Job Interview tips

Job interviews in many organizations are getting sophisticated these days. Psychological tests, role plays, and challenges to one's "quick intelligence" and street smarts are often part of the package. While it's impossible to anticipate everything you may encounter, here are ten tips that will help you negotiate the interview process successfully.

1. **Prepare and over-prepare**
It is assumed that you don't go in with egg on your tie, spinach in your teeth, or without a thorough knowledge of the organization and position for which you are interviewing. Beyond that, there's an important principle that will enable you to be much more confident. It's called, "over-preparing." It goes like this: Plan your strategy--your answers to all the possible questions you may be asked or the challenges that may be thrown at you--and then practice, practice, practice. Role play and repeat your best responses until they are entirely natural, until they simply roll off your tongue with the apparent spontaneity that comes only with successive repetition.
2. **Be particularly clear on what you know and what you want to achieve**
If your interview is resume-based (you've had to supply a resume either before or concurrently), have the facts of your stated objective, relevant experience, education, etc. thoroughly memorized and mentally supported. As to your job objective, be clear on what you want, as well as what you don't want. There's little room in the job market for the applicant who's willing to take anything; he or she will usually get nothing!
3. **Make sure your responses match your claims**
If, for example, you've taken extra coursework to qualify for a particular position, license, or certification, tie it into your narrative, e.g., "When I took my coursework for my CPA, I learned that ..." Build on your resume, but don't refer directly to it (assuming the interviewer has it in his or her possession); make sure the connections are there, but do it subtly.
4. **Be clear about your strengths**
You're almost certain to be hit with questions pertaining to your strengths and weaknesses. Know your strengths and emphasize those that relate specifically to the position for which you're being considered. If, for example, you're applying for a sales position, you might describe one of your strengths (if it's true) as follows: "I've made a study of personality types and I've learned to quickly type people in terms of the kinds of approaches that might best attract them." Be prepared, in this case, to back up your claim if the interviewer suddenly asks: "What type would you say I am?"
5. **Describe your weaknesses as strengths**
This is tricky, so let's think about why the question is asked. The interviewer probably wants to learn several things about you with this question, such as: whether or not you are arrogant ("I really don't think I have any weaknesses"), whether you know yourself ("Well, I've never really thought about that"), and finally, what you are doing to eliminate your weaknesses. Here are two ways to answer this question so that you leave a positive impression in the mind of the interviewer: (a) Show that, in overcoming a weakness, you've learned. If, for example, there's a period in your chronology that just doesn't fit (say that you took a job selling cars between jobs as an accountant ... it happens!), you might tell the interviewer: "One weakness, which it took me some time to overcome, wasthat I really wasn't sure that I wanted to be an accountant. For example, in 1988-90, I worked as a car salesman. I did so because I couldn't decide if I wanted to make accounting my career. That experience taught me that I really didn't want to sell products, and that I was much more challenged by the opportunity to solve client problems. (b) Pick a weakness that is really a strength. If, for example, you're interviewing for a job in an organization you know is hard-charging and unforgiving of average performance, you might say, "One of my weaknesses is that I tend to be impatient with people who aren't willing to pull their full weight and give 110%." In this case, your "weakness" may help you get the job.
6. **If you've been fired, be forthright about it**
So many people have been laid off through no fault of their own in the past ten years that it's no longer a stigma to have been fired--unless it was for justifiable cause (e.g.,- you socked your boss). Answer directly, but without a "charge" in your voice. Expressing your bitterness over being let go tells the interviewer (rightly or wrongly) that you can't accept the realities of modern free enterprise -- that downsizing is acceptable and often necessary.
7. **Be clear where you want to go**
A standard question which has all manner of variations is: "Where do you want to be five years from today?" Only today, the answers are different. Unless you plan to inherit Dad's company, your answer is apt to be a lot more general than it might have been a decade ago. Why? Because the economy and nearly every industry are changing so fast that specificity with respect to the distant future is extremely difficult. So, instead of responding to the question with, "I plan to be in a position of senior leadership in this company," you might want to say: "I plan to become qualified in every phase of this industry." The exact response depends upon the specifics of your job hunting campaign, but the principle is: be specific while allowing yourself the flexibility which suggests that you understand the complexities of the business you're applying for.
8. **Have clear personal standards**
This is a sleeper because, on the face of it, the question doesn't seem to have much to do with the immediate interview. Today, however, many organizations are looking for people who DO have standards regarding their personal and professional lives, who can articulate them clearly and concisely, and who live by them. In this case, the briefer, the better. "I delegate my weaknesses." "I don't take on projects unless I can give them 100% dedication." "I respond in specifics and avoid meaningless generalities." "I am committed to life-long learning and growth."
9. **Interview the interviewer**
The applicant who will take anything offered is unlikely to win any but the most temporary of positions. A competent interviewer (there are some) will respect your efforts to assess the organization and the position in terms of whether or not it meets YOUR requirements. And you owe it to yourself to have defined before hand, what you ideally want and what you are willing to settle for, under certain conditions. For example, you might really want a salary of $75,000 to begin with, but you'd be willing to take less if the opportunities for growth are clearly in the picture.
10. **Don't allow yourself to be badgered by the salary issue**
Even today, it's still not uncommon to hear the old refrain: "Our policy is not to pay a new employee more than X% higher than he/she is currently making." Sorry, that doesn't fly. The real issue, and the only one at stake here, is whether or not your prospective employer is willing to pay WHAT YOU ARE WORTH. And, your worth is a function of the job itself and your capability and willingness to perform it. In most organizations, there are clear parameters for a given job, a range of salary that is adjustable depending upon the market and the applicant's experience. In most cases, unless you are very good, you will have to work within those limits. But, within the limits, what you are worth is a matter of mutual agement based on your own knowledge of your worth and your ability to convince thosere interviewing you. So, to sum it up: Know the range of compensation for the job you're seeking, make your own realistic determination of what you're worth, and then be prepared to stand your ground.

Human Resources personnel, professional recruiters and various other career experts all agree: one of the best ways to prepare yourself for a job interview is to anticipate questions, develop your answers, and practice, practice, practice.

There are plenty of websites that offer lists of popular job interview questions, and knowing the types of questions to expect can be very useful. But knowing how to answer those questions can mean the difference between getting the job and getting the "reject letter."

**HOW TO ANSWER QUESTIONS**

**First, know these important facts:**

1. There is no way to predict every question you will be asked during a job interview. In other words, expect unexpected questions--they'll come up no matter how much preparation you do.
2. Treat any sample answers you find, such as in discussion forums, books or on Internet job sites, as GUIDES only. Do not use any sample answers word for word! Interviewers can spot "canned" answers a mile away, and if they suspect you are regurgitating answers that are not your own, you can kiss that job goodbye. You must apply your own experiences, personality and style to answer the questions in your own way. This is crucial, and it will give you a big advantage over candidates who simply recite sample answers.
3. Job interview questions are not things to fear, they are OPPORTUNITIES TO EXCEL. They allow you to show why you are the best person for the job, so instead of dreading them, look forward to them! The key is to give better answers than anyone else, and that's where your preparation comes in.

**Now, take these actions:**

1. Make a list of your best "selling points" for the position. What qualifications, skills, experience, knowledge, background, personality traits do you possess that would apply to this particular job? Write them down and look for opportunities to work them into your answers.
2. In addition to any sample job interview questions you find through various resources, you absolutely must develop your OWN list of probable questions based specifically on the job for which you are applying. Put yourself in the hiring manager's shoes -- what kinds of questions would you ask to find the best person for this job?
3. Write down your answers to likely questions. Study the job announcement carefully. (If you don't have one, get one!) Note the phrases they use when describing the desired qualifications. You'll want to target these as much as possible when developing your answers. For example, if the announcement says they want someone with "strong customer service skills," make sure you include "strong customer service skills" in at least one of your answers. That will make a better impression than saying "I helped customers."
4. Review and edit your answers until you feel they are "just right." Read them over and over until you are comfortable that you know them fairly well. Don't try to memorize them; don't worry about remembering every word. Practice saying them out loud. If possible, have a friend help you rehearse for the interview.

**Be A (Short) Story Teller**
Make use of this old marketing tip: "Facts tell but stories sell." During a job interview, you are selling yourself. Whenever possible, answer questions with a short story that gives specific examples of your experiences. Notice I said "short." You don't want to ramble or take up too much time; you want to be brief but still make your point.

For example, imagine two people interviewing for a job as a dog groomer are asked, "Have you ever dealt with aggressive dogs?" Candidate Joe answers, "Yes, about 10% of the dogs I've groomed had aggressive tendencies." Candidate Mary answers, "Oh yes, quite often. I remember one situation where a client brought in his Pit Bull, Chomper. He started growling at me the moment his owner left, and I could tell from his stance he wasn't about to let me get near his nails with my clippers. I think he would've torn my arm off if I hadn't used the Schweitzer Maneuver on him. That calmed him down right away and I didn't have any problems after that." (NOTE: I know nothing about dog grooming; I made the Schweitzer Maneuver up for illustrative purposes.)

Don't you agree that Mary's answer is better? Sure, Joe answered the question, but Mary did more than that -- she gave a specific example and told a quick story that will be remembered by the interviewers.

In today's job market where there are dozens of highly qualified candidates for each opening, anything you do that will make you stand out and be remembered will greatly increase your odds of getting hired.

**Keep the Interviewer's Perspective in Mind; Answer His "What's in it for Me?" Question**
While many questions asked during job interviews appear to focus on your past accomplishments, here's an important tip: they may be asking about what you did in the past, but what they really want to know is what you can do NOW, for THEM.

The key is to talk about your past accomplishments in a way that shows how they are RELEVANT to the specific job for which you are interviewing. Doing advance research about the company (such as at their website or at www.hoovers.com) and the position will be extremely helpful.

Here's another example with Joe and Mary. The interviewer asks, "What is the most difficult challenge you've faced, and how did you overcome it?" Joe answers with, "In one job I was delivering pizzas and I kept getting lost. By the time I'd find the address, the pizza would be cold, the customer would be unhappy, and my boss was ready to fire me. I overcame this problem by purchasing a GPS navigation device and installing it in my car. Now I never get lost!" Mary answers, "In my current job at Stylish Hounds, management ran a special promotion to increase the number of customers who use the dog-grooming service. It was a bit too successful because we suddenly had more customers than we could handle. Management would not hire additional groomers to help with the workload. Instead of turning customers away or significantly delaying their appointments, I devised a new grooming method that was twice as fast. Then I developed a new work schedule. Both efforts maximized productivity and we were able to handle the increased workload effectively without upsetting our customers."

Joe's answer shows initiative and commitment (he bought that GPS gadget with his own money, after all). But Mary's answer relates specifically to the job they are applying for (dog groomer). And Mary had done research about the company and discovered it was about to significantly expand it's dog-grooming operations. So she picked an example from her past that addressed an issue the interviewer was likely to apply to a future situation in his company. See the difference?

Here's one more example. Joe and Mary are asked, "What's your greatest accomplishment?" Joe answers, "I won two Olympic Gold Medals during the 2000 Olympics in the high-jump competition." Mary answers, "I was named Stylish Hounds's Dog Groomer of the Year in 2003 for increasing productivity in my section by 47%."

Joe's accomplishment is pretty spectacular. But remember the interviewer's perspective. He might be impressed, but he's thinking "What's in it for me? What does being a world-class high-jumper four years ago have to do with helping me to increase sales in my dog-grooming department?" Mary's answer is much less spectacular than Joe's, but it's relevant to the position and indicates that she has what it takes to be successful in this particular job. It tells the interviewer, "I have what you're looking for; I can help you with your specific needs."

Looks like Mary has a new job!

**Do Not Lie**
Last but not least, tell the truth. It's sometimes very tempting to "alter" the truth a bit during a job interview. For instance, say you quit instead of being fired. But the risk of being discovered as a liar far outweighs the potential benefit of hiding the truth.

If you are thinking about telling a lie during the interview, ask yourself these questions (this technique has helped me make many major decisions): "What is the BEST thing that could happen? What is the WORST thing that could happen? Is the best thing WORTH RISKING the worst thing?" In this instance, the best thing would be getting the job. The worst thing would be getting discovered as a liar, which could lead to getting fired, which could lead to unemployment, which could lead to more job searching, which could lead to another interview, which could lead to the stress of deciding whether to lie about just getting fired, and so on -- a cycle that can go on indefinitely. Is all that worth getting the one job, perhaps on a temporary basis?

Always consider the consequences of your actions.

In Summary, Here's What You Need To Do When Preparing To Answer Job Interview Questions:

1. Study the job announcement.
2. Research the company.
3. Anticipate likely questions.
4. Prepare answers to those questions that are relevant to the position and the company.
5. Promote your best "selling points" (relevant qualifications, capabilities, experience, personality traits, etc.) by working them into your answers.
6. Practice. Practice. Practice.
* Describe an experience when you had to calm down an angry customer.
* Describe a situation when you had to perform under pressure.
* Describe how you formed a team and led it.

No two persons can give same answers to the above questions. Behavioural interviewing – asking questions about your past behaviour in certain specific situations - is one of the hot trends in hiring.

The underlying logic is that your past behaviour is the predictor of your future behaviour – and performance. So, if you handled an angry client well in the past, most likely you'll be able to do so in future as well.

At the root of BI, it seems, is what Russian physiologist, psychologist and physician Ivan Pavlov (Nobel prize in 1904) proved about a century ago: We behave in a conditioned way. Pavlov's observed that if you give a dog something to eat every time you ring a bell, soon the dog starts to salivate when you just ring a bell. Dog gets conditioned to associate one stimulus (ringing bell) with another (food) and behaves accordingly. We are no different.

If someone tends to become irritable under pressure, he will do so every time pressure is applied on him. If someone gets unduly impatient when he has to wait, like in a queue at a bus or taxi stand or at an airport, he would do so every time such a situation arises.

**How to prepare**
If you're going for an interview, it makes sense to be prepared for some BI questions. If not, these questions can put you off balance. For example, a well qualified and experienced candidate pursuing a leadership position was asked by the interviewer to share an experience of creating a new team from scratch. Since he was not expecting such a question, he failed to reply convincingly and lost the opportunity.

Here is a way to prepare for such interviews:

**Study the job requirements:** The first step is to carefully study the job requirements and ask yourself: What kind of behaviour might be expected in this position? Does it involve leadership skills, working under pressure, handling conflicts, working in a team or what? Sometimes, the expected behaviours will be clearly listed in the job advertisement. For example, for the job of a finance manager, an advertisement has listed “good teamwork” as one of the requirements. This is a good enough hint to be ready for some questions about behaviour in a team setting.

**Prepare stories:** Based on your assessment, scan your past experiences and prepare a few stories, which demonstrate that you possess the required behavioural traits. For example, if you’re applying for the job of a contracts manager, you may want to be prepared to describe how you handled situations involving conflicts and claims from suppliers or customers.

It will be easier to put together the stories if you construct them in three parts (S-A-R):

1. **Situation:** First describe the situation that prompted you to act or react.
2. **Action/response/behaviour:** What action you took or how you reacted?
3. **Result:** What was the end result?

Your stories will appear credible and interesting if you keep them short, stick to facts and avoid heaping praise on yourself. Let the facts do the talking.

**Practise:** After preparing the stories, practise narrating them so that you can be fluent during an interview.

In situations with many candidates having similar qualifications and experiences, it is the behavioural aspects that can eventually differentiate you from the crowd and get the job. Being prepared for behavioural interviewing can prove to be the winning stroke.

Whether you’re a student job seeker or a polished and proven executive, the first thing you must come to terms with is, “Regardless of the position you seek, you are now in sales!” The product you are selling is YOU! The interview is your opportunity to differentiate yourself in the eyes of your customer [the interviewer] when compared to your competitors [other job applicants].

Successful companies today, are focused on building what’s known as, corporate “Unique Value-Add Propositions.” Simply put, a unique value proposition is designed to differentiate companies / products and services, by making a decision to do business with you, an easy one. This is accomplished by means of removing the risk in customer’s minds through obvious value-add.

So before you go into an interview, ask yourself, “What is my unique Value-add for this company? What can I say, do, or show, that will separate me from all other candidates?” And, “How convincing am I?”

There is no secret that in many cases today, the most qualified are not always the ones hired. Sadly, many qualified individuals lose out on opportunities expressly due to their inability to distinguish themselves [in the interview] by showing unique value-add. You may then ask, “How does one construct a value-add interview?” The process is surprisingly simple.

**#1:** As quickly as you can, write down all the words that describe your unique strengths that relate to the position to which you’re applying. [Note: Five words are not enough. Try for at least fifteen / you may also ask others for their input].

**#2:** As quickly as you can, write down all the words that describe your potential weaknesses as they relate to the position to which you’re applying.

**#3:** Turn each word into a sentence or statement. It does not have to be complicated. For example, if one of your strength-words was, “experience” - you could simply say, “I am experienced.” [Note: Do the same for your weaknesses list as well].

**#4:** Take each sentence / statement, and turn them into a question. “I am experienced” becomes, “Why am I experienced?”

To answer the question, “Why am I experienced?” inexorably brings to light your real Value-Add. From a selling point of view, ‘being experienced’ may be true, but it is only, however, a fact. “How specifically, am I experienced, and, How it will therefore benefit the new company,” is the real Risk-Removing, Unique-Value-Add-Information needed to showcase your talents.

Knowing the answers, ahead of time, to questions like, “Why is [this] a potential weakness for me - for this position?” is equally integral to the success of any interview.

For more detailed information on Interviewing Skills, visit [www.s150.com]. On the ‘Speaker Profile’ page, is a hot-link to “The Art of the Interview”. There you can order [$5 Admin-Fee] a 55-page booklet that guarantees better interviewing results. It details the specific types of questions trained interviewers will ask and the reasons why they ask them. The do’s and don’ts of a good Résumé’s as well as ways to better prepare mentally for an interview are also there in a comprehensive easy to read format.

Remember that in business, “The degree to which you cannot provide a unique Value-Add Proposition is in direct proportion to the degree you hurt yourself, your company and your industry.” In any job interview, “You are the company. The product you’re selling is YOU!”

by Paul ShearstoneThis article is probably what most of you out there are waiting for. So, wait no more! The "Interviewer's Top 10 Hits" Best Compilation record is out! Here, you'll find a list of the 10 most popular questions used by those faithful interviewers world wide. I do want to caution everyone though, that this is only to provide you with a overall guide to what they want to know, and it should not be treated as text book answers, because there are none. If everyone started answering the same questions with the same answers, there would be (a) very bored interviewers, and (b) absolutely no selection process. But let me not digress.

And the Top 10 are...

**1. Tell Me Something About Yourself**
Now, this is a golden classic used at the start of interviews to break the ice and to get you to give them a good initial run down of who you are and your "hidden" characteristics, demonstrated in the way you present this self-story.

You should prepare a 2 to 3 minute presentation that briefly introduces your self (where you're from), your personal interests (hobbies, community involvement etc), your work history, and recent career experience. The most time should be spent on the accomplishments in the last two areas.

Interviewers look out for three things:

1. ***If you are able to give a brief, sequential summary of your life and career that relates to the job for which you're interviewing. Don't ramble on aimlessly on irrelevant nitty gritty details though. If you find yourself at the 5 minute mark talking about your high school days, you are WAY off the mark!***
2. Your conversational style, your confidence level, your ability to organize and present information.
3. An idea of the person your are behind the suit.

**2. Why Do You Want To Join This Company?**
OK, now they want to know your motivations for joining the company. And this is usually where they can read between the lines in your answer, so think carefully when answering.

First, do your research on the company, its culture and market. Not enough job seekers do enough or ANY of this which is a real no-no! Make sure you understand who you are being interviewed by.

***Second, DON'T give answers such as "Oh, because its such a cool place to work!", "I like your salary and benefits package," or "My friends are already there and it makes it easier for us to hang out together."*** OK, so maybe I exaggerate a little bit, but you should get the picture.

These answers seem "give-me" oriented and do not show the interviewer how your skills and experience deliver what the company needs.

Third, DO demonstrate to them how you can contribute to the company's goals and how your skills and experience match their requirements. Use concrete examples as if you were already working there. For instance, when I interviewed with JobStreet.com for the role of Editor, I drew up a list of things that would add value to the job seeker. Similarly, if research shows that the company is trying to be market leader, tell them how your experience/skills will be able to let you contribute to adding market share for the company.

**3. Why Are You Looking For A New Job?**
This may seem like a straightforward question to answer, but look again. It is very easy to slip up here if you are unprepared. Most people seek another job because they are unhappy/unsatisfied with their current employment. But relating ANYTHING in a negative light at an interview is bad form. Most interviewers don't look so much for the reason you left, but they way you deliver your response. So, always be honest and positive.

Even if you got fired from your last job, try to keep it brief yet honest. If you start ranting on about how your ex boss/company was a terrible employer, they may be thinking "Is he still dealing with bitter or sad feelings, or has he been able to focus his energy on the future and the next position? Does she place total blame on others for her situation or does she accept at least some responsibility for it?" Further, most terminations happen because of an ill-fit between company and employee, not so much performance. So, try to take this angle.

If you left voluntarily, don't dwell on the negative reasons for leaving, and focus on how you can contribute better to your new company/role.

Some examples of answers that would work are below. But again, don't just memorize these answers and throw them out again without being really honest. Interviews never work if you approach them like textbook exams.

1. I wanted to move my career in a new direction. (Make sure you mention what this new direction is.)
2. My company was restructuring and I chose to seek better opportunities elsewhere.
3. I want to keep developing new skills but was unable to pursue this in my previous company. I decided to make a change to allow this to happen.

**4. What Kind Of Position Are You Looking For?**
***Avoid vague answers such as "I want an exciting job" or "I want to grow my skills in this area." It shows lack of focus and motivation for your career objective.*** Instead, focus on your desired position and how your skills and experience can help you be an asset within that position. For example, "I have a strong ability to communicate and market a product as proven in my 2 years experience as marketing officer at University/company A. I believe that I understand the consumer industry and can add value to your company's marketing efforts."

**5. What Do You Consider Your Strengths and Weaknesses?**
This is a time to be honest, but don't go to extremes either way. ***You don't want to start telling them that you are really terrible at organizing and can never be on time. Neither do you make yourself out to be the next best thing since sliced bread.*** Instead, be clear and concise about qualities that demonstrate you take responsibility for your work ethic, actions, and experiences learned (or failures) on the job, problem-solving ability, and values.

**6. What Do You Know About Our Company?**
This is where your research has come in handy. It is a way to demonstrate that you are serious about joining the company and was motivated enough to learn about it before the interview. Don't respond by repeating each and every fact you learnt about the company, because it can seem arrogant and memorized. Do mention its major product, markets and latest development. ***Keep things positive. Also try to show your eagerness to learn more about the company by asking some questions to the interviewer him/herself.***

**7. What Do You Consider Your Greatest Achievements?**
Try to mention about 2-3 achievements. This is a way for interviewers to gauge how you managed people/projects/yourself in a successful manner - which can translate into how you may be able to succeed in the company if they hire you. Try to choose a set of achievements that allow you to display a variety of strengths. Ie. A successful event that you set up showing your organizational skills, successfully resolving a situation at work which demonstrates your problem solving skills and delivering an important report under difficult circumstances which shows your ability to handle pressure.

**8. Where Do You See Yourself One / Five Years From Now?**
Respond to reflect your confidence and drive to reach a level of work that will be rewarded for your success. State realistic expectations and propose a real plan of where you intend to go within the company. Never sound overly confident, fearful or confused.

**9. What Type Of Job Assignments Did You Perform In Your Last Job?**
Be honest and to the point answering this, even if the assignments performed don't exactly match those required in the new position. However, also take the opportunity to mention any projects your volunteered for, special projects you took on outside your work scope or elected positions held in committees in other past jobs/university. ***The key point here is to try to tell them about experience gained in areas that might be relevant to your new position.***

**10. When You Start A New Job, How Do You Establish Good Relationships With Your New Colleagues and Supervisors?**
It is important here to be enthusiastic and positive. Tell them how you worked well with your past colleagues or peers in projects etc. Networking skills is important so show how you used yours in your past to good stead.

So that wraps out the countdown! The bottomline is, be prepared, do your research, and understand the job you are being interviewed for and how your skills / personality / experience match the job's requirements. Close the interview with any last questions, pass on your namecard if you have one, thank them for their time and give a firm handshake before smiling and saying good bye.

The first interview is just a lead into the second interview or offer to a job. Not everyone is suited for the job or the company. So don't be discouraged if you were not offered a position right away. Keep your chin up and your cool, and don't give up on yourself!

Besides, things could be a lot worse at interviews and you could be asked a question like the one used by Goldman Sachs in the USA, "There are eight balls, one of which is slightly heavier than the others. You have a two-armed scale, which you are allowed to use only twice. Which ball is heavier?" Now where is my physics textbook again...