

Interviewing Part 1: Guide to Interviewing

The keys to effective interviewing are strategy, preparation, energy, and enthusiasm. At its core, interviewing centers around the fact that an employer needs to hire a candidate to solve their problem and you need to "hire" a new company (aka land a new job). Your role in the interview process is to have the mentality of a consultant, always clearly demonstrating your value and ability to solve the challenges the company is facing, and also to assess for yourself whether a position is a good fit for you. With that in mind, here are some tips to help you excel in interviews.

ASSESS YOUR STRENGTHS, VALUES, AND SKILLS

Just as you are a unique professional, every job you apply to is unique as well. As part of your interview preparation, take stock of your strengths, values, and skills and identify how they align with the organisation, what the organisation is looking for, and the challenges the organisation is facing.

PREPARE YOUR PROFESSIONAL VALUE PROPOSITION

Your Professional Value Proposition (PVP) is your answer to the question "tell me about yourself." For each interview you prepare for you should slightly tweak your PVP so that it resonates with the employer at hand. Remember to focus on the challenges the organisation is looking to solve and tailor your PVP to position you as the solution to those challenges.

PREPARE YOUR STRATEGY

RESEARCH Research the company, the interviewer, the industry, EVERYTHING.

THINK LIKE A CONSULTANT Your goal in the interview process is to think like a consultant and demonstrate your value and ability to solve the company's challenges. Similarly, you need to assess whether a position is a good fit for you.

READ BETWEEN THE LINES When an interviewer asks a question, there is usually a "question behind the question." You have to learn to discern what the real question is and answer accordingly. Keep your PVP and accomplishments in mind at all times.

TURN THE INTERVIEW INTO A MEETING Interviews are not interrogations. They should be treated as a meeting with each party asking and answering questions.

BE AN ACTIVE LISTENER Listen to what the interviewer says and how they say it, observe their body language, listen for ways you can help them, check for understanding throughout the process, and follow the interviewer's lead.

MIND YOUR BODY LANGUAGE Sitting up straight, eye contact, and good posture are all important. Also avoid crossing your arms, jiggling your leg, or any other body movements that will take the focus off of what you are saying. To build confidence, strike a superman pose before your interview - the bathroom or another private space are good options for this. Stand up straight, hands on your hips, chest out. Remain in this pose for a few minutes. You will find yourself feeling more poised and confident.

ASK CLARIFYING QUESTIONS Sometimes an interviewer will ask a very broad question. The problem with broad questions is that they are difficult to answer in a way that demonstrates your value. It is perfectly acceptable to ask the

interviewer for more specifics. Use language such as "to answer this question I would like to understand a few things: X,Y,Z" or "Before I answer that, can you tell me more about XYZ?"

PREPARE QUESTIONS TO ASK YOUR INTERVIEWER These questions can reveal a great deal about the company, the position, and what strategy you should use to win the job. See the "Ask and Answer Interview Questions" tip sheet for more information.

PREPARE TO OVERCOME OBJECTIONS Going into an interview, you should already have an idea of objections the employer may have about you as a candidate; perhaps you don't have the exact degree they were hoping for or you have some gaps in your employment. Whatever the objections may be, prepare to counter them with reasons why you are the best person for the job and how you will make a measurable impact despite their concerns.

PREPARE YOUR SMART STORIES

A SMART Story illustrates the specifics of your previous accomplishments. This strategy centers on developing interview answers that are impactful, relevant, and position-focused. Using SMART Stories as part of your interview strategy will position you as someone who is a strong fit for a position and will add immediate value to an organisation. Ideally, you should prepare several stories to draw from during your interviews. A SMART Story is made up of five elements:

S STANDS FOR SITUATION Start by outlining the situation behind your story.

M STANDS FOR METRICS OR MORE This second part gives you the opportunity to expand your story with concrete details and scope, including any obstacles, conflicts, or difficulties you encountered.

A STANDS FOR ACTION In the third element, list the specific actions you took.

R STANDS FOR RESULTS Here is where you describe the exact results you achieved. Quantifiable results that use data are always more effective and memorable, so be certain to use numbers, monetary values, percentages, productivity, and comparisons in your description. Feel free to share any accolades or praise you received as well.

T STANDS FOR TIE-IN The final stage is to bring the message home that you are the ideal candidate for the position by tying your accomplishments directly into the expressed needs and desires of your future employer as clarified in the job description and your discussions up to that point.

SMART STORY QUICK TIPS

- » Stories should be approximately two minutes in length. You have a limited amount of time for an interview and should use that time wisely. The attention span of your interviewer won't be much more than this. These should be streamlined and concise stories.
- » You should have several SMART Stories prepared that you can adapt quickly to directly answer the question that's been asked. Your story must be relevant.
- » Never divulge any proprietary or confidential information.
- » Rehearse your SMART Stories before the interview for the greatest effect.
- » Use stories that are focused on your current or most recent experience.

SMART STORY EXAMPLE:

QUESTION: How do you deal with difficult customers?

ANSWER: In my last position at ABC Company, I managed client services and retention for approximately 80 customers per day, which was a very high volume, even for our fast-paced call center. I dealt with difficult customers daily, but I remember one particular customer I received a call from who had his installation service rescheduled 3 times.

I understood his frustration and let him vent for a while, using my active listening skills, until he calmed down. I then let him know that this situation was very uncommon for our company and that I would resolve it for him right away. I immediately called his local rep, who I had a built a strong relationship with, and was able to prioritise his installation to the first appointment in the morning. I called to follow up after installation the next day to ensure he was taken care of and he was very grateful.

Not only did he give me an exceptional satisfaction survey rating, but also wrote a letter to the company praising me for my attention to his needs. He ended up being a very important multi-location client, and I won the 'CSR of the Month' award for ensuring that we retained his business of 12 accounts worth X monthly. I believe I could bring that same level of client service to your company to ensure retention and satisfaction of even your most difficult customers.

GENERAL INTERVIEW TIPS

- » Practice, practice, practice. With yourself, in front of a mirror, or with a trusted colleague. The key is to be extremely comfortable giving your answers, not necessarily memorising them like a script.
- » Arrive 5 minutes early...not 10.
- » Dress the part. It is always better to be over-dressed than under-dressed. Research the culture of the company and dress a step or two above the norm.
- » Approach the interview like a meeting - it is not an interrogation.
- » Avoid bringing up salary, benefits, or vacation - focus on making sure it's a good fit.
- » Ask questions about the position, its challenges, expectations, the organisation, etc., but NEVER ask a question you could have found the answer to on your own.
- » Ask for a business card from every person you meet.
- » At the end, ask, "Do you have any concerns about me as a candidate that I can address for you now?" If there are concerns, address them with confidence and enthusiasm.
- » Let them know if you are interested in pursuing the job: "I've enjoyed our conversation and would love to be considered for the position - what's the next step?"
- » Prepare your references. If you give a particular person as a reference for a position, be sure to not only let that person know, but prepare them with the details on the job and what they are looking for, so that when asked, the reference can speak to specifics that will resonate with the employer.
- » Send a follow up letter expressing your understanding of the needs of the role and how you meet those needs.

Interview Preparation Checklist

- ✓ I have researched the company, the job, the industry, and any other relevant information.
- ✓ I have practiced my SMART Stories and have specific examples of past accomplishments that will be relevant to the hiring manager to present during the interview.
- ✓ I have my interview materials prepared: a pad folio with notepad and pen, my job search business cards, and copies of my CV.
- ✓ I am prepared to approach the interview like a consultant, focused on offering solutions to challenges, and have a comprehensive strategy prepared.

- ☑ I have questions prepared to ask my interviewer.
- ☑ I am ready to send a follow up note after the interview.

NEXT STEPS

- » See Interviewing Part II: Asking and Answering Interview Questions