

Preparing for the Interview

“Success depends upon previous preparation, and without such preparation there is sure to be failure.”

—Confucius

Getting that long-awaited phone call for an interview can be a big confidence booster. It means the cover letter and resume you hoped would impress your potential employer did, and your phone calls, emails or drop-by visits weren't in vain. So be optimistic. You're now closer to getting a call saying you're hired. But just how do you make that happen? You prepare for the interview 10 times more than you would prepare for a date with the man of your dreams. How well you're prepared for the interview will dictate how well you'll do once it's begun.

The following four tasks should be handled before you walk in to greet any employer.

TASK 1: RESEARCH THE COMPANY

Before you step into an interview you should have researched the company as much as possible to help you better answer and ask questions. You can gather information from many sources,

including the company's website, their marketing materials, and employees you may know. Here are some things you can find out:

- ◆ The company's mission.
- ◆ How long the company has been in business and who started it.
- ◆ The company's products and/or services.
- ◆ How successful the company is compared to others within the industry.
- ◆ How well the company is doing financially.
- ◆ How many employees the company has.
- ◆ If the company has offices in other cities, states or countries.
- ◆ The company's recruitment process.
- ◆ The company's future plans.

If you take time to gather this information you'll be a step ahead of other applicants who didn't see the need to do their research. You'll be better able to talk about what you like about the company and discuss aspects of the company that the interviewer may bring up.

TASK 2: PRACTICE INTERVIEWING

Perhaps one of the most unnerving parts of the interview process is when the employer takes out his trusty sheet full of interview questions and smiles. Right then you know it's time for you to either sink or swim. In order for you to swim you need to understand the purpose of the question-and-answer phase of the interview. The questions posed by employers, no matter how mundane or unusual, simply give them a chance to gauge the following:

- ◆ Your personality.
- ◆ If you can help meet the company's wants, needs, and goals.

- ◆ Your wants, needs, and goals.
- ◆ If you will fit into the company's culture.

Just as your cover letter should be tailored to an employer, so should the answers to the questions posed. The more you've researched the company and its needs, the better you'll be able to answer the questions to an employer's liking.

For example, if you know the job requires you to work a lot in teams, then of course you "enjoy collaborating with other co-workers to complete assignments." The employer doesn't need to know you really prefer working alone! If the position requires you to learn new software programs, then you certainly "are sure learning new programs will not pose a problem for you." The employer doesn't need to know you'll have to re-read the software manual a dozen times at home! Employers know that people are rarely perfectly suited for a position. However, you don't want an employer to eliminate you as a candidate because of small weaknesses you blabbed you have. Now, if the employer asks you if you speak Spanish and you say yes when you don't know what "agua" means, then you'll be in trouble.

Answering the interview questions can be like walking on a tight rope. You want to appear confident but not cocky, knowledgeable but not a know-it-all, energetic but not wired, and poised but not "posed" for the interview. And just as important, you don't want to say anything incorrect or silly. This is why practicing for each interview is so important.

The following are sample interview questions and possible ways to answer them. Have an older professional ask you the questions during a mock interview.

Sample Interview Questions:

1. Can you tell me a little about yourself?

First briefly go over your academic background, work history and what led you to the career you're entering. Then you can talk about anything interesting/unusual about yourself

that is positive, like you've traveled to several countries, are a trained dancer or ice skater, or volunteer in community service programs. Do not give the interviewer your whole life story, say anything negative about yourself, discuss your political or religious views, or divulge private details of your life.

2. *Why are you seeking a position with this company?*

Discuss certain aspects of the company that you admire, such as its reputation or mission, and how working for the company will help you reach your career goals.

3. *What makes you qualified to apply for this position?*

Discuss how your educational background, work history, and the skills you've acquired have prepared you for the exact position you are applying for.

4. *Why do you want this position?*

Explain why the position is a perfect fit for you, given your educational background, work history or interests. Talk about specific aspects of the job that you'll enjoy and what you like about the company.

5. *Why should I hire you?*

Again, discuss how your educational background, work history, and the skills you've acquired have prepared you for the exact position you are applying for. However, also highlight your positive character traits, like your creativity or perceptiveness, and how having someone in the position with these traits will benefit the company. You should also talk about anything else that you think may set you apart from other candidates.

6. *If hired, how long will you stay with the company?*

Stress to the employer that you can really see yourself growing with the company, and that you see the company