

Mastering The Interview

The job interview is your proving ground, the place where you must demonstrate why you are the best person for the job. Making that powerful statement that you're the best of all the candidates requires the three Ps: Preparation, Presentation and Perception.

PREPARE PREPARE PREPARE

When you walk into an interview, the more prepared you are, the better the chances are that you'll succeed. Memorize everything you put on your resume and cover letter and be prepared to explain each item. But you should also be ready to talk about more than just yourself. Get to know your future employer. Warren Davis, the Director of Recruiting and Employment for RadioShack, emphasizes this point. "Your resume and application are fair game. Candidates should study themselves and the company with whom they're interviewing."

Read industry trade magazines, visit the company web site, and do a company search on Yahoo! Finance to find current news about your prospective employer. Be prepared to demonstrate what you know about the company and the industry.

Michele Stagg, the Director of Human Resources at Banana Republic, says she is consistently impressed when candidates work their skills into the context of company news. "The more an informed candidate can tie past experience to the requirements of the job they are interviewing for, particularly in terms of what the company is doing, the better."

Another important part of preparation is making sure you look the part. Choosing what you wear is so important that it deserves its own article - Interview in Style.

PRESENTATION IS PARAMOUNT

Keep in mind that you are marketing yourself to everyone you meet. The more people you leave with a good impression, the better your chances are of being remembered. Project yourself as someone who is thoughtful, helpful, and prepared.

Effective presentation includes being in the right place, at the right time. If you're late for the interview, you could inadvertently tell your interviewer that you're not right for the job.

With 35 years of experience in HR, Peter Ackerson, Specialist Leader at Deloitte Consulting, has been directly involved in hiring hundreds of candidates. When it comes to job interviews, he's seen it all. "There's nothing worse than getting a call from someone who is hung up in traffic or went to the wrong office," he explains.

Once you arrive, introduce yourself to the receptionist and turn off that cell phone. "Having a phone go off during an interview is a real turn off," says Ackerson.

According to psychologist Albert Mehrabian, more than half of our communication is nonverbal or body language. Stagg agrees. "Body language is exceptionally important. Positive, upright and open body language shows self confidence and interest." During introductions give a firm handshake and then take a seat facing the interviewer. When you go over your resume focus on your accomplishments instead of reiterating job descriptions. Presenting yourself as an active problem solver will show an employer that you can contribute and succeed in the role. Stagg agrees that this technique can make a fantastic impact. "Give very specific examples of your qualifications. If you have qualifications in financial analysis, give examples of projects you worked on where your analysis was necessary. Describe your experiences that tie in to your skills or qualifications. Even better, tell me how those will help you meet the requirements of the role you might fill in our company."

PERCEPTION IS KEY

The best way to know if your interviewer is getting what he needs is to ask questions. Susan Vobejda, the VP of Marketing at HotJobs elaborates, "When your interviewer asks you a complicated question, don't launch into your answer straightaway. Make certain you understand what is being asked." A clarifying question, or restating the question in your own words saves you from wasting your interviewer's time, and demonstrates that you are a careful listener. Asking the right questions can also demonstrate your ability to think strategically, and help you

decide if the position is right for you. To that end, Stagg suggests ending the interview with this question: "What are you looking for in a candidate to fill this role?" If the answer turns out to be something that doesn't match your expectations, then you need to speak up.

Many candidates are so intimidated by the interview, they forget that the interviewer has a stake in seeing the candidate succeed. Peter Ackerson describes his attitude going into an interview as one of "hopeful skepticism." They don't want you to fail; they want you to show them why you will succeed with their company. The sooner they hire you, the sooner the search can end.