

INTERVIEW PREPARATION AND SOME COMMON MISTAKES

Two important points to remember is to be prepared and go in with a good attitude. You may not be the most experienced candidate, but if you can demonstrate an ability to work hard, do what it takes, and think creatively, you will be ahead of the game. Following are ten common mistakes job seekers make when participating in an interview, and some guidelines for avoiding them.

Giving too much personal information:

Most interviewers do not care about your personal life. Their first and foremost concern is that you are able and qualified to do the job, and that you will fit into the corporate culture. While you should certainly be friendly and polite, avoid any personal subjects such as family life, religion, or, unless they are applicable to the job, outside hobbies. Keep your focus on the job at hand and, even if a personal issue arises, concentrate on discussing your skills and qualifications.

Not knowing anything about the company, or worse, about the job:

Do your homework! Research everything you can about the company and be prepared to discuss why you specifically want to work for this firm. Find out how long the company has been in business, their annual revenue, the number of employees, and their geographical coverage. Also, find out as much as you can about the job itself. If you responded to a classified position that did not list much detail, look up the company website or call their Human Resource department before the interview to obtain a detailed job description. If this is not possible, conduct research on similar job titles to acquire information regarding details of the skills and qualifications required for this type of position.

Not having any questions prepared:

As well as being prepared for questions you may be asked, also be ready to ask your own questions. Do not be caught off guard when the interviewer inevitably asks, "Do you have any questions for me?" Be prepared with several questions, about the company, the position, or the corporate culture. At an initial interview, do not ask about salary, benefits, or workload. You do not want to appear only interested in money, perks, or having an easy job. You want to show your willingness and ability to do the best job possible, and portray enthusiasm for the position. Not having any questions prepared makes a job candidate seem uninterested, unmotivated, and unprepared.

Not finishing a negative issue on a positive note:

In almost every interview, a job candidate will be asked questions that have negative connotations, such as "Have you ever been fired?" or "Have you ever had a work-related injury?" Even questions that are in fact "illegal" can arise and, instead of calling the interviewer on their mistake, simply deal with the question to avoid appearing argumentative or unwilling to disclose something. While you may be forced to explain negative issues in your work history, the important point to remember is to keep it brief and end on a positive note. If you had a work-related injury, for example, do not go into details about what surgeries you had, or the extent of your injury. Calmly and briefly explain what happened, and end it by saying that you are perfectly able to do the job for which you are interviewing. You can even put a positive spin on the issue by stating how you have learned more about safety issues because of the experience, and are even more safety-conscious now than the

average person! Likewise, if you have been fired before or have other negative issues that you cannot avoid, keep it brief, non-emotional, and end it by saying that whatever happened is behind you and you are ready, able, and eager to move forward.

Being "too honest":

Hand-in-hand with the mistake of not ending a negative issue on a positive note, is the mistake of being "too honest", or giving "too much information". It would be difficult to give too much information related to your skills and experience. However, do not volunteer information about being fired, injured, or other negative issues in your work history. If an issue is unavoidable, be honest. However, do not proactively raise these issues. Likewise, if you are asked the very popular interview question, "what is your biggest weakness"; do not bring up issues that could raise a red flag to the employer regarding your qualifications or ability to do the job. Rather, bring up a "weakness" that is either completely unrelated to the job at hand, or that, when seen from another perspective, can appear as a good quality. For example, a possible answer to this "greatest weakness" question could be that you are a perfectionist - a negative issue since you tend to ensure a task is completed perfectly before moving on to the next task, which can take longer. As stated in the previous point, follow up with a positive ending, and state how you are working to "solve" this "weakness". You could state, for example, that you are working on this problem by prioritizing your tasks so that you can ensure everything is completed, while not getting held up on one task.

Not knowing how to sell yourself:

As children, most of us were brought up to be modest and not be boastful. Forget this lesson in an interview! While you certainly do not want to appear arrogant, you do want to be self-assured and be prepared to show what you have to offer. Look at the interview from the interviewer's perspective. He or she is most likely interviewing several candidates who, presumably, all have good enough qualifications to land an interview. The interviewer needs to determine which individual stands above the rest and is the best suited for the job. Make it easy for the interviewer to reach that decision by calling attention those characteristics that render you unique. Think beyond the standard skills, education and experience that make you qualified for the job that the other candidates might possess as well. Share personal qualities about yourself that are applicable to the job. For example, perhaps you are an exceptional leader and not only just manage employees, but help them advance their careers as well. Or perhaps you have a history of taking initiative beyond your job description which has saved your past employers time and/or money. Be prepared to answer the question, "**Why should we hire you?**" by knowing what makes you special and uniquely qualified for the job.

Not seeing the interview questions from the employer's perspective:

Too often job candidates quickly react to an interview question without giving a moment to think, "what is the interviewer really asking?" For example, if an interviewer asks if you have ever managed employees, they want to make sure you have management skills. So, instead of simply saying "no" if you have never been a manager, try instead to think of situations or experiences in which you used similar skills. Perhaps you managed vendors in the past, or managed projects, or perhaps you helped train volunteers for a non-profit. Even if the experience was not paid work experience, a skill is a skill - no matter in which situation it was utilized. Learn to look beyond the interviewer's questions to find out what they are really asking, and what they really want to know.

Discussing pay before a job offer is given:

Occasionally you may be asked about salary needs in an interview. If you are interviewing for a contract position and have already negotiated a rate with your Staffing Agency try to avoid giving an actual number but if answering is unavoidable state the amount you agreed to with your Staffing Firm. If the interviewer wants to know what type of salary you would be seeking if taken on as a permanent employee at the end of the contract assignment try not to give an actual number. Unless you know exactly what the employer is willing to pay, you will always say the wrong amount.

If you state an amount that is below what the employer is willing to pay, they most likely will not offer you more and you have lost potential income. If you state an amount that is too high, the employer may be inclined to think that you will not take the job at the salary they can afford to pay, and may offer the job to someone else. Once a job offer is given, it is perfectly acceptable to negotiate salary - an employer will not retract their job offer. But before the offer is given, it is in your best interest to avoid discussing salary.

Not accurately answering a question:

Going off on too many tangents or not directly answering a question can make a job candidate appear to be avoiding an issue or give the impression that they do not listen. For example, take the question "what is your greatest strength?" If you start listing five good qualities you possess, you have not answered the question accurately. The question asks for your greatest strength, not the top five. You can, and should, explain your best strength in more detail. But simply listing several good qualities is not following directions. Likewise, if an employer asks a question and you circumvent the question or redirect the conversation, it is a red flag to the employer. At best, he or she may think you cannot focus, and at worst, he or she may think you are trying to hide something.

While it is sometimes easy to become distracted during an interview, especially if you hit it off with the interviewer and communicate about topics unrelated to the job, it is in your best interest to keep on track and not go off on tangents that distract from your skills and qualifications.

Additional Comments:

Remember that the interview begins before any questions are even asked. Your demeanor, appearance, and body language speak volumes about who you are and what kind of employee you have the potential to be. Having a good attitude and a pleasant manner go a long way, and many employers would agree that these traits represent a person who is a hard worker and a team player. Throughout the interview, remember to maintain eye contact, not fidget, and remember to smile.

Many job candidates fail to remember that an interview is a dialogue between both parties, and is for the benefit of both the employer and the job candidate. Not only is an interview meant to give the employer an indication of whether or not you are right for the job, but it is also a chance for you to ensure that the company, corporate culture, advancement opportunities, and position responsibilities meet your needs. Keeping this outlook in mind will help you relax and be yourself. If it has been a while since you have been on the receiving end of an interview, it may benefit you to practice prior to meeting with the employer. Practicing in front of a mirror, with a friend, or even by writing down your answers to some typical interview questions will help you refine your answers and make you more confident in marketing yourself to a potential employer.