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Interview Strategies

As competitive as the market is today, it is important to have an interview strategy that will help you elevate yourself above other candidates. The following are key tips to review before going to an interview.

The Purpose of the Interview

The obvious purpose of the interview is to determine if they like you personally. Why?

- Because the hiring decision is predominantly emotional.
- People hire people they like.
- Proof:
 - Qualified people are rejected if the “chemistry” isn’t there.
 - Under-qualified people have been hired because of a good “chemistry” fit.
 - A national survey was conducted to determine the thing most likely to prevent a person from getting a job. The ranking?
 1. Personality/personal presentation
 2. Inexperience
 3. Career background
 4. Lack of intelligence
 5. Absence of skills
 6. Lack of job scope
 7. Speaking manner
 8. Dress and education (tied)

You may be thinking, “I can’t change my personality!” The definition of personality in the *Webster New Collegiate Dictionary*: ‘The condition or fact of relating to a particular person.’ This definition suggests that you can. Personality is no more than how you present yourself, and you can affect how you present yourself in an interview. It depends on your strategy.

Interviewing Strategy

If a job offer is dependent upon how we present ourselves, then we need to have a consciously developed strategy to do so effectively. The following suggestions outline a strategy that has proven to work time and time again.

Suggestion #1: Get the names and titles of the people with whom you interview.

Ask for their business cards or at least write down their names. You need to know to whom you are talking. You will present yourself differently to a department manager than you would a peer. You also need the proper spelling of their names

in order to send a thank you note or follow-up letter.

Goals

Your primary goal is to get them interested in you. Think of the interview as a sales situation. You are trying to sell your skills and abilities to them. You have but one opportunity to make the sale.

The ultimate goal is to secure an offer. You want to be in the position of having the option of turning them down instead of vice versa.

Suggestion #2: Use the limited time available during the interview to present yourself – not to ask about the company.

Use the available time to secure their interest in you. Once they become interested in you, they will be very eager during subsequent interviews to answer your questions about them.

Obstacles That Will Tend to Interfere With Your Efforts

Obstacle #1: Initially, the interviewer has the advantage:

- They know you from your resume/conversations with your recruiter
- They know the job they are wanting to fill
- They know the hiring criteria (they think)
- You know relatively nothing about their situation
- You don't have a target to direct your answers toward
- As a result, you will tend to talk about those aspects of your background of interest to you as opposed to what is of interest to the interviewer

Obstacle #2: The interviewer is as unprepared and uncomfortable as you regarding the interview.

The interviewer is not nearly familiar with the information on your resume as you are. Except for some HR professionals and hiring managers, many interviewers aren't trained at interviewing. They may not know what questions to ask or how to ask open-ended or non-leading questions. This discomfort creates tension.

The interviewer must understand what you can do for him and also be comfortable with you. Anything that creates tension undermines the development of "good chemistry."

Principles of Behavior that Help us Overcome These Obstacles

The Power of First Impressions: People tend to decide how they feel about someone they meet within the first five to ten minutes of meeting them. Therefore, a favorable or unfavorable conclusion about the person being interviewed is made within the first ten minutes of the interview. The rest of the time is spent collecting data to confirm the original conclusion.

Most interviewers are more comfortable answering questions than asking them. Remember, they aren't sure what they want to ask or how to ask it – discomfort. On the other hand, they are very comfortable answering your questions about them, the company, the job, the market, etc.

Suggestion #3: Acquire the 'Target' as soon as possible.

You can't effectively answer questions posed to you if you don't understand the context of the question nor what is important to the interviewer. Without this information, or target, you could inadvertently give an answer early in the interview that could eliminate you from further consideration; an answer that results in an unfavorable conclusion within the first five to ten minutes.

Information gathering questions asked consistently throughout the interview offer many rewards.

How to Acquire the Target

When you are asked a question, give an objective, concise answer followed by an information-gathering question. For example, if you are asked to describe your present responsibilities, you should do so in a complete but concise manner followed by a question such as, "Does this position comprise these types of responsibilities?"

Your intent is to identify the critical elements of the position (targets) by getting the interviewer to step out of the interviewing role and describe the requirements of the position as he or she sees them.

Your question provides a comfortable and natural cue to the interviewer to compare and contrast his position with yours. Thus, the target begins to come into focus.

This technique of answering a question and following it with an information-gathering question of your own should be employed repeatedly throughout the interview – constantly refining the target.

Benefits of Using this Technique

- Provides you a target
- Makes the interviewer comfortable:
 - You have taken him or her out of the discomfort of the interviewing mode
 - He or she is more comfortable answering questions vs. asking questions
 - You become the listener and the interviewer becomes the talker
- Within the initial five to ten minutes:
 - You have only briefly spoken, thus minimizing the chances of making mistakes during those critical first minutes
 - You have done the necessary things to make the interviewer comfortable with you, therefore creating an environment for the generation of positive emotional feelings toward you – good chemistry

Suggestion #4: Use the same questioning procedure with each person you interview with.

Each person will have a different perspective as to what is important, and you must satisfy everyone's interests during the interview. Use your Q&A time as an opportunity to cover the targets in your notes that were not discussed during the interview.

Suggestion #5: Take one-word notes.

When the interviewer is describing the position, he or she is giving you the information vital to conducting a successful interview: the target. Don't rely on the frailties of the human memory to recall each point. While maintaining eye contact, take one-word notes for future reference. Make sure you address each point; they are important, or the interviewer would not have mentioned them. We will point out in a few moments how these notes will serve you again.

WARNING: If while describing the position, the interviewer keeps talking, this might be a sign of nervousness or inexperience. You should tactfully interrupt to tell your story or time will run out and he or she will know nothing about your skills. You will be the nicest person they never hired. At some point, when the interviewer pauses to inhale, you can interject with the following: "A moment ago you mentioned _____. Would you be interested in my accomplishments in that area?" By bailing the person out of the uncomfortable position of non-stop talking, you have removed the tension that has been building and established a comfortable situation again, allowing you to tell your story.

How to Tell if You Made a Favorable Impression

It is going well if the interviewer asks easy questions and helps you to answer them if you hesitate. The interviewer is in search of information that will logically support his initial, favorable impression of you.

It is not going well if the interviewer asks penetrating questions and challenges your answers. The interviewer is in search of information that will logically support his initial, unfavorable impression of you.

Suggestion #6: Use your resume as an outline.

- Don't assume the interviewer knows what is on your resume – remember, he or she may have only skimmed it before you arrived
- Talk from your resume – amplify its contents
- Your resume is all that remains after you leave the interview – make sure it is understood

Identifying and Surfacing Objections

- You cannot allow the interviewer to arrive at an erroneous conclusion. He or she will tend to seek data confirming that conclusion
- Anticipate likely objections and have a prepared response
- Be aware of silent objections such as expressions or body language and address the first signs immediately with: "I sense that you are uncomfortable with something I said. May I ask you what it may have been?" Then remain silent.

Suggestion #7: Know your strengths.

It seems that nearly every interviewer feels compelled to ask about strengths. Be prepared. While this question could be advantageous to you, an unprepared answer can be damaging.

- Identify your strengths before going into the interview; three is sufficient

- Have confirming examples – it is the example that is remembered
- Don't be modest. Modesty is the least likely virtue to get you a job. Traditionally, society frowns at those who indulge in talking positively about themselves. However, the interview is the only situation in which people are expected to speak positively about themselves and should. If you don't, who will? So don't understate your responsibilities and accomplishments. State them with pride.

Suggestion #8: Don't disclose weaknesses.

- Have an example of a weakness that is a strength or that you previously identified and took the steps to remedy
- Don't give more than one example

Suggestion #9: Steer clear of the salary question.

When asked about the salary you desire, do not answer with a dollar amount. If you ask for too much, you may be viewed as too expensive. If you ask for too little, they may conclude that you are not as strong a candidate as they desire.

Be noncommittal, such as, "Money is important to me, but it is not the only criteria I am considering. I am talking with other firms in the industry and I am confident that your company is competitive. My primary interest is the position and its responsibilities."

Closing the Interview

When asked if you have any questions, it means that the interviewer wants to close the interview. You don't want to answer 'no,' but you don't want to extend the interview if the interviewer needs to conclude. Instead, use this as an opportunity to schedule a follow-up interview. It is a great opportunity for an assumptive close. "I do have several questions, but I wonder if it would be more appropriate to cover them at another time. When might we get together again?"

If the interviewer invites you to ask your questions, you need to have some readily available. Better than asking a series of questions about the position or company, use this opportunity to cover the targets in your notes that were not discussed during the course of the interview. Pose the notes as questions. For example: "When you were describing the position earlier, you mentioned the importance of planning skills. Would my accomplishments in that area be of interest to you?" Make sure to use every available moment in the first interview to sell yourself.

If you are genuinely interested in the position, tell the interviewer, "I am very interested in the position and I feel I can make a significant contribution to your efforts." Remember, we are appealing to emotions. Would you hire the person who did not indicate any interest, or the one who said he wanted to work for you?

Suggestion #10: Don't leave the interview without knowing exactly where you stand.

It is the company's obligation to tell you how well you did on the interview, but it is your responsibility to get them to fulfill their obligation. The end of the interview is the last chance you have to uncover and respond to any remaining objections. Your chances of successfully overcoming an objection are much stronger in person

than over the phone or in a letter. Don't miss this opportunity. Ask these questions in this order:

- "How do you view my qualifications?" You may get a soft answer such as, "Your qualifications look good, but we have just begun interviewing candidates and will get back to you."
- "How do you view my qualifications compared to others that you have interviewed?" Also an easy one to sidestep, such as, "Your qualifications look very good, but we have some other candidates to see."

Up to this point, you haven't surfaced any objections or reinforcement. While these questions sometimes get direct answers, most of the time they don't. The following question nearly always results in a direct, informative response; a response that will allow you to determine just where you stand and what needs to be done to qualify for the job. **"What would you be looking for in someone else that you didn't see in me?"**

Suggestion #11: Stay engaged all the way through to the end.

Put yourself in the position of turning down offers, not opportunities. Most people don't accept offers on the spot; neither should people reject opportunities on the spot. Sometimes a candidate will make known, either verbally or physically, that he or she is not interested in the position. This is usually detected by the interviewer. While you may not be totally sold on the position or the company during the interview, after reflecting on it the next day, you may feel differently. Then it is too late to change the initial impression you left with the interviewer. Interview as if this is the last job on earth.