

The Guide to Good Interview Practice

Introduction

Changing jobs is one of the most stressful occurrences in life and the majority of people do so, on average, once every four years. As such, most have little practice in how to prepare effectively to ensure that they present themselves in the best possible way.

The common approach to interview preparation usually centres upon finding information about the company concerned and the job on offer. An interview however is a two-way selling opportunity and one of the most common reasons for failure is because the candidate has not thought carefully enough about the way in which they present themselves.

This guide offers you the opportunity to prepare yourself; it is a distillation of the observations, experience and knowledge of professional recruitment consultants. Used properly it will give you a competitive edge and the opportunity for you to make the decision about the job on offer.

So do take the time to read through this guide, your very first interview may be for the ideal job, if you want to be in control, prepare!

Five Key Considerations

1. Keep an Open Mind

- When looking for a change of company or environment do not let preconceived ideas stop you from analysing what may have changed.
- Consider several sectors within the market, that way any move you make will be the result of a proactive search and an informed choice.
- Attend every interview that has been arranged, they will all be relevant to your experience.
- Whatever the end-result you will have gained an insight as to which direction you should be going in and which sectors are not of interest to you.

2. The Interview

- Ensure that you follow the suggestions contained in this guide regarding interview preparation.
- As far as possible, relax but always be professional.
- Dress to impress.
- Maintain good, confident body language.
- Allow more time to get to the meeting than expected.
- Smile and be enthusiastic.
- Leave on a positive note and secure a commitment for another meeting if you want to proceed.

3. Meeting Review

As soon as possible after the meeting take some time to review the meeting and ask yourself critical questions such as:

- Could you work with the line manager?
- How did you perceive the culture of the company?
- What areas need clarification?
- What were the positive points of the meeting?
- What did you do well?
- What would you do differently next time?

4. Feedback

- After each meeting, preferably within 24 hours, call your Recruitment Consultant to discuss and review the meeting.
- This call is aimed at ensuring both parties have a similar perspective, it is a vital part of the process.
- It will enable you to ask about anything that was not made clear at the meeting and constructive feedback obtained from the company will be offered for consideration.
- If both you and the company request a further meeting this should be arranged as soon as possible.

5. Preparation

- On average, 90% of people who attend an interview do not prepare properly
- BE ONE OF THE 10% AND GIVE YOURSELF A BIG ADVANTAGE
- When you attend an interview, you are being judged on how you present yourself and the impact you make upon the interviewer. Of course, qualifications and experience are important but at this point attitude determines the outcome.
- PEOPLE WITH LESS EXPERIENCE, BUT BETTER PREPARATION WILL HAVE A HIGHER CHANCE OF SUCCESS

Attitude

There are three elements that constitute the make-up of an individual in relation to work.

KNOWLEDGE	The information we acquire through learning and experience
SKILL	The techniques that we assimilate to implement that knowledge
ATTITUDE	The way in which we approach life, relationships and achievement

Knowledge can be taught; skills are usually improved through coaching, but most employers agree that attitude is relatively fixed and not easy to influence.

Your knowledge and skills are simple to test and also the easiest areas for an employer to help you develop, therefore they are the two components least likely to prevent you from passing an interview.

Attitude however is the one area that is personality based and every skilled interviewer will be looking for the correct signs, those that indicate a positive, result- driven and achievement-orientated attitude.

It cannot be accurately evidenced by a C.V. or in any technical or practical test. The only way that attitude can be measured is through questioning at interview or by formal assessment. Therefore, be positive and engaged throughout the interview, especially in respect of your current job, the role on offer, the industry and your career development.

***“There is little difference in people,
But that little difference makes a big difference.
The little difference is attitude.
The big difference is whether it is
Positive or Negative.”***

Homework

In this guide you will find a wealth of information aimed at enabling you to be as prepared as you possibly can be for your next interview.

Prepare your answers

Further on in the guide, you will find samples of the type of question used to assess skills and personal characteristics. Known as competency-based questions they form, with good preparation, possibly the easiest form of interview. Read through each of the competencies and wherever possible prepare, for each topic, a list of work-related situations that you have experienced, ideally within the last 6 months.

The acronym **STAR** may help you to prepare your answers.

What was the situation?	S
What was the task?	T
What action did I take?	A
What was the result?	R

Of the many questions that you will encounter at interview, “strengths and weaknesses” is a topic that will inevitably be probed. Carefully assess and prepare your three key strengths. You should then relate the resulting benefit to the company.

e.g. I’m a good interviewer *which means* that I explore client needs carefully and build a clear picture before considering the advice to give.

When discussing weaknesses, consider them as personal development issues and conclude with a positive statement.

e.g. Like most good salespeople I don’t enjoy paperwork *and so* I put an hour aside every day to check that all my I’s are dotted and all my T’s crossed.

In the same way as the Prime Minister prepares in advance to answer questions with sound bites you should write down your key strengths and apply the “*which means*” formula. Equally, prepare your weakness followed by the “*and so*” formula, read them out aloud until they sound natural and relaxed. Once you have done so you will have some very valuable phrases which will be well received by any experienced interviewer.

Preparation

STRENGTHS

(Turn your Strengths into Features – Features into Benefits)

Strength	Benefit

WEAKNESSES

(Turn your Weaknesses into Features – Features to Strengths)

Weakness	Development Issues

Interview Questions

Achievement/Drive

“A positive self-image and a desire to be the best”

What are your main strengths?

What benefits will we gain by employing you?

Why do you want to move from your current job?

What motivates you?

Customer Focus

“Evidence of a genuine interest in people and of selling to needs. Helping internal and external customers to get the best”

Why do clients buy from you?

How do you make sure that you are aware of the customer requirements?

How do you make sure that you keep your focus on customers?

What future do you see for financial services?

Communication

“Applying appropriate social skills in formal and informal interactions across a variety of situations to build effective relationships”

Tell me about yourself.

What has been the best idea that you have introduced to your present company?

How do you develop new relationships with clients and colleagues?

What leadership, management or coaching roles have you undertaken?

Quality and Efficiency

“The ability to cope with the detailed tasks and paperwork associated with the job. A right first time approach maintaining consistent standards.”

How do you maintain a consistent standard of quality at work?

What do you consider to be your greatest achievements in your career?

What do you enjoy, and dislike, about your current role?

Tell me about a typical week in your current role.

Planning

“Establishing a course of action to accomplish a specific goal”

What performance standards do you set for yourself?

Give me examples of how you prepare for your weekly activity.

How do you go about generating leads from different sources?

You are not achieving your targets, or your target is increased. What actions do you take?

Tenacity and Resilience

“Staying with a position or plan of action until the desired objective is achieved or no longer reasonably achievable.”

What are the main pressures in your job and how do you cope with them?

What do you do to develop your skills and knowledge?

Tell me about a time that you failed and why that was.

What weaknesses do you have?

Judgement and Decision Making

“Handling interpersonal situations involving conflict, pressure or controversy in a way that leads to a constructive solution.”

When and why did you last lose your temper?

Tell me about a problem customer. What was the outcome?

What kind of decision do you find most difficult?

What tasks do you find the hardest?

Teamwork

“Demonstrating good integration with others. Contributing to a team atmosphere.”

What contribution do you bring to a team working on a specific project or task?

What positive attributes do you bring to a team?

What three words would your colleagues use to describe you?

If you had a shortcoming about working in a team what would it be?

Questions to ask at interview

Having already suggested that you take time to prepare and obtain as much information as possible about the company and the role you are applying for, it is then important to prepare several questions in advance of the interview.

Suggested topics include:

- The products, locations and marketplace of the company.
- Where the company's strengths lie.
- A detailed description of the position
- The reason the position is available
- Anticipated induction and training time
- The immediate tasks and priorities for the new recruit.
- Whether a mentor will be assigned.
- Career progression

What advanced training programmes are available for those who show outstanding ability?

Relate at least 1 question to what you may have read about the company on the company website, so you make the point that you have done some research.

Ask if any answers that you gave were in any way unclear and offer to expand if necessary

Tell the interviewer that you are keen to go forward and ask about the next steps in the recruitment process

Not only will all of the above give you a much better insight to the company and the job, but also indicate your commitment and your overall attitude.

The 7 main reasons why Employers reject Candidates

1. Candidates do not show enough enthusiasm about themselves, the industry, or the job.
2. Candidates cannot convince the employer that they are achievers in life.
3. Candidates cannot demonstrate that they can overcome adversity.
4. Candidates give the impression of "What's in it for me?" rather than "What I can contribute to the company's success?".
5. Candidates are poorly prepared for the interview and don't SELL themselves or their abilities.
6. Candidates are unlikely to fit into the culture of the organisation.
7. There is no chemistry or personality match.

Assessment Centres

In order to assist them in the process of selecting the right candidate for the job, many companies use assessment centres. There is no reason to be afraid of an assessment centre; in fact, there are several very good reasons why you should feel positive about being invited to attend.

A company that utilises an assessment centre is investing heavily in the process of careful selection. This demonstrates the employer's commitment to selecting only those who they feel will be successful within the organisation. Compared with a 30-minute interview the assessment centre is also an indication of the professionalism of the company.

Success in one company does not automatically guarantee success in another. The assessment centre is a matching process; it is not a pass or fail situation. It is important, for both you and the company, to ensure that you will fit not only the structure but also the culture of the organisation.

You will be assessed against a set of competencies and skills, which the company has identified as those, required to be successful within the organisation. As previously indicated, they frequently include:

Achievement Drive, Customer Focus, Communication, Quality & Efficiency, Planning, Tenacity & Resilience, Judgement & Decision Making and Teamwork

You will be observed by assessors trained to identify whether, or not, you demonstrate the necessary behaviours to make you a good match for the company. There is little that you can do to prepare for an assessment centre. It is unlikely that you will be able to identify which of the competencies or skills are being measured in each of the exercises. The best approach is to be enthusiastic, be yourself and, strange as it may seem, try to enjoy the day.

Assessment Centres are structured in many ways and there are numerous exercises that can be introduced into the process. Detailed below are some of the more common ones that you will encounter.

- Psychometric Testing – Personality Assessment
- Aptitude Tests – Verbal & Numeric
- Role Play – Industry or Non-Industry Sales Skills
- Presentation –Preparation & Delivery of Various Scenarios
- Individual Exercises – Testing Personal Performance & Competencies
- Group Exercises – Exploring Team Relationship & Management Skills
- Technical Tests – Usually Common Products
- Structured Interview Questions – See “INTERVIEW QUESTIONS”

How to hire yourself a new employer

DO	DON'T
Find out as much as possible about the Company and the role before you go.	Attend any interview without proper research and preparation.
Go to solve the employer's problems.	Go to the meeting just to get a job.
Be an equal. It's your meeting as well.	Behave like a subordinate.
Make sure you secure another meeting.	Forget that getting another interview is your main reason for being there.
Think carefully before you answer every question.	React to questions by saying the first thing that comes into your head.
Indicate to the employer how you are going to do the job.	State, or imply, that there is any part of the job you cannot do.
Tell them about your achievements and skills. Show them your folder.	Be too modest about your successes.
Be positive and proud throughout.	Give a negative impression about your abilities.
Highlight your strengths.	Volunteer your weaknesses.
Give the employer plenty of reasons to want, eventually, to offer you the job.	Provide any ammunition that might cause you to be rejected.

Personal Folder

Suggested contents of your personal folder:

A COPY OF YOUR CURRENT CV	
APPRAISAL OR REVIEW REPORTS	
COMMISSION STATEMENTS	
COMPLIANCE RECORD	
COPY BIRTH CERTIFICATE	
COPY DRIVING LICENCE	
COPY PASSPORT	
COPY PAYSLEIPS OR P60s	
EVIDENCE OF CONVENTION ATTENDANCE	
EXTERNAL EDITORIAL	
INDUSTRY & EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATES	
INTERNAL MAGAZINE EDITORIAL	
INTERNAL OR EXTERNAL LETTERS OF PRAISE	
MENTIONS IN DISPATCHES	
OTHER ACCOLADES OF ANY TYPE	
OTHER VALIDATION OF EARNINGS	
PERFORMANCE LEAGUE TABLES	
TRAINING AND COMPETENCE EVIDENCE	

... and any other documentation which shows you in a good light and as an achiever in life.

PUT IN IT WHATEVER YOU WANT TO AND BE PROUD!

Goals

Research at Harvard University has demonstrated that simply by writing down goals you are 25% more likely to achieve them.

Goals are not a wish-list, they need to be SMART

- SPECIFIC
- MEASURABLE
- ACHIEVABLE
- RELEVANT
- TIMEBOUND

Think about your goals over three time scales and ensure that they are appropriate to the position being applied for.

e.g. you might want to be a self-employed IFA in five years' time, but it wouldn't be a good idea to use that goal at an interview for an employed position.

SHORT 1 YEAR
MEDIUM 5 YEARS
LONG 10 YEARS

The Importance of Body Language

Research has shown that in terms of first impressions:

55% is based on appearance, 38% on tone of voice and 7% on what is actually said.

First Impressions

Based on the three factors above, most interviewers form an impression of the interviewee in the first 30 to 90 seconds, this will, in most cases, be unchanged at the close. Some common poor behavioural problems at this stage include:

- Little or no eye contact
- Poor handshake
- Unsmiling or sullen manner
- Offering 'closed' answers to 'ice breaking' introductions e.g. Yes, No, OK
- Entering the room too rapidly and sitting down before being invited

It is easy to make a good first impression if you consider behaving as follows:

- SMILE** as if you were greeting a friend; be prepared to shake hands positively.
- LISTEN** to the host and respond in a friendly way – make conversation.
- BE CONFIDENT** walk in calmly – good eye contact is essential.

Last Impressions

Too many interviewees leave saying the same:

'Thank you very much for seeing me - I look forward to hearing from you' (or words to that effect).

It must be boring to listen to the same closure all day long.

Demonstrate some enthusiasm or emotion if you are really keen to have the job, such as:

'Today's interview has confirmed my view that this is a job I would really like to do. I sincerely hope that you will invite me to the next stage of selection'

Or

'This job really presents the challenge and career opportunity I've been waiting for. If you offer it to me, you will have my total commitment and enthusiasm'

In other words, **ask for the job**, it's a great technique and so few people do it. Most are so relieved that the interview is over that they can't wait to escape and depart with the minimum of words and poor body language.

US TO YOU

- TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A PERSONALISED AND UNIQUE SERVICE
- TO ASSIST AND COACH YOU THROUGH THE INTERVIEW PROCESS
- TO CAREFULLY MATCH YOUR PROFILE TO THE CLIENTS SPECIFICATION
- TO PROVIDE RELEVANT AND APPROPRIATE FEEDBACK
- TO GUARANTEE A TOTALLY PROFESSIONAL SERVICE AS OPPOSED TO THE RANDOM DISTRIBUTION OF YOUR CV
- TO MAINTAIN YOUR CONFIDENTIALITY

YOU TO US

- TO PREPARE YOURSELF THOROUGHLY FOR ANY INTERVIEW
- TO SELL YOURSELF AT THAT INTERVIEW
- TO SEE THE PROCESS THROUGH TO THE END
- TO REMAIN OPEN MINDED

AND, IF YOU'RE HAPPY WITH THE PROCESS, REFERRALS!

WHATEVER YOUR PERCEPTION AT THE END OF THE MEETING.

ALWAYS MAKE THE INTERVIEWER THINK

WOW!

Contact us here at Financial Careers Ltd to see how we can help you.