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Purpose of the Interview

The job interview is the most decisive step in your search for a job. The purpose of the job interview is to get a second interview or a job offer. To get a better understanding of interviewing, you must first look at the employer's objectives, and yours.

The employer wishes to:

1. Fill a position or solve a problem and wants to find the best possible person to do the job.
2. Find out what you can do for the organization and how much you will cost.
3. Find out about your personality, skills, and appearance.
4. Decide if you meet their needs that fit the organization, and can excel in the position.

You wish to:

1. Establish rapport with the interviewer.
2. Give additional, relevant information about what you can do for the organization.
3. Gather additional information about the organization.
4. Make a tentative decision about whether the company and position provides what you need.

Preparation for the Interview

Know Yourself

Preparing a resume is excellent preparation for interviewing. By doing this, you will have defined your job objective, identified the skills you wish to stress and clearly stated your work and educational histories. You will know and be able to speak articulately about yourself.

Know Your Potential Employer

You must research your potential employer. It is essential that you do your homework by reading any and all company information available. Search the internet for organization structure, contact names, and packet/service information. Call them; they will send you information. Talk to people who have used the product or service or try it yourself. Knowing as much as possible about the employer will allow you to sell yourself much more effectively in the interview.

Tips for Interview Success

Interview skills can be improved with practice. So ask a friend to help you, use a tape recorder or mirror for practice, or sign up at the Center for Student Success for a mock interview session and a counselor will help you improve your interviewing style.

Becoming familiar with the questions will allow you to feel much more comfortable during the interview.

It is important to:

1. Maintain good eye contact
2. Not use slang
3. Be concise: don't ramble, and use complete sentences
4. Arrive 10-15 minutes early and don't bring friends to an interview
5. Be honest, even when describing any shortcomings. Just be sure to remain positive
6. Be a friendly and attentive participator

Appearance and Style

“You only get one chance to make a first impression.” This is not a trite statement when it comes to interviews. Employers are considering how you will appear to their other employees and to the public (or clients). Therefore, it is extremely important that you create an appropriate first impression by:

- a. Dressing as you would the first day on the job or even “up” a step.
- b. Avoid extremes in hair style, make-up, jewelry, perfume or after-shave. Facial hair should be neatly trimmed.
- c. Be well groomed – shoes polished and dirt free, clothes should be cleaned, pressed and fit well.

If you have questions about what to wear, stop by the place of employment and see what people are wearing. If in doubt, know that a suit is always impressive.

How Do Employers Evaluate You?

Every employer has a very clear picture of who they want to hire. Each has a different picture in mind based on their position, staff, and environment. It is up to the job candidate to identify what it is the employer is looking for and decide how to sell themselves appropriately. The following are a few attributes most commonly looked at by employers:

EXPERIENCE – Do not panic if you have never had a “Career-related” experience. An employer is primarily interested in knowing that you have experience of any kind or amount. Work experience helps to prepare you for the transition from the college environment to the work world. From work experience, you may gain greater maturity or judgment and self-discipline, learn to communicate with a variety of people, and become a more poised and self-assured individual. To land and keep a job – whether it is full-time over the summer, part-time during school, regular volunteer hours or a course credit internship, requires - initiative, a willingness to accept responsibility and energy. These factors are important to a would-be employer. Do take the lead, however, and communicate to the employer just how the skills gained from your “unrelated work experience” have direct relevance to your job objective or to his/her organization.

EXTRACURRICULAR ACTIVITIES – This dimension is similar to experience because of the personal qualities that you may have developed. Extracurricular activities demonstrate involvement in your community. Such activities provide an opportunity for you to strengthen in your leadership style and problem-solving abilities. Furthermore, this involvement illustrates that you can work as a part of a team. Note: An employer will not be surprised to see few extracurricular activities enumerated on a resume of someone who has worked substantially to help defray college expenses or who has completed his/her degree requirements in three years instead of four.

COMMUNICATIONS SKILLS – Can you communicate clearly and concisely in both written and oral form? Interviewers/recruiters look for good word choice and vocabulary, and for potential ability to communicate with all levels – supervisors, peers, and subordinates.

LEADERSHIP/INITIATIVE – Are you a self-starter? Employers are interested in your decision-making style, and in evidence of your willingness to assume responsibility and serve as a leader.

ATTITUDE – What is your attitude towards work and yourself? Willingness to work hard and enthusiasm about your professional objectives are pluses. Additionally, knowledge of and interest in the company is reflective of attitude. Lastly, employers are concerned with attitude toward self. Self-confidence, self-respect, desire for personal and professional growth are all important traits.

SKILLS – What can you do for this firm? Identification of skill areas both in the resume and in the interview is a must. Your skills may be analytical, technical, managerial, administrative, organizational - remember, you are being hired to perform. What can you do to contribute?

The above are several of the dimensions that interest interviewers/recruiters. Few students will score 100 percent in all areas. However, the name of the interviewing game is to: DEMONSTRATE, ILLUSTRATE, ARTICULATE, and COMMUNICATE!

Skills and Qualities which Employers Consider Important

Skills and Qualities	Percentage Considering Item very important
Verbal communication.....	83%
Responsibility.....	79%
Initiative.....	74%
Interpersonal skills.....	74%
Self-discipline.....	65%
Problem solving skills.....	64%
Written communication skills.....	64%
Decision making.....	63%
Self-confidence.....	59%
High energy.....	53%
Leadership.....	52%
Working under pressure.....	42%
Organizational skills.....	42%
Meeting the public.....	37%
Selling/promoting skills.....	31%
Appearance.....	30%
Math skills.....	29%
Research skills.....	14%

Source: Report on the Liberal Arts Employer Survey: Opportunities for the Liberal Arts Graduate. Liberal Arts Group, Midwest College Placement Association, 2002.

Portfolios in an Interview

You can put together a portfolio that will help you at interviews. Visual techniques are always remembered, and showing skills and achievements mean much more than simply describing. Your portfolio can accompany you at every interview and can be adapted according to the needs and requirements of the job.

The Second Interview

If offered, the second will allow you to talk more in-depth with an employer to determine how your qualifications and interests match the needs of the organization. If you receive an invitation to visit the employer for a follow-up interview, recognize that the employer is very interested in you.

The follow-up interview will be conducted in much the same manner as was your initial screening interview. However, you will undoubtedly meet more people, and the length of time spent with each interview will be longer. Therefore, you will be expected to be more conversant about the employer, your personal background, your academic and work experiences, your career and life goals, your activities, and how all of these accomplishments, put together, will make you a valuable member of the employer's team. Because of the extended time spent with each individual, you will have more time to ask questions. It will be very important to have prepared yourself for that part of the interview process.

Questions Candidates ask Employers

Fifty percent of the interview is your time. Use it to give pertinent information about yourself and to gather information which will allow you to know if you wish to work for this employer.

During screening (or first) interviews, it is inappropriate to ask about salaries or fringe benefits. Appropriate questions could be:

1. What is the employer's management philosophy?
2. What is the nature of the training program and supervision given?
3. What qualities are you looking for in an employee?
4. How would you describe the work environment at your company and in this office?
5. Do you give annual reviews and if so, how do you use the results?

If all goes well during the follow-up interview, you may receive an offer of employment prior to leaving. This, however, is not always the case. The offer may be made within a few days after the interview. Therefore, don't be alarmed if you leave not knowing whether you have an offer.

After the interview, sit and record your observations. Doing this will assist you, should you have a need to ask the employer additional questions. This will also help you in comparing one employer with another. This practice will be very beneficial when it comes time to make a decision. Evaluation: How did you feel during the interview? What questions did you answer well? Poorly? Did you learn new information about the organization? Does the interviewer have adequate knowledge of your background and career interest? Could you clearly present your career goals? If the interviewer did not provide you with direct feedback at the interview, feel free to make an appointment our Career Counselor. We'll be happy improve your presentation.

Thank You Letters

Thank You Letter: After every interview you should follow up with a thank you letter to the person or people with whom you interviewed. The letter should cover some of the important points from your interview as well as express your interest in the position. A thank you letter is very important since it keeps your name fresh in the recruiter's mind and further communicates your desire for the position. It is not uncommon for employers to screen out candidates on the basis of whether or not they received a thank you letter. Send the interviewer a letter the first week after the interview. Be business-like, short and to the point. Mention something that was discussed in the interview or again express your interest in the position.

SAMPLE THANK YOU LETTER

123 Grand Avenue
Palo Alto, CA 94305
(415) 555-1212
April 1, 1986

Ms. Sarah Newman
Human Resources Manager
McGraw-Hill Publishers
1400 Embarcadero
San Francisco, CA 94120

Dear Ms. Newman,

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you last week. The discussion we had was particularly informative and I found myself even more enthusiastic about the Assistant Editor's position. I was very impressed with the philosophy of your organization, and the informal conversation over lunch confirmed my interest in McGraw-Hill Publishers.

To reiterate my qualifications, I believe that the research and writing skills I have acquired here at Stanford, together with my work experiences with the Daily and Jones-Smith Publishers, make me a strong candidate for the position. I work well independently, am able to manage my time efficiently, and communicate easily with all types of people. To clarify my present situation, I will be graduating the week of June 14th and will be out of town the following two weeks. I am available for employment the first of July. Ms. Newman, it was a pleasure to speak with you. Should you have further questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at home. Again, my sincere appreciation for your time and consideration of my application. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

John Fischer

Coping With the Offers

This is what the interview process is all about. This is the reward for the hours spent preparing for and excelling in the interview. Savor it – but not for long. Now you have an important decision to make. Do you accept the offer or reject the offer? No matter what you decide, a decision is required, and your response should be given usually within one week.

If you elect to accept the offer of employment, make sure you understand all the details of the offer. Be certain:

- The initial assignment and salary and benefits meet with your satisfaction.
- The starting date is clearly understood.
- The location of the assignment meets your approval.
- The opportunity offers future growth potential

If the job offer meets these criteria, write a letter or accept a call to the offer.

Once you have accepted an offer of employment, write a letter rejecting other offers you may have. Do this with great care. You may wish to consider employment with this employer in the future. Be tactful.

Sometimes an extension of time is needed to consider more than one offer. When this happens, don't be afraid to ask for an extension. Most employers will give you at least one week if you really need it.

Once you have accepted an offer, stop interviewing! It is unprofessional and unethical to keep interviewing once you have accepted an offer.

Common Reasons for Rejection

It has already been suggested that, should you get a letter of rejection, it may be advisable to turn that letter into a learning tool. To do this, contact the person from whom you received the letter and ask why you were not given consideration. Before you do this, however, analyze the following reasons employers normally give for rejecting candidates and see if any of them fit you for that particular interview.

*Poor personal appearance

* Overbearing, over-aggressive, conceited, superiority complex, know-it-all attitude.

* Inability to express themselves clearly, poor voice, diction, grammar.

- * Lack of planning for career – no purposes and goals.
- * Lack of interest and enthusiasm – passive, indifferent.
- * Overemphasis on money, interested only in best dollar offer.
- * Poor scholastic record – just got by.
- * Unwilling to start at the bottom – expects too much too soon.
- * Makes excuses, evasive, hedges on unfavorable factors in record.
- * Lacking in courtesy, ill-mannered.
- * Asks no questions about the job.
- * Lack of knowledge of the employer with whom the candidate is interviewing.
- * Late for the interview.
- * Sloppy date sheet, resume, application form.
- * Poor eye contact during interview.
- * Extreme nervousness.
- * Indefinite responses to questions – talks too much.
- * Lack of confidence and poise.
- * Indecisive. Lacks initiative.
- * Condemnation of previous employers/professors.
- * Lack of leadership qualities.
- * Timid, introverted, lacks sufficient degree of assertiveness.
- * Unwilling to relocate.
- * Questionable long-term potential for advancement.

For more information regarding interviewing and practicing, contact the Career Services Office:

Dan Falk
620-229-6267
dfalk@sckans.edu