

INTERVIEW PREPARTATION

One of the best ways to separate yourself from the competition is to be prepared!

Ok, we made it to the interview, now what. First of all, you need to understand what the interview is all about. Your winning resume, and the way Career Management Associates presented your abilities, character and background have gained you entrée into the potential Employer's office. The interviewer has already reviewed your resume in detail with me so they are intimately knowledgeable about the hard facts of your employment history and skills. The actual interview is a subtler, more subjective aspect of the job-hunting process. During the course of each interview each person you meet will be forming an opinion of you and gauging your compatibility with the needs of the organization and more importantly their ability to work with you within that role. Bottom line – **You're trying to make a good impression!!**

You need to be sincere, polite and enthusiastic about your knowledge of their company and the industry in order to secure the position. Your resume may well have shown examples of your skills as a team player, but now you need to convince them that you fit their team. In order to make the best impression you can you need to be prepared, know what to expect, and how to handle it if things don't go quite as you had planned.

Preparation

Research the company:

- Check out the company website. Know about their history and growth over the years.
- Check out other company profiles through websites like Hoovers or Dun/Bradstreet.
- Look for relevant press releases in major newspapers or trade publications.
- Read through again any notes you have surrounding the interviewers you will meet. Try to understand their role within the organization and make sure you answer their questions with a bent toward their area of expertise.
- Re-read the job description so you can fit your background most effectively to their needs.
- Be ready with questions for each interviewer but focus on responsibility related issues not “what’s in it for me” questions.

Presenting Yourself

General Rules For Presenting yourself:

- Arrive early
- Bring extra copies of your resume, references, a notepad & pen.
- Be sure you know how to pronounce your interviewer’s name correctly.
- Be polite to *everyone* you meet there. They all count.
- Be personable as well as professional.
- Do NOT chew gum, smoke, swear or use slang.
- Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly.
- Do not assume that your interviewer knows how to elicit the information he/she is looking for.
- Feel free to ask for clarification before answering a question.
- Take some time to formulate your answers before you speak.
- Answer all questions honestly, but in the best, most positive light.
- Do NOT bad mouth old employers.

Proper Attire:

- First Impressions are extremely important. The way you present yourself can be as important as what you say.
 - **For a woman:** A suit or conservative dress is appropriate. Minimal amounts of jewelry and perfume. Stylish low heel shoes are best.
 - **For a man:** A conservative business suit, long-sleeved shirt and tie are still best. No jewelry other than a wedding ring and a watch, matching socks and polished shoes are the way to go.

*** If you are unsure as to the attire you were planning to wear-please call me.**

Some really good things to read and think about:

These next few pages are some excellent articles to read prior to going on any interview. They were written by EXPERTS so they are very much worth heeding and applying to this interview.

A Guide to Behavioral Interviewing

"Tell me about a time when you were on a team, and one of the members wasn't carrying his or her weight." If this is one of the leading questions in your job interview, you could be in for a behavioral interview. Based on the premise that the best way to predict future behavior is to determine past behavior, this style of interviewing is gaining wide acceptance among recruiters.

Today, more than ever, every hiring decision is critical. Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

Behavioral vs. Traditional Interviews

If you have training or experience with traditional interviewing techniques, you may find the behavioral interview quite different in several ways. Instead of asking how you would behave in a particular situation, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave. Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion"). The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.

The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important. You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories. Most interviewers will be taking copious notes throughout the interview. The behavioral interviewer has been trained to objectively collect and evaluate information, and works from a profile of desired behaviors that are needed for success on the job. Because the behaviors a candidate has demonstrated in previous similar positions are likely to be repeated, you will be asked to share situations in

which you may or may not have exhibited these behaviors. Your answers will be tested for accuracy and consistency.

If you are an entry-level candidate with no previous related experience, the interviewer will look for behaviors in situations similar to those of the target position: *"Describe a major problem you have faced and how you dealt with it."* *"Give an example of when you had to work with your hands to accomplish a task or project."* *"What class did you like the most? What did you like about it?"*

Follow-up questions will test for consistency and determine if you exhibited the desired behavior in that situation:

"Can you give me an example?"

"What did you do?"

"What did you say?"

"What were you thinking?"

"How did you feel?"

"What was your role?"

"What was the result?"

You will notice an absence of such questions as, "Tell me about your strengths and weaknesses."

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

Recall recent situations that show favorable behaviors or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service. Prepare short descriptions of each situation, be ready to give details if asked. Be sure each story has a beginning, a middle, and an end, i.e., be ready to describe the situation, your action, and the outcome or result. Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable). Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story. The interviewer will find out if your story is built on a weak foundation. Be specific. Don't generalize about several events; give a detailed accounting of one event.

A possible response for the question, "Tell me about a time when you were on a team and a member wasn't pulling his or her weight" might go as follows: "I had been assigned to a team to build a canoe out of concrete. One of our team members wasn't showing up for our lab sessions nor doing his assignments. I finally met with him in private, explained the frustration of the rest of the team, and asked if there was anything I could do to help. He told me he was preoccupied with another class that he wasn't passing, so I found someone to help him with the other course. He not only was able to spend more time on our project, but he was also grateful to me for helping him out. We finished our project on time, and got a 'B' on it."

The interviewer might then probe: "How did you feel when you confronted this person?" "Exactly what was the nature of the project?" "What was his responsibility as a team member?" "What was your role?" "At what point did you take it on yourself to confront him?" You can see it is important that you not make up or "shade" information, and why you should have a clear memory of the entire incident.

Don't Forget the Basics

Instead of feeling anxious or threatened by the prospect of a behavioral interview, remember the essential difference between the traditional interview and the behavioral interview: The traditional interviewer may allow you to project what you might or should do in a given situation, whereas the behavioral interviewer is looking for past actions only. It will always be important to put your best foot forward and make a good impression on the interviewer with appropriate attire, good grooming, and a firm handshake and direct eye contact. There is no substitute for promptness, courtesy, preparation, enthusiasm, and a positive attitude.

General Overview

Behavioral Interviewing, also referred to as Structured Behavioral Interviewing, is by design a more systematic and standardized process of evaluating job candidates than is typical of the "traditional" interview process. Its primary intent is to increase the success rate of an organization's in "good" hires and is, therefore, the form of interview being used more often by a wide variety of recruiting organizations.

Behavioral interviewing is based on the "Behavioral Consistency Principle" which essentially states that the best predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar circumstance. Therefore, the questions that are asked of you will tend to focus on behavior, and attempt to evoke how you responded to a variety of specific personal and interpersonal situations and what results occurred from your actions.

"HOW DO I KNOW WHEN I'M BEING GIVEN A BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEW?"

It is quite possible that the interviewer may make you aware prior to the interview that you should expect a structured or competency-based interview. However, you shouldn't have much trouble identifying whether or not you're being given a behavioral interview even without prior information. If you hear questions that are asking you to describe or recount specific situations in which you carried out a job-relevant action, and are then asked to describe the consequence or result of your action, you know you're being behaviorally interviewed.

Behavioral interviews are designed to assess your "real" ability or skill level in functioning in any number of work related activities by delving into how you functioned in your past jobs or extracurricular activities. As with any sort of interview, there are a number of common behavioral "themes" or "performance dimensions" that most recruiters are likely to be interested in. These include (but are not limited to) leadership, interpersonal, communication, multi-tasking, management and cognitive skills, Transition ability (e.g., personal flexibility, tolerance for ambiguity), motivation, decisiveness and commitment. The kinds of inquiries you'd hear from a recruiter might resemble the following:

- What do you estimate to be your biggest academic achievement at this point? What did you do to contribute to that achievement?
- Cite an example of when you were faced with an unpleasant task. How did you go about facing it?
- Give me the most recent example of a conflict you had with a coworker or a supervisor. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to use your communication skills in order to make an important point. Tell me about a time when you had to use a persuasive argument to help someone see things your way. How did you do it?

Note that each of the above examples integrates three universal components of a good behavioral inquiry: a particular performance situation or task, an action on your part, and the consequences of your action.

It is highly critical that you first do some preparation. For any given job interview, this should begin with an analysis on your part of what you believe to be the most important skills, abilities, and personal qualities needed to successfully fulfill the various responsibilities of the job.

Once identified, think carefully about any kind of "working" experience that you've ever had that required you to use these skills, what courses of action or strategies you used to accomplish the tasks, and what positive results came about from your diligence. It is often the case that an interviewer will seek a relatively high level of detail in your responses (e.g., the conversation you had, the mood of the person you were talking to, your specific thought processes at the time of action, etc.).

The final key is preparation, you don't want to be trying to think of examples "on-the-spot" during the interview. Review your past and make some notes to help you recall your past successes during the interview. On the next page is a sheet formatted to help you recall and detail those successes.

In the world of interviewing there is one sad but inevitable truth – the person who is best for the job does not always get the job – **the person who interviews the best for the job gets the job!**

The interview prep worksheet is designed to specifically help you give the very best interview you can. In order to do that it's important you understand a little bit about what you will experience during an interview, because the number one reason why a candidate bombs an interview has nothing to do with their skills it has to do with how they prepare. During an interview you will begin to feel a certain amount of stress. When you become stressed one of the first things that happens is you will start to lose your ability to access your long term memory (details about things that happen more than 18 months ago). Well right now the most popular style of interview being conducted is a "behavior based" interview – give me examples of what you've done in the past and it's a pretty good indicator of what you're going to do in the future. So you are going to have an interviewer ask you for details about something on your resume from 3 years ago and your brain just simply won't let you access those memories and the result is a long drawn out pause, and a filler statement like – "Boy that's a good question. Let me think about that a minute." As your thinking – the interviewer is equating that with a lack of real experience and ultimately a failed interview.

This worksheet is designed so that isn't what you're going to experience. Start with the left hand side of the document. What you want to do first is go through your last 3 positions and write down every accomplishment you can remember from those 3 positions. Focus specifically on some specific areas – namely – where did you MAKE the company money? Where did you SAVE the company money? And finally where did you IMPROVE A PROCESS OR PROCEDURE?

Once you've done that – focus on the right hand side of the page. Look at each individual accomplishment and make some notes on what happened with that accomplishment. Specifically address these issues –whose buy-in did you have to get for the accomplishment? What hurdles did you have to overcome? Were you on time and on budget? What were your actual results vs. expected results? What would you do differently next time?

Once you've written all this down what you have successfully done is now moved all those details that were stored in your long term memory and put them back in your short memory so use can give better examples faster now during your interview. The result will be you'll give a much better interview. IF you are scheduled for a telephone interview feel free to have this sheet lying in front of you while you're talking on the phone.

Good luck!!

A Few Last Reminders:

Line up your references in advance and verify that they will be good ones.

If we at Career Management Associates have redone your resume and you need additional copies just let us know.

Follow up immediately with thank you emails to everyone that you interview with.

Your ultimate goal should be to go in there and make them want to give you an offer. Remember an interview is not a fishing trip, trying to fish out information. If you go in with that approach often you will discover that you like all you hear about the company and opportunity, yet, you've been so focused on gathering information for yourself you have forgotten to sell your abilities and now it is too late to give them the impression of yourself you wanted.

The company will be anxious to know how you thought the interview went so it is important that we talk as soon as possible so that I can pass along your feedback to them. So call me as quick as you can...and a cell phone in the parking lot is not too soon.

Good Luck!

John Daugherty
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Managing Partner – Career Management Associates