

# **JOB INTERVIEWS**

## **(the great unknown!)**

For many of you it may have been some time since you had a proper job interview – if ever. Your CV and any personal contact or referral has persuaded the interviewer you are worth a look so obviously you have the potential to fill the post. Now for the next part of the process.

You are probably now in very unfamiliar territory and, like your CV, you have to shine. Whatever your background and level, from Admiral to AB, the interview principles remain broadly the same.

You now need to think very carefully about the interview process, how you wish to present yourself and how you will respond to the challenges which you will meet during the process.

### **PREPARATION**

#### **1. Research the organisation and its leading people**

- Internet/Company Report and Accounts/Company Brochure/Press search for topical items.
- People you know who have worked there.
- Gain some knowledge of recent company achievements and activity.
- Sound preparation about the organisation will give you confidence.

#### **2. Really Understand Job Spec**

- How do your skills and experience actually apply?
- Concern yourself with what you do have to offer not, perhaps, what you think your shortfalls might be. Play to your strong points.
- Find specific areas of strength in relation to the job and link them to your covering letter and CV, which they will already have.
- Meticulous preparation on how you 'fit the job' and what you can bring to the organisation.
- You need to demonstrate your potential for the job so that they can minimise your risk, if any, to them.
- Much of this potential should be evident in your past achievements.

#### **3. Dress appropriately**

- Business attire or suitable alternative. Better to be overdressed than underdressed. If in doubt, ask.

#### **4. Be in good time**

- 5 – 10 minutes early – no more, no less. A good recce is never time wasted.
- Observe environment, read literature. It is surprising what you can find out in reception.
- Be friendly with the reception team/outer office – they are frequently asked afterwards which candidate they would most enjoy working with.
- Think positively and have a positive, upbeat attitude!
- Remember – phone – turn it off!

## **5. Carry Documentation**

- Anything the organisation has sent you.
- Anything you have found out about the organisation; you may need to refer to something.
- A couple of copies of your own CV (it is surprising how often this gets mislaid).
- Ideally have it ready to hand in a folder/briefcase but do not pile up the table with files or papers.

## **6. Finally**

- Try to obtain and remember names: use them on the day and afterwards.
- Remember, anyone you meet on the day is a potential source of information or may wish to comment on you.
- Always write a short appreciative note after the interview. You never know.

# **THE INTERVIEW ITSELF**

## **1. Create A Good Impression**

- First impressions are really important – firm handshake and a smile!
- Maintain eye contact with all the interviewees as appropriate– shows confidence and engagement.
- Be aware of your body language.
- Try to keep still and composed throughout. Upright posture, possibly legs crossed, hands on lap. Avoid being flamboyant in gesture or over demonstrative.

## **2. Breathing**

- Deeply, slowly and not just in the chest.
- The diaphragm then releases breath smoothly as you talk.

## **3. Listening**

- Don't let the enthusiasm to express yourself impede listening.
- Poor listening skills hamper (or even negate) effective communication.
- Do not interrupt (unless essential to understanding).
- Do not anticipate the endings to sentences by either providing them or answering early.
- Show engagement; understand and examine exactly what is being said.
- Pause momentarily before answering questions to give yourself time to compose your response.

## **4. Responding**

- Look at the person you are speaking to - if more than one, or a panel, take them all in deliberately.
- As with movements, your speech should be deliberate and unhurried (when utterance exceeds speed of thought you may lose your way).
- Conversely, as our speed of thought exceeds our speed of speech, start gathering your next argument, or response before you or your interviewer stop talking.

- If you don't know the answer say so quickly and don't waffle. That then gives them the opportunity to ask more questions – whose answers you probably will know!
- Avoid acronyms at all costs, even if some of the panel may have had military experience.
- Remember that you are 'selling' yourself and although you may have had a successful Service career you may initially come at some risk to a civilian organisation.
- Think carefully what they are seeking and how you may be able to provide it.
- Expect the unexpected and keep calm. One of the interviewers is often primed to try to disconcert or even antagonise the interviewee to see what sort of reaction they get.
- You may be nervous but conversely it may be that your interviewer is also be a little nervy.

## **COMPETENCY INTERVIEWS**

It is essential to find out beforehand if you will be having a Competency Interview.

### **What is a Competency interview?**

The competency interview technique is designed to provide interviewers and candidates with an objective process for selection. This structured interview technique gives all candidates an equal opportunity to present themselves. For some interviews there may be as many as six or more interviewers and each will have been allocated an area of questioning to pursue. This will be the same for each candidate.

### **How should you prepare for a competency interview?**

This section of the interview is usually devoted to discussing real life critical events - situations which have been important or significant events in your life over the past two years or so. The information from these discussions will be evaluated against the different job competencies and will form an important part of the selection process.

It would be helpful, both for you and the interviewers, if in advance of the interview you spend a little time identifying in your own mind the key events or activities of the past two years ideally, but not necessarily, in a working environment. You may wish to bear in mind that:

- You will need around 5-6 different events in mind. They should be able to show how you meet or exceed the main requirements of the Person Specification: such as leadership ability, commercial skills, financial competency, change management, dealing with workforce problems, etc.
- They will ideally reflect a range of different situations, which will give you the opportunity to explore your performance via competencies.

### **What sort of events should you choose to discuss?**

- They should be important because you were deeply involved in them, not necessarily because of any major strategic significance.

- They should be identifiable events that have a beginning, a middle and end and not a single on-going process
- They should not be any longer than two years or so ago in your working life
- Think of structuring your answer around a **STAR** – Situation, Task, Action and Result.

### **What are the benefits of the competency selection process?**

- It's objective as possible.
- Helps to find the people/person most suited to the job
- Promotes and improves equal opportunities
- Provides a common language

### **OTHER TYPES OF INTERVIEWS YOU MAY ENCOUNTER**

- The informal but exploratory chat somewhere just to see if your face fits. The job may not even exist.....yet.
- The series of progressive interviews; the longer you survive the higher up the management chain you reach.
- The telephone interview
- You may also be asked to attend Assessment Centres and take part in Scenario Planning, Role Play, Psychometrics (online or with a psychologist). It is very possible you will have to interact with other candidates for such events so you need to consider very carefully how you achieve your aims within this group

**Finally, whatever the interview process, just be yourself!**