. It is important to convey a professional image, and it is better to overdress than underdress.

3. Be aware of your body language.
   Be alert, energetic, and focused on the interviewer. Make eye contact. Non-verbally, this communicates that you are interested in what the interviewer has to say.

4. Consider first and last impressions.
   The first and last five minutes of the interview are the most important. It is during this time that critical first and lasting impressions are made and the interviewer decides whether or not you are a viable candidate. Communicate positive behaviors during the first five minutes and be sure you are remembered when you leave.

5. Fill out company applications completely - even if you have a resume.

   Even though you have brought a copy of your resume, many companies require a completed application. Your willingness to complete one, and your thoroughness in doing so, will convey a great deal about your professionalism and ability to follow through.

   “Be alert, energetic, and focused on the interviewer.”

6. Remember that the purpose of every interview is to get an offer.
   You must impress your interviewer both professionally and personally to be offered the job. At the end of the interview, make sure you know what the next step is and when the employer expects to make a decision.

7. Understand employers’ needs.
   Present yourself as someone who can really add value to an organization. Show that you can fit into the work environment.
How do you compare with your peers in education, experience, training, salary, and career progression?

8. Be likeable.
   Be enthusiastic. People love to hire individuals who are easy to get along with and who are excited about their company. Be professional, yet demonstrate your interest and energy.

9. Make sure you have the right skills.
   Know your competition. How do you compare with your peers in education, experience, training, salary, and career progression? Mention the things you know how to do really well. They are the keys to your next job.

10. Display an ability to work hard to pursue an organization’s goals.
   Assume that most interviewers need to select someone who will fit well into their organization in terms of both productivity and personality. You must confirm that you are a hard-working, productive, and personable individual by emphasizing the benefits you will bring to the company.

11. Market all of your strengths.
   It is important to market yourself, including your technical qualifications, general skills and experiences as well as personal traits. Recruiters care about two things, credentials and personality. Can you do the job based on past performance and will you fit in with the corporate culture? Talk about your positive personality traits and give examples of how you demonstrate each one on the job.

12. Give definitive answers and specific results.
   Whenever you make a claim of your accomplishments, it will be more believable and better remembered if you cite specific examples and support for your claims. Tell the interviewer about business situations where you successfully used a skill and elaborate on the outcome. Be specific.

13. Don’t be afraid to admit mistakes.
   Employers want to know what mistakes you have made and how you have learned from them. Don’t be afraid to admit making mistakes in the past, but continuously stress your positive qualities as well, and how you have turned weaknesses into positive results.

14. Relate stories or examples that heighten your past experience.
   Past performance is the best indicator of future performance. If you were successful at one company, odds are you can succeed at another. Be ready to sell your skills and performance using relevant stories from your work experience in the interview.

“Past performance is the best indicator of future performance.”

15. Know everything about your potential employer before the interview.
   Customize your answers as much as possible in terms of the needs of the employer. This requires that you complete research before the interview about the company, its customers, and the work you anticipate doing. Speak the employer’s language and address his or her needs.

16. Rehearse and practice interview questions before the interview.
   Prior to your interview, try to anticipate the types of questions you may be asked and rehearse the appropriate answers. Even if you do
not anticipate all of the questions, the process of thinking through will make you more confident and relaxed during the interview itself.

17. Know how to respond to tough questions.

The majority of questions that you will be asked can be anticipated. However, there are exceptional questions tailored to throw you off guard to see how you perform under pressure. Your best strategy is to be prepared, stay calm, collect your thoughts, and respond as clearly as possible.

18. Address the relevant needs of the employer.

While you no doubt have specific strengths, skills and experience, make sure you translate how these qualifications would address the prospective employer's needs. Emphasize the benefits you are likely to provide in the new position. Whenever possible, give examples of how your strengths, accomplishments, and contributions relate to the employer, using the appropriate language for the job or industry.

19. Identify your strengths and what you enjoy doing.

Skills that you enjoy are the ones that are most likely to benefit a future employer. Prior to the interview, understand what it is that you enjoy doing most, and what benefits this provides to both you and your employer.

20. Know how you communicate verbally to others.

Strong verbal communication skills are highly valued by most employers. They are signs of educated and competent individuals. Know how you communicate, and practice with others to determine if you are presenting yourself in the best possible light.

21. Don't plan to arrive on time, plan to arrive early!

No matter how sympathetic your interviewer may be to the fact that there was an accident on the freeway, it is virtually impossible to overcome a negative first impression. Do whatever it takes to be on time, including allowing extra time for unexpected emergencies. However, don't show up too early either. A good time to announce your arrival is 5 - 10 minutes before your interview is scheduled to start.

22. Treat everyone you meet as important to the interview.

Make sure you are courteous to everyone you come in contact with, no matter who they are or what their position. The opinion of everyone can be important to the interview process.

23. Answer questions with complete sentences and with substance.

Remember that your interviewer is trying to determine what value you would bring to the company and the position. Avoid answering the questions asked with simple “yes” or “no” answers. Give complete answers and use examples of past experiences that demonstrate your qualifications.


There are many stress-reducing techniques used by public speakers that can certainly aid you in your interview process. Practice some of the relaxation methods as you approach your interview, such as taking slow deep breaths to calm you down. The more you can relax, the more comfortable you will feel and the more confident you will appear.

25. Be sure to ask questions.

Be prepared to ask several questions relevant to the job, the employer, and the organization. These questions should be designed to elicit information to help you make a decision as well as to demonstrate your interest, intelligence, and enthusiasm for the job.
Ten must-ask job interview questions

HARVEY SCHACHTER

From Monday's Globe and Mail

Posted on Monday, January 3, 2011 9:29AM EST

Sam Geist, a consultant based in Markham, Ont., finds that clients at his workshops praise his scorecard and questionnaire for evaluating candidates in job interviews. It has 10 must-ask questions, in which the answers are rated on seven criteria.

THE CRITERIA

Generalization

Weaker candidates have a tendency to generalize their experience, not being able to draw out specifically what they learned in a given situation, or why. Stronger candidates tend to be much more specific.

Learning experiences

Weaker candidates have difficulty explaining what they learned when the interviewer probes deeper. They tend toward extremes in their answers - either routine, expected answers or exaggerated ones. Stronger candidates are more open about their weaknesses and mistakes.

Long view

Weaker candidates have a simpler view of people and their jobs. Stronger candidates describe situations and events with more significant depth of analysis.

The why

Weaker candidates tend to focus more on "what" happened and less on "why" it occurred. They have difficulty expressing whether any learning took place after an incident and what that learning was. Stronger candidates consider the "why" more than the "what" and are not hesitant to explain what they learned and what they would do differently in future.

Focus of interest

Weaker candidates are more focused on the incidentals of the job - the chance of promotion, for example, or the fringe benefits. Stronger candidates are more interested in the content of the job and their future in it.

(more on back)
Ability to analyze

Weaker candidates are able to analyze failure, but they are more reluctant to acknowledge their role in it. Stronger candidates are able to analyze failure and success - and acknowledge their role in both.

Self-awareness

Weaker candidates are not accurately self-aware; they overstate strengths, are inconsistent when correcting weaknesses and they don’t accurately judge their limits. Stronger candidates are more accurately aware of strengths, weaknesses and limits.

THE KEY QUESTIONS

1. What was your most challenging job? Why?
   What did you learn from this job?

2. What was your least challenging job? Why?
   What did you learn from this job?

3. In what situation did you find that you had to overcome major obstacles to meet your objectives? What did you do? Why? What did you learn from the experience?

4. Who do you admire most? Who do you admire least? Why?

5. In what situation did you attempt to do something, but failed?
   Why did you fail? What did you learn from this situation?

6. Describe a bad experience that happened to you. What did you learn from it?

7. Describe a situation where you tried to help someone change. What strategy did you use? How did the situation end?

8. Describe a mistake you made in dealing with people. What did you learn from it?

9. What was your best learning experience? What was your worst learning experience? What did you learn from each of them?

10. Describe the last major change you made. Why did you do it? How did it work out? What did you learn?
Questions Questions

... that might be asked in an interview

Most hiring decisions are made at the first interview. How you come across in that interview could be as important as your experience and job talents, so it pays to be well prepared.

The information here is in the form of broad questions about yourself. Practice answering the following possible interview questions with a friend or relative.

A job interview gives you the opportunity to showcase your qualifications to an employer. As part of your preparation, you should learn about the organization. Have a specific job or jobs in mind, and review your qualifications for the job.

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What do you really want to do in life?
3. Why did you choose this field?
4. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
5. Why should I hire you?
6. What qualifications do you have that make you think you would be successful in this job?
7. How do you determine and evaluate success?
8. How/what do you think you can contribute to this company?
9. What qualities should a successful worker possess?
10. What do you expect from your supervisor?
11. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?
12. In what kind of work environment are you the most comfortable?
13. How do you work under pressure?
14. Why do you want to work here?
15. What do you know about our company?
16. What criteria do you use to evaluate the company you hope to work for?
17. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
18. What is your attitude toward relocation?
19. What kinds of decisions are easy/hard for you to make?
20. Describe yourself in 5 words.
21. What would past supervisors/teachers say about you?
22. How do you think your peers would describe you?
23. What are your salary expectations?
24. How many days of work/school did you miss last year? How many times were you late? Why?
25. What do you think this job involves?
26. What would be your first action once you got this job?
27. If hired, how long would it take before you become productive?
28. Do you have any questions you’d like to ask?
29. How would you describe your ideal job?
30. We all have areas we need to improve in. In what areas do you feel you need to improve in order to strengthen your work performance?
31. Why do you think you’re more qualified than other applicants I’ve interviewed?
32. How do you react when given orders?
33. Do you have dependable transportation?
34. Are you (creative, flexible, a self-starter, organized, etc.)? Give me an example.
35. What personal characteristics do you believe are necessary for success in this field?
36. Which of your parents has had the most profound influence on you? Explain.
37. This field is constantly changing. How have you adapted to change in your past experiences?
38. What have you done for your own professional development in the last few years?
39. What do you do to keep current professionally?
40. This position requires a responsible, reliable and dependable person. Prove to me that you are all three.
41. How do you plan and organize major projects?
42. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
43. Which is more important to you: The type of work you’re doing or the money you receive for doing the work?
44. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
45. What have you learned from your mistakes?
46. How do you get along with others?
47. What do you like to do in your spare time? Do you have any hobbies?
48. Do you prefer to work alone or with others? Why?
49. Do you consider yourself to be more of a leader or a team player?
50. What kinds of people do you find easy/difficult to work with?
51. What types of books, magazines, movies do you prefer?
52. What book have you read most recently? How long ago was that?
53. How much initiative do you take?
54. What do you do for fun?
55. What part does family play in your life?
56. Describe your best friends.
57. How much of an effort is it to be tolerant of people with backgrounds or interests different from your own?
58. I’m interested in how you manage your time.

Describe the system you use to structure your time and establish priorities.
59. What makes you unique?
60. What professional or community groups are you active in?
61. Describe your personality.
62. Tell me about a time you had to use effective listening and communication skills to resolve a problem situation.
63. Give an example of a time you used your fact-finding skills to gather information for solving a problem, then tell me how you analyzed this information to come to a decision.
64. Describe a situation in which you had a positive influence on the actions of others.
65. Give an example of a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.

Education-related questions

1. Do you have plans for continued studies? An advanced degree?
2. What did you like/dislike about school?
3. You never received your degree. Why is that?
4. Describe your educational background.
5. Describe your most rewarding educational experience.
6. Which school subjects did/do you like the best? Why?
7. Which school subjects did/do you like the least? Why?
8. Which extracurricular school activities did/do you participate in? What did you learn through your participation?
9. What kind of grades did/do you get in school? Do you consider your grades to be an accurate indicator of what you can do? Why?
10. What led you to choose your major field of study? Your college?
11. How was your education financed?
12. How did you spend your vacations while in school?
13. Do you feel your education was worthwhile? Why?
Work experience, employment status questions

1. Give me a specific example of a problem you encountered at work and how you dealt with it.
2. You’ve been out of work for a while. What have you been doing between jobs?
3. What kinds of machines, tools, or equipment can you operate?
4. Why did you leave your last job?
5. What did you like/dislike about your prior jobs?
6. Why do you want to change careers?
7. Have you ever been fired? Why?
8. Why have you changed jobs so often?
9. Give me an example of a time when your employer’s policy didn’t agree with your own. How did you deal with the situation?
10. What did you like about your boss? Dislike?
11. What are some of the things about which you and your supervisor disagree?
12. This position offers less responsibility and pay than your most recent position. Why are you interested in this position?
13. Your work application states that you’ve been laid off. If your former employer were to recall you, what would you do?
14. Tell me about a typical day at the last company you worked.
15. What have you learned from some of the jobs you’ve held?
16. Would you raise any objections if we were to check with your former employers for references?
17. Tell me about any performance based raises, promotions, bonuses or special assignments you were given.
18. What extra out-of-the-ordinary job responsibilities have you taken on?
19. Have you done this type of work before? Describe.
20. Describe how your job related to the overall goals of your department and your company.

21. What aspects of the job do you consider top priority?
22. Tell me about the last time you felt angry on the job.
23. Tell me how you’ve moved up in the organization.
24. Describe the most significant presentation/report/document you have had to complete.

Management and supervisory questions

1. What is your management philosophy? Style?
2. Describe the process you’ve used to hire employees. Have you had any hiring surprises or disappointments? Explain.
3. What experience have you had with major expansions or reductions in workforce?
4. How many employees have you fired? For what reason? Give me an example of how you went about firing an employee.
5. How would your employees describe you?
6. Do you maintain close checks or loose reins on your staff? Why?
7. What are your feelings about an open door policy?
9. What things do you think contribute to your success as a supervisor/manager?
10. What things do you think might interfere with your effectiveness as a supervisor/manager?
11. In what ways do you feel you have improved as a supervisor/manager during the last few years?
12. How do you motivate staff?
13. Define participative management. Explain any experience you’ve had using this management.
14. Define a difficult employee. How do you deal with such an employee? Give me a specific example.

More questions to consider
You may be asked about your personal life or health that may not be related to the job. If you believe you are denied a job because of the way you answered any of these questions, you may want to contact the Department of Workforce Development, Equal Rights Division, in Madison at 608/266-6860, or Milwaukee at 414/227-4384.

1. Are you married, divorced, separated, or single?
2. How old are you?
3. How is your health?
4. Do you go to church regularly?
5. Tell me about your financial debts.
6. Do you rent or own your home?
7. What religious, political, or social organizations do you belong to?
8. Are you practicing birth control?
9. Do you plan on having more children?
10. Were you ever arrested? Why?
11. How much do you weigh?
12. How tall are you?
13. What does your spouse do for a living?
14. What arrangements have you made for child care? Do you have back-up child care arrangements? Have you lost work time due to problems with your children? Explain.
15. Have you ever had any serious illness or injury? Describe.
16. Are there any personal, family, or health conditions that would limit your ability to function in this position? Explain.
A note for employers

This information is intended to assist job applicants with preparations for interviews. It is not intended for employers in preparing questions.

Employers are responsible for asking questions which provide information about a person’s ability to do the particular job. The examples herein may not be the best or most appropriate questions to ask.

The best questions depend on the job. Employers may wish to review, “Avoiding Loaded Interview Questions” (ERD-4825-P), published by the Equal Rights Division, Department of Workforce Development.

Goal-directed questions

1. What are your short-range and long-range career goals and objectives? When and why did you establish these goals? How do you plan to achieve them?
2. What do you see yourself doing 2 years from now? 5 years? 10 years? 25 years?
3. What do you expect your salary to be 5 years from now?
4. How long do you plan on working?
5. How long do you plan on working here?
6. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself?

Examples of questions you may want to ask in job interviews

1. What happened to the last person who had this job?
2. What strengths or abilities would the ideal candidate possess for this position?
3. Would you describe the duties of this job?
4. How many people have held this position in the last 2 years?
5. What kinds of equipment, machines, tools will I be working with?
6. Is there anything I can do or study to get a head start on learning this job?
7. What hours will I be working if hired?
8. What is the normal pay range for this position?
9. Is training provided? If so, what types of programs do you offer?
10. Will I work alone or with other people?
11. Who do I report to … directly and indirectly?
12. What are the chances of moving up in this company?
13. What are the greatest problems you think I may face in this company?
14. What are the key tasks and responsibilities for this position?
15. How does your company plan to grow/expand in the next few years?
16. May I see the area where I would be working?
17. May I speak with one or two employees?
18. Why is this company a good place to work?
19. Do you have any company literature I could take with me?
20. Is there any probation period?
21. How will my performance be evaluated?
22. What can you tell me about the new products/services the company is planning to introduce?
23. What is the company’s position within the industry?
24. What are the challenges this company/department is facing?
25. Describe a typical work day.
26. Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?
27. How would you describe the working atmosphere of your company?
28. Does your company encourage participation in community projects?
29. What are some things you feel could be improved by the person you hire?
30. Why have you gone outside the company to fill this position?
31. Is this a new position?
32. How would you characterize your leadership style?
33. Could you describe how this job relates to the overall goals of the department and the company?
34. What are some of the more important objectives that you would like to see accomplished on this job?
The 25 Most Popular Behavior-Based Questions

Tell me about a time when you . . .

1. Worked effectively under pressure.
2. Handled a difficult situation with a co-worker.
3. Were creative in solving a problem.
4. Missed an obvious solution to a problem.
5. Were unable to complete a project on time.
6. Persuaded team members to do things your way.
7. Wrote a report that was well received.
8. Anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
9. Had to make an important decision with limited facts.
10. Were forced to make an unpopular decision.
11. Had to adapt to a difficult situation.
12. Were tolerant of an opinion that was different from yours.
13. Were disappointed in your behavior.
14. Used your political savvy to push a program through that you really believed in.
15. Had to deal with an irate customer.
16. Delegated a project effectively.
17. Surmounted a major obstacle.
18. Set your sights too high (or too low).
19. Prioritized the elements of a complicated project.
20. Got bogged down in the details of a project.
21. Lost (or won) an important contract.
22. Made a bad decision.
23. Had to fire a friend.
24. Hired (or fired) the wrong person.
25. Turned down a good job.