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Effective Communication at Job Interviews

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Abstract

Job Interview is an inevitable criterion for selection of a good candidate for a job position. This paper aims at introducing various aspects of the most common types of Job Interviews and a few points to keep in mind while sitting for a job interview.

It first throws light upon the importance and need to prepare for the interview beforehand. Then it mentions the things to do before and interview. It then proceeds to discuss the various skills and manners required during the interview itself and finally mentions a few tips for ensuring the success of interview in the post interview phase.

Two appendices are also included which deal with the topics 'Technical Knowledge vs. Communication Skills' and 'Interviewer Biases'.

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Chapter 1

Job Interviews

1.1 Introduction

Job interview is a meeting between an eligible candidate who is looking for a position in an organization and a recruiter who has been given the responsibility to select the most appropriate person for the particular job. It is an opportunity for both the aforementioned parties to know each other and fulfill the purpose.

This project report focuses on the candidate side of the Job interview and how should a person present himself/herself to the interviewer in order to increase his/her chances of getting the job offer. As the author of a best selling book on job interviews, ‘Matthew DeLuca’ [1] says– **It is not necessarily the best candidate who gets the job offer—it is most likely the best interviewee.** It deals with two main kind of interviews Telephonic and Personal, and discusses the verbal and non verbal aspects of both.

I have also included two sections in the appendix which are not directly related to ones success at Job interviews but are more of informative nature for candidates sitting in an interview.

1.2 More on Job Interviews

1.2.1 Process

The process of hiring a candidate begins with a round for shortlisting eligible candidates based on their CV or a test conducted by the company. GD's may be scheduled for further refining the candidates, but this practice varies for different organizations. This is followed by a series of interviews: Technical or HR. Both of these have their own specific methods of preparation, yet the underlying principles for effective communication at both of these interviews is the same.

A typical job interview can last for anything around 10 minutes to as long as a few hours. It can be conducted face to face, i.e. a personal interview or over a telecommunication medium like a phone or over a video conference on software such as Skype.

A bulk of the time is spent by the recruiter in assessing the candidate by asking questions about his work history, style of work, personality, and any other quality relevant to the position itself. A job interview is a dynamic process[7] for both the parties involved. An interviewee may predict to an extent whether the interview is going successfully or not and on the other hand the interviewer may learn something new about the interviewee which was not mentioned by him prior to the interview. So, due to the dynamic nature of interviews the thoughts and behavior of both sides constantly changes and this subsequently affects their later thoughts and behavior.

End of the interview may feature the recruiter encouraging the candidate to pose any questions to him. Such questions are highly encouraged as they depict an individual's interest in the company and work position offered to him.

The process finishes after all the eligible candidates have been interviewed and the recruiting team has assessed them. Although the assessing may depend on some of the previous achievements or the tests given by the candidate prior to the interview, but the interview is still remains the major contributor to the selection of a particular individual for a position.

Chapter 2

Classification of a Job interview

2.1 Telephonic

2.1.1 Introduction

Telephonic interviews, as is clear by the name, take place over a communication medium such as telephone. They are increasingly becoming popular in today's times as the number of applicants is growing.

Advantages

With a very large number of applicants, usually a recruiter may want to reduce the number of applicants by interviewing all of them over telephone and eliminating some of them beforehand. Telephonic interviews are cheaper to conduct than a traditional personal interview and far more convenient for both parties than their counterparts and are preferred by smaller companies and start-ups. They are also very useful when the interviewer is unable to be physically present to conduct the interview, eg. him being in other state or country.

Disadvantages

But a telephonic interview has some obvious disadvantages also. If the interview is technical there is no means to put a check on cheating by the

candidate unless a video conferencing takes place. Communication problems may hamper the conduction of a telephonic interview. In a telephonic interview, the interviewer is unable to judge all the qualities and shortcomings of the candidate as the non-verbal part is mostly absent.

Despite of these shortcomings, the advantages of telephonic interviews generally advocate the need to focus on them and prepare for them.

2.2 Personal

2.2.1 Introduction

This is the most common and effective type of interview in terms of selecting the best individual for the job. The candidate faces a single or a panel of interviewers face to face.

Advantages

The interviewers analyze every non-verbal and verbal gesture of the candidate to decide amongst the best. This allows gathering far more information about each other for both parties and helps them to perform better. The recruiter can elicit more in-depth response or help the candidate by filling in information. The question of cheating is also gone as the recruiter observes every move of the candidate.

Disadvantages

Yet it has certain disadvantages too. Most people are afraid of face to face interviews and may not perform well during the interview, even if they are best suited for the job. It also costs the organization a lot of time and money to conduct a personal interview which is not desirable for the newer companies and small start-ups.

Personal interview is a highly formal meeting which expects adequate amount of maturity from both sides. Proper dress code should be observed and the interview should take place in a quiet and isolated environment. Following common etiquettes shows the sincerity level of the candidate. After all it is a question of how much is a candidate able to demonstrate to the recruiter his suitability for the job.

2.2.2 Classification

A personal interview may be further divided into these following categories based on kinds of questions asked:

Technical Interview

Sitting in the interview for a technical position obviously requires certain level of technical knowledge. The level varies from company to company. Some interviewers may require you to solve hard and mind teasing puzzles, some may ask for solving a particular problem, while some may ask you to explain your technical projects to them. The bottom-line is that you need to prepare extensively for interviews of such companies.

But your communication skills still play a vital role here. e.g. you may know the answer to a problem but if you have trouble explaining it to the recruiter, that counts as a negative for you.

HR Interview

HR interview are designed specifically for testing the soft skills of the candidates. They may also feature questions which ask for the applicant's managerial skills and behavioral skills. The interviewer may pose a business problem and ask a solution for it. This specifically comes under case study questions. These kind of questions are meant to analyze the creativity, analytical thinking and general knowledge of the candidate.

These interviews are conducted by the Human Resource department of the company, hence the name. They are non-technical in nature and some of the typical questions asked are:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10 years from now?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Chapter 3

Telephonic Interviews

3.1 Pre-Interview Phase

As mentioned in earlier chapter telephonic interview is mostly a screening phase before the final interview. But still some smaller companies and start-ups or any out-station interviewee may it as sole criteria for offering job position. Following points should be taken care of before the telephonic interview starts.

Collect information about the company

Candidates should collect as much information as they can about the company before the interview. It has a very positive impact at the time of the interview if the candidate is able to discuss the recent events at the company during the post-interview phase. Various media sources and the company website can be used to collect such information.

Prepare common questions

Most of the telephonic interviews begin with a small introduction of the candidate, so it is wise to write down the answers to such common questions. Practicing giving these answers in front of a mirror will certainly help reduce the anxiety and nervousness at the time of the interview.

Ensure that your phone is available

Ensure that your phone is reachable and charged enough to be able to function throughout the interview. A dropped connection due to the phone being discharged within 10 minutes of the interview will put a bad impression.

Ensure a quiet environment

Interviews should always be conducted in a quiet and isolated environment to avoid distractions and noise. Since most of the telephonic interviews would take place at the room of candidate, he/she should ensure that the environment around him at the time of the interview is silent and with minimal noise. Giving an important interview on a street with much noise is certainly not going to have good impression on the interviewer.

3.2 Interview Phase

3.2.1 Verbal Skills

Let the interviewer lead the interview

Let the interviewer start the interview. It is better to let the interviewer lead the interview. Only answer the questions that the interviewer asks, don't over-clarify things unless the interviewer misinterprets any answer. And never interrupt the interviewer while he/she is speaking, it puts a very negative impact and shows you as rude and arrogant.

Use correct and clear language

The language that you use at an interview is very important. Don't use any words that you don't normally use in your vocabulary. At the time of the interview some people tend to use complicated words just to impress the recruiter. But wrong words at wrong places do more harm than the good that the correctly used words do. Also practice on your grammar before interviews, it is another plus point in the interviews. Final point on the

language- be clear in what you say, it may be hard to listen if you speak softly over the telephone, leading to miscommunication.

Don't get nervous or feel shy

Many people get nervous during the interview and feel intimidated if they are interviewing for a post in a big organization. Then they start making mistakes that they themselves regret later. This is not a good thing and interviewee should practice on overcoming these fears before the interview. You can ask for clarifications on some doubts you have, and this generally encouraged. Asking for a doubt is clearly better than misinterpreting a question and making a mistake.

Be concise

As the time for a telephonic interview is limited, your answers to the questions should be as concise as possible. But it does not mean that clarity of the answer can be sacrificed for the sake of conciseness. Best way is to set a time limit in your mind on the length of the answer you are going to give, depending on the total time of the interview. Try to finish each of your answers in this predicted time limit. eg. for an interview of 15 minutes, try to finish every answer in at most 5 minutes, leaving time for other questions to be asked.

Avoid long pauses

Don't let a pause continue for too long, keep talking something if you are thinking an answer to a technical question. Explaining your thought process might give the interviewer something to evaluate you. Avoiding pauses is also important in a telephonic conversation, as they can get awkward for both parties.

3.2.2 Non-Verbal Skills

Do not take help

As the interviewer is unable to see the interviewee, temptation to cheat in the interview can take over easily. But one should refrain from any kind of cheating during the interview. Remember telephonic interviews are generally only a screening phase, if you are unable to answer the questions now, the questions in next round are probably going to be tougher. Moreover, if the interviewer suspects cheating he may blacklist the candidate from ever sitting again in the interview for the company.

Maintain correct posture

Even when the interviewer is unable to see you, you should maintain correct posture and sit upright during a telephonic interview. It helps in creating a mental image that a serious thing is going on and not just an every day chat with a friend.

Don't lie

Do not about your achievements, abilities, projects in an interview. If the interviewer suspects a lie, he/she will probe into it unless you accept that you are not knowledgeable as you claimed you were about the topic. This will count as very bad impression on the interviewer and he/she may simply reject you.

Be an active listener

Note down the names of the interviewer, and other information especially something that will help you in the personal interview round, if there is one. Addressing the interviewer by his/her name has a positive effect. Even try to remembers the voices of the interviewer in case a second round takes place.

3.3 Post-Interview Phase

Post interview phase refers to the time after the formal interview is over and the interviewer engages you for discussion. This is particularly important phase as you can get some good information from the recruiter and display your social skills. A few points to observe in this phase are:

Thank the interviewer

Remember to thank the interviewer for his/her time at the end of the interview. Also mention that you are interested in the opportunity and ask about the next step in the selection process.

Ask questions

Ask questions about the organization, the work you are expected to do, the current and most significant work going on the organization. Asking questions depicts your interest in the organization and is very much appreciated. But avoid questions like ‘What are my chances of getting selected?’ or ‘Did I perform well?’. These questions show that you are unsure about yourself and lack self-confidence.

Try to make light conversation

Making lighter conversation, maybe crack an appropriate joke will always go in your favor. It says about you that you are confident and not nervous.

Chapter 4

Personal Interviews

Most of the ideas and points mentioned in the previous chapter apply straight-away to a personal interview, so this chapter has been intentionally kept somewhat shorter in order to avoid redundancy.

4.1 Pre-Interview Phase

Prepare thoroughly

Preparation for an interview is of utmost importance. Personal interviews are most likely to be the final round, so significant amount of preparation is always required to give a good interview. The preparation includes the basic research about the company, its work and the answers to the common questions asked.

Proper dressing up

Always reach the interview venue well before time, properly dressed in clean formal clothes. Improper clothes non-verbally speak a lot about the individual and his/her personality. Always carry an extra CV, a pen and a notepad to the interview.

Know yourself

Do a self-evaluation before letting someone else evaluate you. It is very important for your self-esteem and helps boost your confidence. Analyze your current needs, career goals and identify the companies you wish to target for a job position. Compare this information with the job profile that the company offers and identify your suitability for the job beforehand.

4.2 Interview Phase

4.2.1 Verbal Skills

Greet cheerfully

The day of the interview is normally very hectic and tiring. Try not to show this in front of interviewer and greet him/her cheerfully and be friendly. Being rude in any way to the interviewer can cost you a good opportunity.

Try to imitate the verbal tone and modeling of interviewer

People are naturally attracted to the people like themselves. This is the reason why people have friends who have common interests. Take advantage of this and try to match your verbal tone and voice modulation to that of the recruiter. If the interviewer speaks softly you do the same. If they speak fast, you also try to increase the speed of your voice. This point has also been mentioned in the Appendix B: Interviewer Biases under the section interpersonal attraction.

Watch your tone

The meaning of the words you wish to convey depends on the way you say your words - including the speaking speed, clarity in pronunciation tone of your voice, pitch etc. According to the study by Albert Mehrabian [2] the tone itself accounts for 38% of the message conveyed in a face to face communication.

Be concise

Don't talk too much on the same topic. Try to use sharp and perfect language.

Avoid long pauses

Don't pause for a long time while thinking for an answer to a tough question. Keep talking to the interviewer, explain him/her your thoughts and ideas that come to your mind. Many recruiter intentionally pose tough problems at a technical interview just to see the way you handle a problem, your approach and your analytical skills.

Common verbal skills

Apart from these verbal skills, most of the ones mentioned for telephonic interviews are easily applicable in this regard. They include the following list:

- Let the interviewer lead the interview
- Use correct and clear language
- Don't get nervous or feel shy
- Don't interrupt the interviewer

4.2.2 Non-Verbal Skills**Keep Smiling**

One needs to portray a self-confident and positive image of himself in an interview. By smiling and maintaining a happy look can convey these qualities to the interviewer.

Maintain a positive body language

Keep a body language that is attentive, open to and interested in what the interviewer is saying. General advise is to read up a book on body language to know about these stances and try to follow the positive ones like leaning forward to show interest, keeping hands open to show openness etc.

Proper use of gestures

Use your hands properly when explaining something, your gestures should support your verbal explanations. This is particularly important as is shown by the studies of Albert Mehrabian[2] mentioned above. They say that 55% of the meaning of the message to be conveyed is taken care of by non-verbal gestures. So, one needs to take special care that his/her gestures do not contradict their verbal meaning.

Avoid distractive habits

Try to avoid all kinds of distractive habits like chewing nails, scratching head, staring at nails, biting lips, playing with buttons of shirt, humming, speaking to yourself at the time of interview or during a pause when you are thinking an answer to some question.

4.3 Post-Interview Phase

Shake hands and thank the interviewer

Don't leave in a hurry as soon as the interview is over. Before leaving the interview room, shake hands with the interviewer and thank him for his time. Also mention your interest in the opportunity and mention that you hope to see him/her again.

Ask questions

As in the case of telephonic interviews, asking questions after the interview is very important. Most of the interviewers will encourage you to ask questions themselves, even if they don't, don't hesitate to ask them yourself. Here is a small list of questions that can be asked[3]:

- What exactly would my day-to-day responsibilities be?
- What are the opportunities for training and career advancement?
- When did you join?
- What is the biggest challenge facing the organization today?

Chapter 5

Survey

To get a the statistics and general level of awareness of students of students at IIT Kanpur campus, a survey was conducted which is publicly available and accessible to all the fourth and fifth year students of IIT Kanpur.

5.1 Questions

1. Which year are you in?
 - Fourth Year
 - Fifth Year
2. What is your Department?
3. What is your CPI?
4. Did you sit for the placement season 2011-2012?
 - Yes
 - No
5. If yes, did you accept a Job Offer?
 - Yes
 - No
6. Did you take a core job or a non core Job?

- Yes
- No

7. On a scale of 1 to 5 how much would you say your placement preparation was?

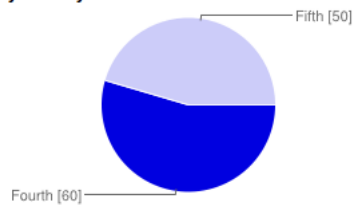
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

8. On a scale of 1 to 5, indicate your satisfaction with the job offer you got?

- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5

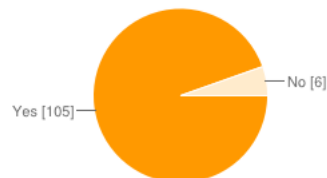
5.2 Results

Which year are you in?



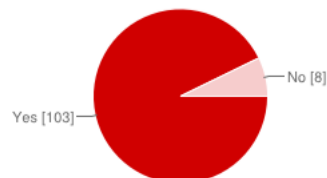
Fourth	60	54%
Fifth	50	45%

Did you sit for the placement season 2011-2012?

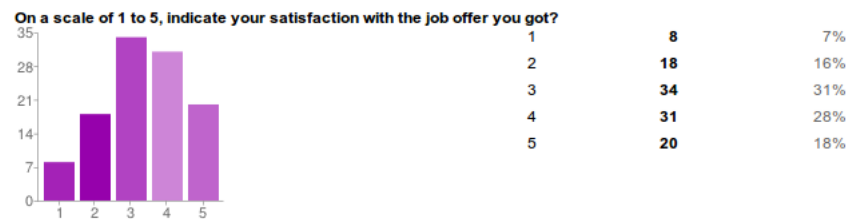
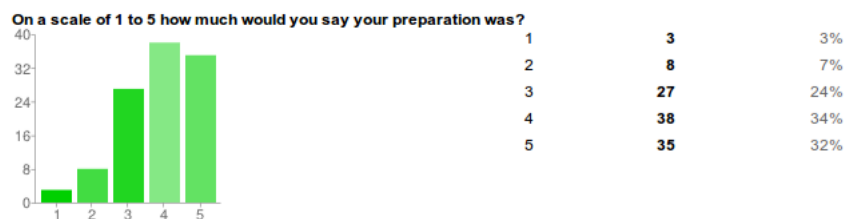
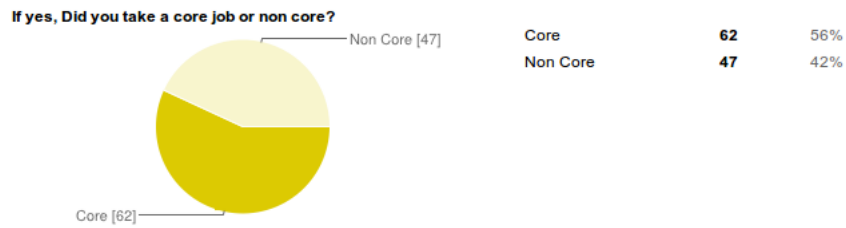


Yes	105	95%
No	6	5%

If yes, did you take up a job offer?



Yes	103	93%
No	8	7%



A total of 111 people filled this form across all departments. The average CPI of the people who took this survey was 7.65.

5.3 Conclusion

- As can be seen from the first pie chart on this page, the number of people going into non-core jobs is substantially high. More and more non-core companies come each year, and a significant portion of people go for them. As these companies require very good level of communication skills, this emphasizes the need for development of soft skills in students of our campus.
- The next two bar charts represent the amount of preparation done by

the students. The peak of the graph is very near to 5, which says that the students prepare thoroughly for their placement session. But if we look at the next bar graph which depicts the satisfaction with the job offer received, it has a peak around 3 tending on the side of 4, with substantial number of students in range 1-2 also.

This shows that there are students who are not satisfied with their job offers. But what limits our students from grabbing the job opportunity they desire? The lack of preparation is not the answer as is clear from 1st graph. The answer is 'lack of correct preparation' and that our students perhaps need to spend more time enhancing their 'Communication Skills'.

Appendix A

Technical Knowledge vs. Communication Skills

This section is not directly required for Effective Communication but consists of general information on these topic. Therefore it is included in the appendix as optional reading.

People are not sure whether to concentrate on studies to improve Technical Knowledge or on extra-curricular activities to improve Communication Skills. Lets start with a classification for companies into the following two basic sectors:

- Core companies
- Non-Core companies

Core sector includes companies which have a job profile which requires the knowledge one has studied while completing his/her education. On the other hand, Non-Core can be defined as all the companies which have a job profile which is not related to the education of the candidate. But getting selected for a job certainly requires some basic knowledge about the work a company does, be it core or non-core.

Now why this classification is important? The main reason is that the preparation for both these sectors differs by a fair amount. The Core companies require technical knowledge and may even ignore obvious flaws in a candidate's communication skills if the technical knowledge is high. The Non-Core companies like consultancies want their employees to deal with clients and it is absolutely necessary for them to hire candidates with good soft-skills. Other reason that can be given is that a company can specify whether it belongs to core or non-core and get suitable candidates for themselves at shortlisting stage to select from.

So the general advise that can be given in this situation is that before while preparing for the placement session at campus or applying for jobs off-campus, one should decide beforehand which is the job profile in which he/she would like to work. Then go through the job profile of each company and anticipate the qualities required for the job and prepare judiciously. Since the amount of preparation required is enormous, it is not possible to prepare for both profiles in a short time.

Appendix B

Interviewer Biases

This section throws some light on the shortcomings of the interviewer himself/herself. It talks mainly on the biased nature of some of the interviewers against or for some candidates. These factors are unrelated to the fact that the individual is able to do the job or not, thus their influence should be reduced. This kind of nature is mostly observed in smaller organizations, but is dependent on the nature of the recruiter and may happen in larger organizations too. The source of each data is cited in each case.

Gender Female candidates tend to score higher scores in interview rounds than their male counterparts with same level of qualifications if the interviewer is a male[4]. However, same gender has no effect on these ratings.

Attractiveness Physical attractiveness of the applicant is sometimes able to influence the interviewer evaluation scores. Also if the interviewer has interpersonal attraction[5] to the interviewee i.e. some interests and ideologies match, then it is found have an affect on his/her ratings in a positive way.

Cultural differences Cultural differences are also found to affect the selection chances of a candidate[4]. Applicant from an ethnic name, accent were viewed less positively by the interviewers than applicants without these traits.

Health Unhealthy applicants, particularly those who are highly underweight or severely obese (except, of-course due to some medical condition) may face discrimination from the hiring team. The reason that can be given is that health is an aspect of an individual which can be directly controlled by him/her. As such, the above individuals are seen by the recruiters as lazy, undisciplined and not motivated and thus non-ideal as a future employee of the organization.

Although certain biases like gender, culture and race are prevented by the law, but there can not be a check to the biases arising from personal attraction and company policies. The lesson to take from this is that these biases are prevalent and there is no way to stop this from happening, albeit you can take advantage of these for yourself in certain situations.

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