

# INTERVIEWING SKILLS

The Career Center @ Towson University



# INTERVIEWING IS A SKILL

- Like any other skill, your interviewing improves with practice.
- Arrange a mock interview with a friend before the actual interview.
- Practice makes one perfect!

# INTERVIEW PREPARATION

There are three important keys to effectively preparing yourself to shine in the interview.

- 1) Know yourself
- 2) Dress the part
- 3) Research the organization

# KNOW YOURSELF

- How well do you fit the job description?
- What are the skills, abilities, and qualities you have that can benefit the organization?
- Why are *you* the best fit for the job and the organization?

# WHAT TO BRING

Prepare a travel folder that includes:

- Name, address and phone number of the organization and your contact
- Directions – make sure you know where you are going; take a practice drive before if possible
- Copies of your resume and reference sheet; paper and pen
- List of questions you will ask
- Professional portfolio (if applicable)

# RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

Employers expect you to know what the organization is, what it does and how that fits into your employment plans.

- What do you know about the organization?
- What are the organization's main services/products, values, structure, culture? Recent news? Leaders?
- Is the organization financially stable?
- Be able to articulate what you have learned, including your understanding of its mission and philosophy; Integrate what you know into the questions you ask.
- Use the company's Web site, Career Insider, Glass Door, Wetfeet.com and Google Alert to find information.

# THE INTERVIEW DAY

- Take time to compose yourself when you arrive.  
The interview begins when you step out of the car.
- Greet everyone in a friendly and professional manner; often staff are asked their opinion of candidates.
- Greet interviewer by name, with a smile, and direct eye contact.
- Offer a **firm**, not bone-crushing, handshake.
- Be calm; be aware of non-verbal/body language.



# HOW TO SHAKE HANDS



*Tip:* Carry a tissue in your pocket. If your palms are sweaty, wipe them dry before you go into the interview.

- Smile and make eye contact as you shake hands.
- Extend your hand; your palm should touch the palm of the interviewer
- Use a firm handshake; adjust your grip to the other person's hand.
- Hold the handshake for 2 to 3 seconds making a slight up and down pumping motion.



# TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF

- Describe yourself professionally, not personally.
- Consider your answer a “30-second commercial” or an “elevator moment” that is about your professional accomplishments.
- State your skills and experience and how they relate to the position.

# THE INTERVIEW BEGINS

- Ask permission to take a few notes during the interview in case you need clarification at the end of the interview.
- Listen carefully to questions. It's okay to ask for clarification
  - Use 5-second fillers to help you remember such as, "That is a good question, let me think about it for a moment," or, "Would you please repeat the question so I am sure of your meaning."
- Show interest in the position through your eye contact, posture and attentiveness.
  - If you are interviewed by several people, make eye contact with each one as you respond to questions.
  - Paint your bridges, don't burn them - Remember that you are interviewing the organization as well as being interviewed. You may meet the recruiter again in another organization.

# BEHAVIOR ASSESSMENT QUESTIONS

- Often, employers ask questions that will determine how well you use your skills and abilities in real-life situations.
- This concept is called behavior interviewing; the premise behind it is that past experiences predict future behavior.

# THE STAR METHOD

- Include in your targeted and thorough answer:
  - **S**=Situation (Describe the situation)
  - **T**=Technique (What approach did you use?)
  - **A**=Action (What action did you take?)
  - **R**=Result (What was the result of your action?)

# BE PREPARED TO GIVE EXAMPLES

- Behavioral questions illustrate that past experiences can predict future behavior.
- Always include outcomes – what happened and what did you learn.
- For example:
  - Describe a challenging project or assignment.
  - Tell me about a time when a project or assignment did not go well.
  - Tell me about a time when you improved a process either at work or in the classroom (can also use athletic examples).

# SAMPLE QUESTION AND ANSWER

## Recruiter:

“I see that you did an internship with company X. Give me some examples of key accomplishments and lessons that you learned on the job.”

## Student:

“One year ago I was offered an internship with X company based on my specialized training in graphic and Web page design. My main responsibility was to create a new Web page design that was more user friendly than the one they were using prior to my hire. Currently, my Web design is still in use and has supported the business by acting as a viable, effective marketing tool.”



# **“WHY SHOULD I CONSIDER YOU A STRONG APPLICANT FOR THIS POSITION?”**

Articulate what's in your resume.

- Be self-assured, not arrogant.
- Relate your knowledge, skills and abilities directly to the job.
- Show your passion.
- Tell and sell your story.

# THE “WEAKNESS” QUESTION

- Everyone has a weakness. A weakness is a deficient skill that you have or need to improve. A weakness is not a character flaw.
- Be honest and always use an example that is NOT job-related.
- Always describe the weakness in the past tense and discuss briefly how you have improved.
- Avoid trite answers such as, “I am a perfectionist.”

# GOOD AND BAD ANSWERS



"I do such a good job that it makes everyone else envious of how great I am."



"I've never been in a position with enough influence to do any damage, so I'm not sure."



"My greatest weakness would have to be speaking in public. I don't think it's something that comes naturally to me, so I've taken courses X and Y to get some practice, as well as put myself in situations where I was forced to improve."

# WHAT QUESTIONS DO YOU HAVE FOR ME?

- Prepare a list of at least three to five intelligent/researched questions.
- Google “Interview Questions to Ask” as a guide to formulating pertinent questions.
- Do NOT ask about salary, benefits, or vacation time. These issues are discussed when you are extended a job offer.

# SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK

- When will you make a hiring decision?
- What would an average day on the job entail?
- What are the challenges and opportunities for the new hires during their first year?
- What goals or projects would you want this person to accomplish quickly?
- How will performance be evaluated?
- Who would be the immediate supervisor? What is the supervisor's management style?
- What do you enjoy about working at this organization?

# ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

- Employers cannot ask about the following:
  - Age, race, national origin, marital and family status, sexual orientation, medical history, or possible disabilities
- One way to respond:
  - “That is a question I have never been asked before and I am curious as to why it is important to the job under consideration.”



# SAMPLE ILLEGAL QUESTIONS

- How many children do you have? What are your baby-sitting arrangements?
- What is your national origin?
- Do you have any disabilities?
- Do you own your home?
- Do you wish to be addressed as Mr.? Mrs.? Miss? Ms.?

# INTERVIEWING WORKS BOTH WAYS

- **You are also interviewing the potential employer.** Is this the best “fit” for me? Will I enjoy this job? Will the work be meaningful, positive, or interesting? Does this company reflect my values?
- While you are conducting research on your potential employer, take note of questions that come to mind.