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EXECUTIVE SEARCH

Keys to a Successful Interview

How often do you get a first chance to make a great impression? More importantly, how often will that opportunity materially affect where you work, where you live, who you interact with, how much you earn and the general course of your life? There are very few experiences in your professional career like an employment interview.

To that end, we have collected our results from more than 20,000 interviews and compiled the following advice in hopes that you will sail smoothly through to your next exciting opportunity.

Preparation. Before attending your first meeting with a prospective employer, there are several things you must know. On your own or with the help of your search consultant, learn where the company houses its headquarters, branches and local offices. Know the correct names (and spelling) and titles of all people involved in the interview process. Familiarize yourself with the company's products and/or services and whether it is private or public—all this information can be found on the company's web site. Thoroughly study the web site and most recent annual report (if the company is public) before your first interview.

Timing. It is critical to be punctual to every interview. On every actual interview occasion, plan to arrive a full 30 minutes prior to the meeting time. Park out of site of your prospective employer's facility and take time to prepare yourself mentally. This will also allow you to attend to any last minute grooming needs. Approximately 10 minutes before your scheduled meeting time, park in the company's lot and with a purposeful stride and a smile on your face (people may be watching you from inside the building) walk to the front door.

First Impressions. Every candidate should dress for an interview one level above what the position will require on a daily basis. We recommend men wear a jacket and tie (preferably a suit) and women wear a business suit. Conservative clothes—gray or navy blue—are always appropriate choices. Men should wear a white professionally-laundered shirt, a silk tie (please, no novelty or theme ties), black shoes and socks, and a black belt. Both men and women should avoid excessive jewelry and cologne/perfume.

Answering Tough Questions. Ideally, the interview will have a conversational tone. Open-ended questions should be answered completely in three or four sentences—practice your answers to some of the standard interview questions beforehand. Closed-ended questions (answers to which are usually “yes” or “no”) should be answered directly, but with short elaboration or a return question. For example: "Yes, we did cut

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our defect rate by 20 percent, but most of that was accomplished by an accountability program we implemented." Your goal is to answer every question completely and concisely, while fostering a conversational style so that your interviewer will openly share information about the position and company with you.

Get Your Questions Answered. Come prepared to ask questions, and ask them in a way that ensures accurate and meaningful answers. During the interview, all of your questions should be strictly related to the company and the *performance* of the position. Topics can include the company's products and services, strategic business objectives and any contemporary issues that may have a direct impact on company performance. Questions regarding benefits, hours, vacation policy and other personal matters should be addressed only to your search consultant until you have a firm offer in hand. Those issues are not pertinent to a candidate who is not going to receive an offer, and at this point all of your attention needs to be directed toward winning the best possible offer. At the close of the interview, thank the interviewer for his/her time and say something similar to: "From our conversation today, I feel certain that I could be effective in this position, and I'd really like the opportunity to come to work here. What are our next steps?"

Follow-Up. Immediately following the interview, call your search consultant for a debriefing and strategy session. Also, send a brief e-mail or handwritten note to the interviewer thanking him/her for their time and expressing a significant interest in the company and the position.

We recognize that job change decisions are among life's most important transitions. Take advantage of the training and expertise of your search consultant and work together to make the right career-related decisions. You never know where your next interview may lead.

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