

Tips for Successful Interviewing

So you have decided it is time to move on, develop your career or maybe just look for a new challenge. Job hunting can be hugely time-consuming and so when you find the job that really appeals to you, how do you give yourself the best possible chance of attaining it?

Here at 1st for Recruitment, we have years of experience sending people for interviews and unfortunately, so often the opportunity is wasted because the candidate has not prepared properly, displays the wrong image of themselves or simply makes a mistake that could have been easily avoided. We always brief our candidates as well as we possibly can, so that they know what to expect, and to enable them to prepare themselves properly. After that it's up to them.....

To help you through what could be a nerve wracking experience, here are a few tips based on the interview techniques we are seeing companies using today.

Preparation

The art of presentation was once explained to me as following the five Ps - Proper Presentation Prevents Poor Performance! Exactly the same is true of attending an interview. You would not dream (I hope!) of attending a business or sales meeting, without preparing properly first. The result would be the contract going to your competitors, or any hope of future career progression disappearing or an embarrassing humiliation in front of your boss.

So how should you prepare and what you need to consider? Below are some essentials for you to think about.

- Ensure you have an up-to-date job description for the position you are applying for. Carefully analyse each of the key requirements of the role (experience and personal skills) and match these as closely as you can to what you have to offer. Write this down and memorise it best you can.
- Next, think of a good example that supports the experience or skill that you think you have. Its all well and good saying you are good at something, much better if you can prove it by quoting examples. For instance, if the job requires excellent presentation skills, think of a time when you have presented successfully and choose the biggest and most prestigious occasion this happened. If you need to demonstrate that you are a good Sales Manager, detail the experience you have had in this field and back it up with hard data. For

example where did you have the biggest impact? What was the percentage improvement in revenue or conversion to sale?

At the interview, do not wait to be asked for this information, volunteer it, to back up your answer.

- Research the company thoroughly. In the Internet age, there is no excuse whatsoever for attending an interview and not having a comprehensive understanding of;
 - what the company does
 - what their products are
 - what their turnover is
 - who their main competitors are.
 - Who their principle officers are

Try calling the company and see what service you get. If you know somebody who works there, contact them and try and get the inside line. The more information you can find and memorise, the more impressed your interviewers will be. Try and find out something pretty unique about them that not many people might know.

You will definitely be asked company related questions by any interviewer worth their salt.

- You are also likely to get asked a theoretical question. For example, *'If a customer had received poor service and wanted a discount, what would you do?'*
- Think of other questions they might ask and have good answers ready. Favourites are your strengths and weaknesses, your career ambitions, your management style and your views on what makes a good salesman or what represents good customer service. But there are plenty of others and you can research these on the Internet. Put yourself in the interviewer's position - what would you ask?
- Before the day of the interview, research all the administration surrounding the day, such as who will be interviewing you, what their position is in the company, exactly how to find the office where you will be interviewed (make sure you get the right site!) and whether you need to prepare anything. Check out train times or estimated car journey times and parking facilities. This will save a lot of worry or potential hassle on the day.

- Make sure your suit is not at the dry cleaners and that you have a clean shirt/blouse, your shoes are clean (some people read a lot into this) and if you need a haircut, it's done. If you leave these until the day of the interview, they will eat up valuable time and potentially make you late, or just as bad rushing, so you turn up sweaty and hassled.

The Day of the Interview

All your preparation will go to waste if you do not present yourself confidently at the interview.

You are unlikely to be confident, and this will be evident, if:

- You have not prepared properly and are not confident with the answers you are going to give.
- You do not know what to expect when you get there.
- You are late or you have had to rush.
- You are unhappy with your appearance for some reason.

Allow yourself plenty of time. If this new job is important enough to you, take some time off, ideally half a day, or a whole day if you have a bit of a journey. If it is not that important, then politely decline the interview.

Rushing out in your lunch hour, worrying about how long the interview is going to take, or faking sickness or a dental appointment is not the ideal situation. If you are not working, try not to plan anything else for that day or the night before.

Having already worked out how long it will take to get there, aim to arrive 10 minutes early and then add at least half an hour (an hour if you have a reasonably long journey). Have a good breakfast/lunch, but don't drink too much before the interview - bursting for the WC will make you look uncomfortable and could be misconstrued.

Make sure you take any necessary documentation. It is a good idea to check the confirmation of interview letter or e-mail to make sure you have everything you need. Take a copy of your CV, regardless of whether the company is supposed to already have one.

The interview itself

If you have prepared properly, got there on time and paid attention to your appearance, you are giving yourself the best possible opportunity. Don't forget **'you only get one chance to make a first impression'** and so your appearance, your body language and the way you greet your interviewers will immediately have an impact on them - make sure it is positive!

Another important thing to remember is that nobody will select somebody they don't like, so it is vital that you build rapport with your interviewers (even if you don't particularly take to them!)

Throughout the interview make sure there is plenty of direct eye contact and that you smile and avoid frowning. It seems obvious, but so many people are in 'serious interview mode' and forget.

Body language tells your interviewers a lot about you. Try to avoid the obvious actions that show you are nervous or ones that suggest that you might not be completely telling the truth.

Interviews these days tend to be competency based and include experiential and theoretical questions.

The experiential ones you will have prepared for. They will relate to the key responsibilities of the job and you will answer with the 'script' you have practised giving at least one specific example of how you have been successful in that area.

The theoretical ones are likely to relate to scenarios you may face in the role, were you successful e.g. *'How would you handle an underperforming member of your sales team?'* Alternatively you may be asked for examples from your past work that may be relevant to this one. For instance, a classic would be, *'Give me an example of when you have provided outstanding customer service'*. Your preparation should have ensured that you have got some solid answers to these types of questions.

Many interviewers still ask candidates to talk them through their CV. The key to this is to only pick out the parts which are relevant to the job you are applying for. Make it results focused such as *'At The ABC Company I was responsible for the entire field sales team and increased the revenue by over 80% in the two years I was there'*.

Some people faced with this question ramble on for ages and by the time they get to the recent relevant material, the interviewers have become bored or even moved on to another question. As a general rule of thumb, companies are not interested in anything you did more than 10 years ago, many will only look at the last five years experience.

At the end of the interview you will inevitably be asked if you have any questions. Have three (no more) that are well prepared and demonstrate your understanding of their business further. For instance *'I notice your turnover last year was £255 million, but only 30% of that came from retail business. What plans do you have to grow that part of the company?'*

Avoid asking questions about the remuneration package or employment conditions here; there will be plenty of time for that if you are offered the position.

Although you may be required to undertake other tests, make sure that you finish the meeting on a positive note with comments such as *'I have really enjoyed meeting you today'* or *'I like the sound of this job and I look forward to hearing from you'*. If it is close between you and another candidate, letting them know how keen you are might just make the difference.

You can never tell who you are up against when applying for a new job and you might just be unlucky. However, you always want to be sure that you have given it your best shot and following these practical tips will, I guarantee, make a difference.

First for Recruitment is an employment agency who specialise in the Call Centre, Sales and Marketing, Customer Service and Administration sectors. Our Consultants have all worked in the markets in which they recruit and so have a thorough understanding of the roles they are recruiting for. We spend a great deal of time ensuring that we select the best candidates for our clients, but also pay the same respect to our candidates, by responding to their applications and communications. We do our best to thoroughly prepare everybody attending an interview and we believe this gives us and our candidates an edge in our chosen markets.