What Can I Expect During the Interview?

Everything that you have done in your job search has been designed to get you an interview with a potential employer. Now that you have that interview scheduled, it is important that you prepare. There is a natural flow to most interviews. Knowing what is going to happen will help you prepare for this important part of the job search process. Remember: No one gets a job without interviewing.

1. Preparing for the interview

Before the big day, find out as much as you can about the company and the job. Your local America Job Center, library and Chamber of Commerce can help you. Look for the company's website and do an Internet search for articles about the company. You can ask a librarian to help you find articles in national magazines, too. If you know someone who works at the company, talk with them. Check Internet networking sites such as ***www.linkedin.com*** to find contacts. Review the **JobSearch Guide** ***How to Research the Job & the Employer***.

Prepare for some of the questions that you think you might be asked. The **JobSearch Guide** ***Common Interview Questions*** lists some of the major questions that interviewers ask. Be prepared to tell the interviewer:

- Why you want this job with this company.
- What your knowledge, skills and abilities are as they relate to the position you seek. Be ready also to talk about examples of past successes that prove you can do the required tasks.
- That you are ready and willing to do the job.

Find out where the interview is and determine how long it will take you to get there. You might want to make a practice run so that you don't get lost on the day of the interview. Be sure to bring copies of your résumé and samples of your previous work, if appropriate.

2. In the waiting room

The interview begins before you even meet the interviewer. It is very important that you make a good first impression. Do this by being on time or a few minutes early, dressing appropriately (review the **JobSearch Guide** ***How to Make a Good First Impression***) and presenting a positive, friendly attitude. Be courteous to everyone you meet in the building. If you are rude to someone, you can be sure that this will get back to the boss. And don't forget to turn off your cell phone!

3. Meeting the interviewer and making a connection

Here is where body language is important (see sidebar). Stand when the interviewer comes into the waiting area. Shake the interviewer's hand when it is offered to you. Your handshake should be firm, but not bone-crunching. Look the interviewer in the eye and don't forget to smile!

The first few minutes of the interview are usually spent on small talk and may actually be the most important few minutes in the whole interview. This is the time that you might want to search for a connection to the interviewer. Comment on a painting in the office or the golf trophy on the desk. Don't get too personal or friendly, however. Remain professional. Let the interviewer set the pace of the interview.

Body Language

During the interview, how you act is almost as important as what you say. Your posture and facial expressions can tell the interviewer a lot about you.

- Look to the interviewer for cues. Shake hands when one is offered. Wait to be told where to sit.
- You want to appear relaxed, but attentive. Sit up straight. Look the interviewer in the eye, but don't stare them down.
- Gestures that make you appear open and flexible include showing your palms, keeping your arms relaxed at your sides and uncrossing your legs.
- Closed or defensive gestures include folding your arms across your chest and tightly crossing your legs. Placing your hands on your hips or crossing your hands behind your head may indicate inappropriate dominance and should be avoided.
- Everyone has habits in their body language. Try to learn what yours are and control them. Typical nervous behaviors include tapping a foot, nail biting, fidgeting, excessive arm waving or gesturing.
- Many people pepper their sentences with "*You know*" or "*like*" or say "*um*" before every sentence. Try to limit or remove these expressions from your conversation. Raising your voice in pitch at the end of each sentence makes it sound as if you are insecure and seeking approval. Audio or video taping yourself talking with friends may reveal these speech patterns so that you can learn to avoid them.
- Don't get too hung up on body language. If you try to control your actions too much, you will appear stiff or nervous. Take it slow and easy to show that you are confident but respectful.

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4. Getting down to business

After you have chatted for a short while, the interviewer will probably begin to ask you questions or will tell you about th company or the specific job for which you are applying. This is where your preparation pays off. You should already kno what you want to communicate to the interviewer: *The reason why you want this particular position, that you are capable o doing the job and that you will be a good employee who can be counted on to perform the work.*

Questions asked by the interviewer may be designed to discover these things, or they may not. Practice all of the questions listed in the **JobSearch Guide** ***Common Interview Questions***.

Be courteous throughout the interview. Don't get defensive or be apologetic. Follow the interviewer's lead.

Asking questions

You will also want to ask questions about th job or the company. Have these in mind, o even written down, when you go into th interview. Refer to your notes during th interview, if you like. You may also want t jot down some information, so have a pe and paper handy.

Find out from the interviewer wha knowledge, skills and abilities their *idea candidate* has. Frame your answers around their description of the *ideal candidate*. Fo more information on the *ideal candidate* review the **JobSearch Guide** ***What Are Interviewers Looking For?***.

5. Time to go

Most interviews last about an hour. Again, follow the interviewer's lead to know when the interview is coming to a close. In the last few minutes, try to emphasize the following points: State that you are still interested in the position; summarize the major points of the interview, including your applicable strengths; and, if the interviewer raised concerns about you during the interview, state why these concerns are not problems. At this point, ask when a decision will be made about the position. This way you will know how long to wait before calling to find out if you got the job. Shake the interviewer's hand and leave, making sure that you haven't left anything behind.

6. After the interview

Send a thank you note within one day of the interview (Review the **JobSearch Guide** ***How to Write a Thank You Note***). You may even want to fax or email it, depending on how soon the decision about the hire will be made. Thank the interviewer for their time and state again that you are very interested in the position. This is important. One company that recruited on a mid-west college campus would give a second interview to anyone who sent them a thank you letter. Sending a letter shows that you are interested, responsible and organized. Be sure to check the spelling of names, if possible, to avoid misspellings in your letter.

7. Salary negotiations

Only discuss salary after you have been offered the job. (See the **JobSearch Guide** ***How to Negotiate a Fair Salary***.) Try to avoid being the first person to state a number. If they ask you about salary before they have offered the job, make the best of it, but avoid stating a salary. If you do, chances are your number will either be too low, and you will have lost money, or too high, reducing your chances of getting the job. Try starting with the following: Before I answer your question, could you give me an idea of the salary range for other people who are doing work similar to what I would be doing?

8. The job offer

Occasionally, an employer will offer you the job during the interview. Before accepting any offer of employment, consider the following:

- Make sure you want the job. Remember, the employer is hiring you, but you are also hiring the employer. Do you want to work for the company? Will you be doing what you want to do? Are you being paid what you feel is a fair salary? Have you thought through all of the positives and negatives?
- It is best not to accept an offer if it is given during the first interview, because you have not had ample time to review the pros and cons. Indicate that you are flattered by the offer and that you will give them a decision within 24 hours.
- If an offer is not made during the interview, and it usually isn't, review the pros and cons of working for that employer after the interview. Then you can be prepared to give an answer when you are offered employment.
- Review the **JobSearch Guides** ***Pre-Interview Checklist***, ***Post-Interview Checklist*** and ***How to Respond to a Job Offer***.

9. Congratulations!

Accepting an offer means understanding and accepting the terms of your employment. Before you accept, your salary should be settled. You should ask about benefits, health insurance, holidays, vacation and sick time, and more basic things like when you will begin work, where to report and whether there are any dress requirements for the company. Many companies will put the terms of employment into a letter. You might want to request this, even if they don't offer it, so that everyone is clear on what is expected.

Internet resources

www.livecareer.com/quintessential/types-of-job-interviews-- Types of job interviews explained.
www.businessinsider.com/how-to-succeed-in-any-type-of-job-interview-infographic-2013-3 -- How to succeed in any type of job interview.
www.livecareer.com/quintessential/job-interview-tips-- Interviewing tips.