

How to Ace Your Job Interview Part Two

Job Interview Tips

This is part two of my discussion on in-person job interviews.

Now let's get into the actual strategy for the day of the interview! These are my basic ideas on interviewing. You may not be able to apply all of these techniques in every case, but if you can get the essential concepts down and work them into your interview, your success rate (offers presented) will increase.

My suggestions here are meant to help you feel better about the outcome of your job interview and to give you a good idea of how well you did. First, it's good to have a game plan and to know what your objectives are.

Objective

Interviewing is a process of elimination. Companies will try to have a slate of candidates to interview for any particular open position. Through the phone screens and interviews they are looking for reasons to disqualify and eliminate candidates so that they can winnow their list down to the one person they wish to hire.

Your objective: to move along to the next step, which could be another interview, or, an offer?

Attitude: Be enthusiastic and excited that you are being considered for this opportunity. In the early phase of the interview, the hiring manager is in the driver's seat. If you come off as aloof or disinterested, you will not be moved forward in the process. You can always turn down an offer once presented, but first you have to earn the offer.

Smile! Make eye contact. Have a firm (but not crushing) handshake. Be attentive and sit forward in your seat during the interview. Don't: lounge,

hunch, clasp your hands behind your head, or do anything else that makes you seem overly comfortable. This is true for second and third interviews by the way. I know a candidate who brought a bag of carrots to share with the interview team in his third meeting. Although the sentiment was well intentioned, it was perceived as being overly comfortable and not taking the interview serious enough. He was not offered the job.

Be courteous and professional to everyone you meet. You won't believe how many people have blown their interviews by being rude to the receptionist. People talk.

Don't be nervous: it's natural to feel somewhat anxious when you are the person being interviewed. Everyone has some level of butterflies in interviews. But realize that the interview is an exchange of information. The hiring company invited you in because they want to learn more about you, and to inform you about the company and the opportunity. No candidate has a perfect interview, and no interviewers give a perfect performance either. Relax! Breathe!

Mirroring: ever notice how some people just seem to hit it off with everyone they meet? I have learned from my sales experience that if you are more like the person whom you are meeting, they will like you more. And if they like you more, you have a better shot at the job. Think about the style and mannerisms of the person you are meeting. Do they seem laid back? Fast paced? Friendly? Formal? If you can adjust/adapt your behavior to be more similar to that person, you will subconsciously score points on the chemistry side of the equation. Chemistry is important. People hire people that they like. This does not mean you need to be totally out of character and out of your comfort zone. But it does mean that you should be conscious of how the human mind works and use that knowledge to your advantage.

In the interview:

The posted job description and the *real* job description

The job description posted is often a static and generically written document following a standard template. And the larger the company, the more formal and comprehensive that description will be. But you will likely find that the actual job is somewhat, or even radically, different than what was posted. You could ask three people for a job description for the same job, and you will get three different answers. Not that any of the descriptions is incorrect, it's just that people have their own view of the world and so they put their own spin and impression on the description. That's ok. You just need to understand what this interviewer thinks the job is about.

For example, a potential peer may tell you the job is about completing some technical task, a direct supervisor may emphasize getting things done on schedule, and his boss may say the job is about keeping customers happy. What really matters here is what this interviewer is emphasizing. Jot it down! These are the **Hot Buttons!**

You need to know what the person in this job will be **doing**/accomplishing. Never mind the "must haves". Your focus is on what needs to be done-and how you are the person to do it.

How to get this info

Once you get through the introductions and the ice breakers (the weather, the game, whatever) try to work this into the conversation early on if you can. You can simply ask. Say something like: "I have seen the description", or, "...so and so described the job to me, but could you tell me what is really important in this job? " "What do you want the person in this job to do?" Listen intently for those "*hot buttons*". This is where the interviewer is placing emphasis, or indicating pain about some issue. These hot buttons are your key to succeeding in this interview. You will

want to be sure to address the hot buttons and convince this interviewer that you can do it.

Also important: How does the interviewer define success in the role? Ask!

Now that you know the hot buttons, you can describe your experiences and capabilities in relation to those criteria. If you can relate your accomplishments in measurable quantifiable terms (money, time, productivity, etc) that is even better!

Important: your focus must be on this interviewer's hot buttons. What was of interest to one interviewer may not matter to another interviewer. Remember the three job descriptions?

\$ Money \$

It always comes up eventually, if not in the first round, then at the second or third interview. Most people are squeamish and uncertain about how to handle this topic, including the interviewer. Hopefully you already have an idea of the market salary for your occupation and level. There are many resources available to answer that for you. Know ahead of time.

Know this: he who speaks first loses. If they are bringing it up, that is a very good sign. It means you are a serious contender. If they ask "What salary are you looking for?", then you will need to give an answer. But I suggest that you do not answer this question with a specific number. It could be too high and may knock you out of contention, even though perhaps you were willing to entertain a lower offer. Or, it could be too low, and you risk leaving money on the table. Or, it could be "just right", but the odds are 2 to 1 against your being spot on here.

The best answer to this is to keep the ball in their court. It's fine to respond "I am really focused on the opportunity here, and I am open to a competitive offer". But sometimes the interviewer will press for an answer.

If you are pressed, and you do not already know their range for the position, it's ok to ask. "Can you tell me the range on this position?"

They may give you a range, or, they may say they pay competitively. If you are pressed for a number, try to answer with a range. For example, "The market seems to be in the \$60,000s and that is what I am seeking" Just know that if you state a range, be prepared to accept an offer at the lower end. In this example, the offer may come in at \$60,000. If you felt you needed \$68,000, then your initial range should be "...high 60s..." Try not to get too worked up over this point, and try to keep the focus on the job and your desire to do it.

How did you do?

Ever leave an interview and not feel sure how it went? Or, think you did well, but did not even get a call back, just a "Thanks but No Thanks Letter"?

You deserve to know how you did in the interview. You have just invested some of your valuable time helping this company learn if you are a viable candidate. And it is important here to uncover and clarify any misunderstandings in the interviewer's mind.

So ask for feedback: At the end of the interview you will be given verbal signals such as "Thanks for coming in, we'll get back to you soon." Sometimes they will ask you if you have any questions. Even if they don't ask you, you must ask for feedback. "Ms Interviewer, based on what we talked about today, how well do you see me fitting in to this job? What do you see as my strengths and weaknesses for this job?"

Listen carefully. People will always tell you what they like about you first. That's easy. But what you really need to know is if there are any concerns or misconceptions in their mind. If so, this is your chance to address them. Here you have a brief opportunity to clear up any misunderstandings or holes in their perceptions. Sometimes the concern

may be something that was not even brought up in the interview. You must be brief and respectful of the Interviewer's time. But do try to address the issue. It may be the one thing that would have kept them from hiring you.

Neutralize the negatives: No candidate is perfect; nor is there any perfect job, company, manager. So there may be a legitimate concern that is obvious. If so, try to at least "neutralize" it. For example, perhaps you don't have experience in a specific software package that the company uses. Cite an example of another time where you had to quickly get up to speed in some technology.

Positive Close

Before you leave, be sure you convey interest.

"I'm really interested in this position and I know will be successful in this job because...

And you finish this statement by stating how you will address those hot buttons.

Done?

Not yet. There is one more thing you can do that will thin the herd and make you stand out from your competition. That very day, ideally immediately after your interview, write out a hand written Thank You note and drop it in the mail so that it will arrive within a day or two. (You did get a business card from the interviewer, right?) This is a lost art. The Interviewer will read your card and set it aside on their desk. They rarely get these, and they don't know what to do with it. So it travels around on their desk without a specific spot. And they see it constantly and they remember you- not your competition!

Now you're done! **Great Job!!**

