

Interviewing Toolbox

This document has been developed to give our candidates all the tools necessary for a successful interview process. Please read this information carefully and follow-up with your Executive Search Consultant if you have any questions.

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INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Interviews can be tough – even for seasoned veterans. The interview is, however, your best opportunity to gain insight into the position and company, and to determine how your experience and talent can contribute to the company's growth and profitability.

Below you will find a list of things that you can do to make your interview as successful as it can be. No tricks or gimmicks here – just good, solid information to help you prepare and win that job.

- ❖ Do your homework – on the company. Find out as much about the company, its history, its current situation and its future as you can. Utilize your Executive Search Consultant and the Internet to find periodicals and trade journals, articles, annual reports and 10K reports. Be prepared to ask good questions about the company and its direction.
- ❖ Do your homework – on the position. Have a thorough understanding of the position, its key duties and primary responsibilities, and what is expected. Be prepared to ask good questions: Who has been successful and why? Who has failed and why? Who does the position report to? Who does the position supervise? What needs to be done in the first 6 months? 1st year? Your Executive Search Consultant will be able to provide insight in these areas prior to the interview.
- ❖ Do your homework – on yourself. Review your career history thoroughly. Review dates, positions, duties and responsibilities, and accomplishments. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to ***cite specific examples of accomplishments and how your specific experience can help the company*** solve some of its problems. Concentrate on your most recent positions, but don't neglect your early career. Reflect on your successes, so you can adequately impart your strengths when given the chance!

PHONE INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Phone interviews are frequently a first step in the interviewing process. In these times of corporate frugality, companies often opt for an initial phone interview for the screening of potential candidates. These phone conversations are normally your first contact with a company, therefore your first impression. Make your impact!

Here are a few useful hints to help you through the process:

- ❖ Work with your Executive Search Consultant to set up a specific time for the call. This will allow you to be fully prepared to conduct an effective interview.
- ❖ Treat the phone interview just as you would a personal, face-to-face interview. Just because it is over the phone does not mean that you should take it lightly or take it less seriously!
- ❖ Make sure the phone you plan on using for the call is of high quality. Avoid portable and/or cellular phones.
- ❖ If you have an answering machine/voice mail, please make sure your recording is both courteous and professional.
- ❖ Make sure family members know how to answer the phone and take messages in your absence. Keep a note pad by the phone for messages and reinforce how important their cooperation is to your search success.
- ❖ Be aware of any potential distractions, i.e. radio, television, background conversations, etc. Plan to sit in a quiet room/area where you can speak and think in a productive manner.
- ❖ If you have the “call-waiting” feature on your phone, it is best not to interrupt your conversation to answer a call.
- ❖ If you have a bad connection and/or have difficulty hearing the other person, offer to call them back.
- ❖ Be fully prepared with your notes in regard to: 1) the company, 2) the position, and 3) yourself (resume). You will then be able to come across as an organized and articulate interviewee.

Again, do not take this step in the interview process lightly. This is a great opportunity to sell yourself and to find out more about the position. Last, but certainly not least, the phone interview is the opportune time to set up your face-to-face meeting. **DO NOT BE AFRAID TO ASK FOR THE APPOINTMENT!** Have your calendar at hand so you may suggest dates that would be convenient to interview. **GOOD LUCK!**

INTERVIEWING TO "SECURE YOUR SUCCESS"

Preparation will allow you to enter the interview relaxed and confident which will help you determine if you can fulfill the needs of the company and if they have an opportunity that can enhance your career.

- 1.) Arrive fifteen minutes early to the interview, but no earlier. If you arrive any earlier, do not enter the company until 15 minutes prior to be respectful of your interviewer's time.
- 2.) Fill out all applications neatly and completely. Write "negotiable" in the salary section.
- 3.) When meeting the interviewer, mirror their demeanor.
- 4.) Do not answer questions with a simple "yes" or "no". Sell yourself by using examples and paint a clear picture of where, when, how, what, and why you did it.
- 5.) Stress your achievements, records and accomplishments.
- 6.) Answer all questions to the point; do not ramble on. Role-play some responses before the interview. "Practice makes perfect!"
- 7.) Do not make derogatory remarks about previous or present employers.
- 8.) Avoid asking questions in regard to salary, commission, bonuses or vacation.
- 9.) Tell your possible employer what you are going to do for them, **NOT** what they can do for you.
- 10.) Always represent yourself honestly.

Talk to your Executive Search Consultant about specific issues that may be addressed in the interview. Learn about the interview style of those you will be meeting with during the interview.

During the interview you will be asked difficult questions. These questions are designed to see how you will react under pressure and unfamiliar territory. There are no "pat" answers to these questions. Interviewers ask different questions and look for different responses. However, by being familiar with the types of questions you may be asked, you will give yourself the opportunity to answer these questions comfortably and confidently. We have included a list of typical stress questions and some examples of how they might be answered.

Following is a list of typical stress questions that you may encounter during your interview.

QUESTIONS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER DURING AN INTERVIEW

- ❖ What are your short-range objectives? Long-range objectives?
- ❖ What do you look for in a job?
- ❖ What is the difference between a good position and an excellent one?
- ❖ Why are you leaving? Why did your business fail?
- ❖ Why did you select my organization to interview with?
- ❖ What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
- ❖ Why should we hire you?
- ❖ Do you work well under pressure, deadlines, etc.?
- ❖ What is your philosophy of management?
- ❖ How are you best managed?
- ❖ How has your early career or background influenced your progression and current management style?

- ❖ How has your management style changed over the years?
- ❖ What salary are you seeking and why?
- ❖ What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
- ❖ What are your five biggest accomplishments in your present or last job? Your career?
- ❖ What is your biggest strength? Weakness?
- ❖ What business, credit or character references can you give us?
- ❖ What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this business?
- ❖ In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our firm?
- ❖ How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?
- ❖ How long would you stay with us?
- ❖ If you could start again, what would you do differently?
- ❖ How do you rate yourself as a professional? As an executive?
- ❖ What new goals or objectives have you established recently? Why?
- ❖ How have you changed the nature of your job?
- ❖ What qualities have you liked or disliked in your boss?
- ❖ What was the most difficult ethical decision you have had to make? What was the result?
- ❖ Why have you not obtained a job so far?
- ❖ What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?
- ❖ Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?
- ❖ How would you evaluate your present firm?
- ❖ Do you generally speak to people before they speak to you?
- ❖ How would you describe the essence of success?
- ❖ How successful have you been?
- ❖ What is the worst situation you have faced in your professional life? How did you deal with it? What happened?
- ❖ What interests you the most about the position we have? The least?
- ❖ Do you feel that you might be better off with a different size firm than ours?
- ❖ Are you a leader? A good manager? Analytical? Given an example.
- ❖ How do you build a team under you?
- ❖ How would you describe your own personality?
- ❖ Have you helped increase sales? Profits? Reduced costs?
- ❖ Where do you relate best – up one level, down one level, or with your peers?
- ❖ What do your subordinates think of you?
- ❖ How do you evaluate your subordinates?
- ❖ Have you had to let people go? Lay off? Terminate? When and why?

As we indicated earlier, there are no “pat” answers to these questions.

Review the questions and your responses. While some of the questions seem difficult, the keys to answering effectively are to be direct, truthful, positive and succinct!

***If you are interested in the position, ask for it, or ask for the next interview. If you want this job, say this “I am very interested in your company. I am confident I can do an excellent job for you. What is the next step in your hiring process?”*

QUESTIONS TO ASK IN AN INTERVIEW

1. Who are your major competitors and how do they stack up against you in terms of product, market share, methods of marketing, and strengths and weaknesses?
2. Tell me about the history/growth of the company.
3. In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance, and what has been the biggest setback?
4. What is your highest priority in the next six months, and how could someone like me help?
5. Tell me about a typical day.
6. Tell me about your training program?
7. What are the characteristics of your top people?
8. Where do you see your company going in the next several years?
9. What are three main qualities you are looking for in a candidate?
10. How do you see me fitting in with your company?
11. If I were to ask your top person what he/she likes most/least about the company, what type of responses would I get?
12. How do I compare with other qualified applicants?
13. Do you have any hesitations about me being successful with your company?
14. What does your interview process entail?
15. When may I return and meet some of the people with whom I would be working?
16. What are your personal satisfactions and disappointments since you have been with the firm?

HOW TO HANDLE THE MONEY ISSUE

The question of compensation can be very sensitive and often requires extended negotiations to reach a figure that is fair and acceptable to both the company and the individual. Some points to remember:

- ❖ Most companies want to make a fair offer. They want to bring new employees on board at a salary level that provides incentive to change jobs that also is consistent with the company's existing salary structure for that position.
- ❖ The days of 20% and 25% increases in compensation are gone. Inflation rates are down; all corporations are more conscious of maintaining consistency in existing salary structures; the economic growth in many industries has leveled off, and the competition for better positions has increased. **Be realistic in your expectations.**
- ❖ The position/opportunity is the single most important element of your decision. No amount of money will make a poor position/company a good one. A quality position, working with quality people in a dynamic work environment offers rewards that money cannot buy.
- ❖ Be flexible! Compensation packages are a combination of salary, reviews, titles and perks. These elements can be arranged/re-arranged, and sometimes, very creatively to satisfy both the individual and the company.

- ❖ Keep your Executive Search Consultant involved. Part of our job is to handle sensitive negotiations and move both parties to a fair and acceptable compensation package. We do this for a living and can often offer alternatives that will satisfy both parties. (We are also a good buffer. We are able to keep sensitive negotiations on a professional level and not become personal.)
- ❖ If you are asked what salary you are looking for, try to avoid quoting a specific figure. Attempt something like this: “I am very interested in the opportunity, and I feel I can make a meaningful contribution. I would be open to a competitive offer.” It is best not to name a figure if at all possible. You don’t want to over-price/under-price yourself, so remember to discuss all relevant salary and benefits issues with your Executive Search Consultant.
- ❖ If you are asked again later in the process, you may want to re-state what you are earning, and ask what a person with your experience level is worth in their company.

FOLLOW-UP LETTER

A well-written and timely follow-up letter will enable you to make a positive impression and show your genuine interest in the position. It is an example of both your work habits and writing skills. To gain full advantage of this opportunity, here are a few points to consider:

- Send the letter as soon as possible. This allows you to convey a sense of urgency and a high interest level in the opportunity. Ideally, your letter should go out the next day.
- Be as brief as possible. It shows respect for other’s time.
- The body of the letter should address four main points:
 1. Thank them for their time.
 2. Express interest and enthusiasm towards the company and position.
 3. Highlight experiences/accomplishments that amplify your qualifications, using the manager’s own words from the interview.
 4. Ask for the next interview.

Have someone carefully proofread your letter, then e-mail it in MS Word to your Executive Search Consultant for a final proof (***we ask you to do this in order to avoid a letter being sent out that does not represent you well!***). They will make any corrections or suggestions. Once you and your Consultant have agreed that the letter is ready to be sent, sign a hard copy, and drop it in the mail.

Sending thank you letters via e-mail is on the impersonal side, so we recommend avoiding e-mailed thank you letters, unless it is necessary due to timing or special circumstances.

SAMPLE FOLLOW-UP LETTER

Date

Mr. John Smith
Vice President
XYZ Company
1234 South Street
Anywhere, VA 12345

Dear Mr. Smith:

I appreciate the time spent with you discussing XYZ Company and the _____ position. It was a pleasure meeting with you, _____ and _____. I feel my qualifications and skill set in _____, _____, and _____ reflect those necessary to be successful at XYZ Company.

At ABC Corporation, I successfully installed a state of the art _____ system on time and under budget, as well as managed a staff up to fifteen professionals and clerks. I am confident that I have the experience and drive to successfully manage the _____ Department.

I feel an even great excitement level about the opportunity because it will allow me to attain my goals of _____, _____ and _____.

I look forward to our next meeting to discuss this opportunity in greater detail.

Sincerely,

Michael Brown

This is a sample letter to help get you started. You may customize yours to reflect what is relevant to your interview. If you need assistance with preparing your thank you letter, then do not hesitate to call your Executive Search Consultant for assistance. They will be happy to help you with it!

DRESS FOR SUCCESS

MEN:

- A conservative suite in dark blue or dark gray, with a long-sleeved white shirt. The tie should be conservative but in-style. Dark socks (over-the-calf) with dark, freshly shined shoes.
- Jewelry should be limited to a wristwatch and a wedding ring.
- Fingernails should be clean and trimmed.
- Facial hair should be clean-shaven.

WOMEN: Women today should have a few more options when it comes to career dressing, but similar principles apply. Conservative is still the rule of thumb for interviews.

- A business suit in a subdued color is best for first interviews. Natural fibers work best. Dress in today's styles, but keep the hemline close to the knee length and keep blouses modest.
- A conservative dress or suit is fine for additional interviews.
- Hosiery should be worn at all times, regardless of weather conditions. Shoe heel height should be moderate and comfortable – shoes should be freshly polished. If heel tips are worn get them replaced – so you do not click as you walk.
- Jewelry should be minimal and in good taste.
- Nails should be well manicured and polished in clear or light, conservative colors. If long nails are a part of a personal fashion statement, avoid bright colors and glittered accents for interviewing.
- Hairstyle will vary with each individual. Long hair/pull back; Short hair/neat.
- Make-up should be tastefully and lightly applied.

25 WAYS CANDIDATES STRIKE OUT WHEN INTERVIEWING

A survey of companies, who were questioned as to why they did not hire a qualified candidate, resulted in the following reasons:

1. **Poor personal appearance**
2. **Lack of interest and enthusiasm**
3. **Over-emphasis on money**
4. **Criticism of past employers**
5. **Failure to have good eye contact with interviewer**
6. **Limp, "dead fish" handshake**
7. **Late for the interview**
8. **Failure to express appreciation for the interviewer's time**
9. **Does not ask enough detailed questions about position**
10. **Lacks sufficient detail when responding to questions asked by interviewer**
11. **Overbearing, over-aggressive, conceited, "know-it-all" complex**
12. **Inability to express oneself clearly**
13. **Lack of planning for career and no purpose or goals**
14. **Lack of confidence, ill at ease**
15. **Lack of factual information**
16. **Lack of manners, courtesy**

17. **Lack of maturity**
18. **Lack of vitality**
19. **Indecisive**
20. **Merely shopping around**
21. **Cynical**
22. **Lacks a strong work ethic**
23. **Intolerant**
24. **Inability to take criticism/not open to being mentored**
25. **High pressure type**