



PERSONAL INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Thanks to your winning resume, and the way AccruePartners has presented your abilities to a prospective employer, you've been asked to interview with a company. **Are you prepared?** You may think you are, but one of the best ways to separate yourself from your competition for a position is to be prepared for anything that may come your way during the interview process. The following information is designed to help you understand exactly what you need to do to maximize your chances of receiving an offer.

First, let's consider what an interview is all about. By the time you are invited to meet with a prospective employer, the interviewer has already reviewed your resume in detail with AccruePartners and they are intimately knowledgeable about the hard facts of your employment history and skills. Therefore, the interview itself is a subtle, more subjective, part of your job search process. **First impressions are extremely important.** During the course of each interview, each person you meet will be forming an opinion of you. They will be gauging your compatibility with the needs of the organization and they will be making an assessment of their ability to work with you in the role they may hire you for. Every interview needs to be viewed as your only opportunity to make a good impression, even in cases when an organization requires multiple interviews prior to making an offer.

Be sincere and polite, and let your enthusiasm for the organization show. Let your knowledge of their company and the industry show through as well. Your resume likely gives examples of your skills as a team player. In the interview, you need to convince them that you fit within their team. In order to make the best impression possible you need to be prepared, anticipate questions, and know how to handle any situation that may arise unexpectedly.

RESEARCHING THE COMPANY (The 5 W's)

Understanding the **Who**, **What**, **When**, **Where** and **Why** of a company is critical in preparing for an interview. This information can easily be found through searching; the company website, social media sites such as LinkedIn, Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, Hoovers and Dun & Bradstreet and newspaper articles and/or trade publications.

Prior to the interview you should be able to speaking intelligently about:

- » The company's history
- » Recent mergers or acquisitions
- » Company locations
- » Competitors
- » Trends in the industry
- » Recent press releases
- » The leadership team
- » People you know who currently work for the company or who have worked for the company in the past

ETIQUETTE & PRESENTING YOURSELF

- » Allow enough time to ensure heavy traffic or an accident will not cause you to be late. It is recommended that you arrive at least 10 minutes prior to the interview, but no more than 15 minutes early. Sitting in your car in the parking lot because you've arrived too early is better than risking arriving late.
- » Bring extra copies of your resume, a conservative portfolio and a pen. If you are applying for a position that requires samples of your work (i.e. a creative position), bring samples to leave with the interviewer.
- » Be sure you know how to pronounce the interviewers first and last names correctly. Address the interviewer only by the name with which they introduced themselves.
- » Be polite to everyone, especially the receptionist. Everyone within the organization is important, and everyone within the organization is going to form a first impression of you.
- » Do not use your cell phone in anyway prior to the interview, make sure it is turned off prior to walking into the reception area (the first impression people form of you begins from the minute you walk in the door).
- » Be personable and professional; a smile helps relax everyone!
- » Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake.
- » Use professional verbiage. Casual language such as "cool or awesome" is considered unprofessional.
- » Do not chew gum, eat candy, smoke or swear.

- » Do not interrupt the interviewer, even if you think you know what they are going to ask. Similarly, do not go off on a tangent and answer a question that was not asked.
- » 93% of communication is nonverbal. Sit up straight and smile. Do not slouch, cross your legs or cross your arms. Think about the tone and inflection of your voice as you respond to questions.
- » Assume all questions are asked for a good reason and answer accordingly.
- » If you are unsure of what is being asked by the interviewer, ask for clarification prior to answering the question.
- » Your responses should be thought-out, take time to formulate them before you speak. Answer all questions honestly, but in a positive light.
- » NEVER bad-mouth previous employers.

PROPER ATTIRE

- » First impressions are extremely important. Your appearance (and smell) can be equally as important as what you say.
- » Do not wear perfume, cologne or heavy make-up. Some interviewers find it offensive, and worse yet, some are allergic. A well-groomed, freshly-bathed appearance is all that is necessary.
- » FOR WOMEN: A suit or conservative dress is appropriate attire. Minimal amounts of jewelry. Stylish low heels are appropriate. Form-fitting or low-cut blouses or dresses should NOT be worn.
- » FOR MEN: A conservative business suit, long-sleeved shirt and tie are the best choice of attire. Wear matching socks and polished shoes. Do not wear jewelry other than a wedding ring and a watch.

*If you are feeling unsure about the appropriateness of the attire you plan to wear, call AccruePartners.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS TO BE PREPARED TO ANSWER

Practice, Practice, Practice! Give thought to the questions you might be asked and prepare a response for each one. Behavior-based interviewing is becoming more common. This is based on the idea that the best predictor of a candidate's future performance is his/her past performance. These types of questions target your specific work experience and require a more detailed response. Expect to be asked many standard interview questions, as well as behavior-based interview questions in your interview.

Standard Interview Questions:

- » Tell me about yourself?
- » Describe a difficult problem or work conflict you've had to deal with and how you overcame it?
- » What do you know about our company/industry?
- » What is your greatest strength? Weakness?
- » Why should we hire you?
- » What are you looking for in your next position?
- » How do you evaluate success?
- » What can you bring to our company?
- » Why would you want to work here?
- » Are you willing to relocate?
- » What's something positive your boss/peers/subordinates would say about you?
- » What do you like most about your current (or last) position?
- » Where do you see yourself in 5 years?
- » What are you looking for in terms of dollars and compensation?
- » Why are you leaving your current position? Why are you looking for a new opportunity?
- » What other positions are you considering and why?
- » What is your ideal position?
- » Rate this job as it relates to your ideal position.
- » What are your strengths, assets and things you do well?
- » What do you like about yourself?
- » What are your shortcomings, weaker points and areas that need improvement?
- » How does this job compare to others you have applied for?
- » Can we check your references?
- » Describe your leadership philosophy and style.
- » How do you think your subordinates view you?
- » How might you modify your approach in dealing with subordinates?
- » For your last two jobs, give a sketch of each subordinate – title, length of employment, strengths, shortcomings and overall performance?
- » What questions do you have for us?

Behavior-based Interview Questions:

- » Can you describe a time when your work was criticized?
- » Have you ever been on a team where someone was not pulling their own weight? If so, how did you handle it?
- » Give me an example of a situation at work where you felt you went above and beyond the of duty.
- » Tell me how you handle giving someone difficult/negative feedback.
- » Imagine you have multiple tasks to finish by the end of the day and there is no conceivable way to complete them all. How would you handle this situation?
- » What is your greatest failure, and what did you learn from it?
- » What irritates you about other people and how do you handle it?

THE STARCH METHOD

The STARCH method is used to help you formulate strategic answers for behavior-based interview questions:

- » S/T – Situation/Task
 - o Clearly describe the situation or task (paint the picture)
- » A – Action
 - o What “action(s)” did you take to overcome or accomplish?
- » R – Result
 - o What are the “results/outcome?” Describe results that have a relatively positive outcome/result
- » CH – Change
 - o What “change(s)” would you make if you had to do it all over again?

POLISH YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA

Your social media presence is a part of your résumé. It is important that your social media presence accurately portray who you really are and what you represent as a person and a potential employee. Your social media profile is like the cover to your book: It should be clean, vaguely explain what your work and life are about and give a hint at your personality — nothing else. It is important to ensure your online profiles, not just LinkedIn, aren't going to contain something that may lower your chances of landing that new job. How to clean up and enhance your online profiles:

- » Set your accounts to private
- » Create a solid, purely professional LinkedIn profile if you don't already have one
- » Follow publications in your industry
- » Follow influencers in your industry and share their content

- » Connect with your extended network
- » Get a professional photo
- » Be careful what you post and delete old posts or tweets that do not display you in a positive light
- » Join a professional group
- » Google yourself

QUESTIONING THE INTERVIEWER

Most interviewers will ask at the end of an interview if you have any questions. How you respond will play into their evaluation of you, so be prepared to ask insightful, well thought-out questions. Make sure you ask at least a few questions so you don't appear passive and uninterested in the position.

- » Make a list of any questions you have regarding the company. Don't ask questions you are able to find out the answer to from an online search or from asking AccruePartners.
- » Do not ask about compensation and benefits. You should have some idea of the salary and benefits from your conversations with AccruePartners. If not, you will be given that information at the appropriate time in the process. The interview is not the place for you to ask those questions. These types of questions make you seem more interested in what they can do for you and less enthusiastic about the position. The interview is the time for you to convey what you can do for them.

Some Questions You Should Consider Asking

- » Describe the competitive environment in which the organization operates.
- » What are the top 3 attributes that would make someone successful in this role?
- » What obstacles does the organization anticipate in meeting its goals?
- » How have the organization's goals changed over the past 3 years?
- » What is the culture like?
- » Why do you like working at this company?
- » What can I do to best prepare myself for a job at your company?
- » What challenges do you see my having in this position?
- » What obstacles have commonly been met in reaching corporate goals?
- » What resources are available from the company and what must be found elsewhere to reach position objectives?

The Most Important Question

The last question you must always ask every interviewer is, "Do you feel I have the qualifications necessary to be a successful in this position?"

Listen very carefully to how the interview responds. If they respond with a resounding “yes,” you have done a good job covering all the issues that are important to them. However, if they respond with something like, “You appear to have all the qualifications we’re looking for, but...” Listen for that “but.” Whatever comes afterwards is an area you need to re-address with them. Try to go over your experiences in that area one more time in an effort to re-strengthen their view of your experience.

FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- » Follow up immediately with a brief, sincere thank you email to each person you interviewed with. Do not text your thank you.
- » Do not update your social media status with details of your interview on the internet. Your interviewer may be checking up on you online. Skills testing to ensure proficiency of what is “as advertised”.

These next few pages are some excellent articles written by experts we encourage you to read prior to going on any interview.

SIX INTERVIEW ANSWERS YOU NEED TO GET HIRED

By Peter Vogt, Monster Senior Contributing Writer

During the typical job interview, you’ll be peppered with many interview questions. But do you really understand what the interviewer needs to know?

“Most [candidates] have no idea why a recruiter asks a particular question,” says Brad Karsh, a former recruiting professional for advertising giant Leo Burnett and current president of career consulting firm Job Bound. “They tend to think it’s a competition to outwit the interviewer.”

The reality is that employers have neither the time nor inclination to play games with you, especially when hiring. Your interviewer is not trying to outguess you -- he’s trying to assess your answers to six key questions:

Do You Have the Skills to do the Job?

According to Karsh, the employer must first determine whether you have the necessary hard skills for the position, e.g., the programming knowledge for a database administration job or the writing chops to be a newspaper reporter. “By really probing into what the candidate has done in the past, an interviewer can tap into hard skills.”

But the interviewer is also looking for key soft skills you'll need to succeed in the job and organization, such as the ability to work well on teams or "the requisite common sense to figure things out with some basic training," says Terese Corey Blanck, director of student development at internship company Student Experience and a partner in College to Career, a consulting firm.

Do You Fit?

"Every organization's first thought is about fit and potentially fit in a certain department," Corey Blanck says. That means the interviewer is trying to pinpoint not only whether you match up well with both the company's and department's activities but also whether you'll complement the talents of your potential coworkers.

Do You Understand the Company and its Purpose?

If the organization fits well with your career aspirations, you'll naturally be motivated to do good work there -- and stay more than a month or two, Corey Blanck reasons. "I don't want someone to take the position because it's a job and it fits their skills," she says. "I want them to be excited about our mission and what we do."

How do You Stack up Against the Competitors?

You're being evaluated in relation to other candidates for the job. In other words, this test is graded on a curve so the interviewer will constantly be comparing your performance with that of the other candidates.

Do You Have the Right Mind-set for the Job and Company?

"I'm always looking for someone who has a can-do type of attitude," Corey Blanck explains. "I want someone who wants to be challenged and is internally motivated to do well.

Corey Blanck points out that an employer can't train for this essential trait. "But you can hire for it," she says. "And if you don't, you'll end up with a lower-performing employee."

Do You Want the Job?

Most employers know better than to believe everyone they interview actually wants the position being offered. They understand some candidates are exploring their options, while others are using an interview with a company they don't care about to hone their interview skills.

So you have to prove you really want the job, says Al Pollard, senior college recruiter for Countrywide Financial. "I use the ditch-digger analogy," he says. "Many of us can dig ditches, but few are willing to -- and even fewer want to."

STEER CLEAR OF INTERVIEWERS' PET PEEVES

By Carole Martin, Monster Contributing Writer

You sit facing the interviewer, feeling like things are moving along nicely when all of a sudden, the interview takes a drastic turn for the worse. What just happened? You may have hit one of the interviewer's pet peeves, one of those things that automatically triggers a negative response.

Here are seven of the most common peeves provided by experienced interviewers, along with some tips on how to avoid them:

SMELLS: Too Much of a Good Smell Can be Bad

Pat Riley, author of *Secrets of Breaking into Pharmaceutical Sales*, has a pet peeve story to relate: "Preparing for an interview is not like preparing for a date. I had one interview with a woman who doused herself with perfume (the same perfume my ex-girlfriend used to wear) right before stepping into the small interview booth. The perfume was overpowering and brought back bad memories."

COMMUNICATION: Too Little Leaves Interviewers Exasperated

"My No. 1 interviewing pet peeve is an applicant who won't talk," says Steve Jones, a manager of client services at a software company in Dallas. "I try to ask open-ended questions and prod them for longer answers, but no luck. I've even mentioned to a few that I need more information so I can get an idea of where they're coming from - still no luck. I always end the interview saying, 'Now it's your turn to ask questions,' and still no luck. They don't have any. Oh well - next!"

Jones advises job seekers to come prepared to answer questions and talk about yourself.

COMMUNICATION: Too Much Can be Too Much

"Candidates who ramble are the ones who get to me," says Dotti Bousquet of Resource Group Staffing in West Hartford, Connecticut. "I was interviewing a candidate and asked her one question. The candidate talked and talked and talked for 45 minutes straight. I was unable to stop her. I had to say, 'Let's wrap this up,' and I stood up while she continued to talk. I walked to the door of the office and opened it. She left, but continued to talk while walking out the door."

The lesson? "Candidates should stay focused, and answer the question asked -- in less than two to three minutes," advises Bousquet.

LACK OF FOCUS: Results in Losing the Interviewer

"Typically, candidates are simply too intimidated by the process," says Mark Fulop, project director for a large nonprofit agency. "Relating the answer given to one question back with another -- and asking clarifying or follow-up questions -- shows me that the candidate is confident and thinking about the whole picture instead of enduring an interrogation.

AVERTING YOUR EYES: One Way to Avert an Offer

Incorrect nonverbal communication is a turnoff for many interviewers. People who do not make any eye contact during the entire interview irritate Gwen Sobiech, an agency recruiter in West Hartford, Connecticut. "I realize some people are shy, but to never look at me once -- they look down, around, everywhere -- but not at me for the entire interview," she says. "I find that extremely annoying. I also tend to distrust someone who will not look at me when I've asked a question."

If you are uncomfortable looking into someone's eyes, look at his third eye, just above and between the person's two eyes.

SLANG AND STREET SPEAK: Leave Them on the Street

"Poor communications skills really get to me," says Robert Fodge of Power Brokers in Dover, Delaware. "What I mean by this is not merely their language fluency, but more about the use of language. Slang words and street speak just don't have a place in most business environments. Also, candidates who say 'um,' 'like' and 'uh' between every other word lose my attention very quickly."

DECEPTION: Little Lies Leave a Big Impression

One major complaint among recruiters is when a candidate is not completely truthful; small lies are all too common in the world of recruitment. This includes not being completely forthcoming with relevant information, embellishing accomplishments, hiding jobs or leading the process on with no intention of ever following through. Building trust during the interview is key to getting an offer.

THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS AND MOST COMMON INTERVIEW MISTAKES

By Jacqueline Smith, Forbes Staff

Asking the hiring manager for a sip of his coffee during an interview isn't the smartest move—especially if you want the job. Taking your shoes off while you're in the hot seat or asking, "What company is this again?" will never get you a job offer either—but these will earn you a spot on our list of the most unforgettable interview blunders hiring managers have seen.

Harris Interactive conducted a survey on behalf the jobs website CareerBuilder.com, in which they canvassed more than 3,000 hiring managers and human resource professionals between Nov. 9 and Dec. 5, 2011, to unearth the most shocking mistakes they had seen candidates make during interviews.

The sluggish hiring environment may cause frustrated candidates to make avoidable mistakes—but no amount of stress or pressure can justify some of these outrageous gaffes. Nerves and lack of preparation can also be to blame, says Rosemary Haefner, CareerBuilder's vice president of human resources, leading to errors like referring to yourself in the third person or showing up in a Boy Scout uniform and never explaining why. "In this job market, it can be tough just to get a face-to-face interview. When the day comes, it's not uncommon for anxiety to get the best of the person," she points out. "On the other hand, there are candidates who are confident and are articulate about their own record, but fail to research anything about the prospective role or the organization."

Even common blunders can be a sure-fire way to make a bad first impression. CareerBuilder asked hiring managers about frequent mistakes that will destroy a candidate's chance at employment, and more than three quarters (77%) cited answering a call or texting during an interview as one of the biggest deal breakers. Seventy-five percent said one of the most detrimental mistakes a candidate can make is appearing uninterested. Dressing inappropriately, appearing arrogant, talking negatively about current or previous employers and chewing gum are other common missteps that hiring managers won't tolerate.

"One item on the list of detrimental mistakes that stuck out, and that we hear from hiring managers a lot, is talking negatively about current or previous employers," Haefner says. "It's a mistake that a lot of job seekers probably don't think about. After all, the job seeker may be entirely justified in their criticisms or frustrations with past employers. However, the employer may see it as unprofessional, unwarranted or a sign that the candidate may have a hard time building positive relationships with colleagues." If you've had a negative experience in a previous job, focus on what you've learned from the challenges and stay away from badmouthing old bosses, she adds.

One job candidate brought a “How to interview” book into the interview with him, and another talked about promptness as one of her strengths, after arriving 10 minutes late. Another woman told the interviewer she wasn’t sure if the job was even worth starting the car for.

To avoid such screw-ups, Haefner suggests researching and practicing. Vigorous preparation can help you stand out from the crowd—in a good way—so you’ll want to show up with well thought-out questions and examples for the interviewer, and present yourself confidently without teetering into arrogance, she says. “Most important, do whatever it takes you to be calm and focused. For example, exercise a few hours before the interview, make sure you’ve had a meal and aren’t jittery, leave early to eliminate any chances of a rushed or late arrival, and when you’re there, let your personality, professionalism and skills do the standing out.” Your interview is often where you make your strongest impression, so to avoid making it also your last impression, carefully consider what you want the employer to learn about you during the meeting, and strive to stand out for being a perfect fit for the job. Putting the hiring manager on hold during a phone interview to schedule a date on the other line—as one candidate actually did—just won’t cut it.

“Interviews are a job audition,” Haefner says. “The employer isn’t hiring a list of skills and accomplishments. They’re hiring the whole person: their personality, their resume, their critical thinking and creative ability. The impression you make during the interview, regardless of how competitive the job market happens to be, will most always be the determining factor in landing your next job.”

The Most Common Interview Mistakes

- » ANSWERING CELL PHONE OR TEXTING
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 77%
- » APPEARING UNINTERESTED
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 75%
- » DRESSING INAPPROPRIATELY
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 72%
- » APPEARING ARROGANT
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 72%
- » TALKING NEGATIVELY ABOUT CURRENT OR PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 67%
- » CHEWING GUM
Hiring managers who ranked this as a “top detrimental mistake”: 63%

TOURING THE FACILITY

By Carole Martin, Monster Contributing Writer

The process had gone well so far. Lindy was asked back for her fourth interview with the same company. Each of her visits lasted two grueling hours. This time she was scheduled to tour the facility and /or the manufacturing plant. Lindy was nervous because she'd never been through a tour before, and she didn't know what to expect.

You're still Under the Microscope

When employers invite you to tour their facilities, it usually means they want to show off for you - let you know what they have to offer, and see how you react to the surroundings and culture.

The office tour may include introductions to key people in various departments. Make sure you walk and talk with confidence. You are still being looked at as a possible candidate.

Try to remember names as you are introduced, or better yet, get a business card. No matter what the person's status, show an interest in the person and what part he plays in the company. Answer any questions asked, but be sure to ask questions too.

The Plant Tour

If there is a plant tour included, it will pay to think about what you wear. You might want to ask the interviewer for some guidance on attire prior to your tour. Assuming the dress is more casual, start with some comfortable walking shoes. This is a time to wear sensible, practical, clothing. You should be prepared to don a hardhat in some industries --yes, it messes up the hair, but is sometimes a safety requirement. When you walk through a plant you must be prepared for anything and everything --odors, noises, and hazards to walk over, under and through.

Be ready to deal with a different culture than you may have experienced in the office setting. You may be asked some questions you haven't dealt with before. This is a good time to demonstrate how flexible you are and that you're not easily intimidated. If this is the company and industry you are going to work for, you should see the whole process in order to understand the company's business.

Take an Interest in Others and What They Do

A key factor in winning people over is to demonstrate an interest in them and what they do. Everything from your smile to your body language will indicate an acceptance or distaste for the situation, especially in unfamiliar territory such as a manufacturing plant. This is what this company does, and if you want to be a part of it, then you have to show an interest in the process and the people.

Turn Up Your Intuition

Use this time while touring an office or plant facility to check out the company's pulse. Do the employees look happy, harried or busy? How do they react when introduced to you? Do you feel welcome or under suspicion? Are you willing to come to this place every day and interface with these folks? Listen to what is being said, and observe what you see and how you feel about the set up and the way the employees are interacting --turn up your intuitive powers.

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T TAKE A COUNTER OFFER

By Allison Green, U.S. News & World Report LP

Thinking about using a potential employer's job offer to get your current company to counter and pay you more money? Stop right there. Using another job offer as a bargaining chip may be tempting, but too often, it ends badly. If you want a raise, then negotiate it on your own merits--or prepare to move on.

Here's why:

- » Employers often make counteroffers in a moment of panic. ("We can't have Joe leave right now! We have that big conference next month.") But after the initial relief passes, you may find your relationship with your employer – and your standing with the company has fundamentally changed. You're now the one who was looking to leave. You're no longer part of the inner circle, and you might be at the top of the list if your company needs to make cutbacks in the future.
- » Even worse, your company might just want time to search for a replacement, figuring that it's only a matter of time until you start looking around again. You might turn down your other offer and accept your employer's counteroffer only to find yourself pushed out soon afterward. In fact, the rule of thumb among recruiters is that 70 to 80 percent of people who accept counteroffers either leave or are let go within a year.
- » There's a reason you started job-searching in the first place. While more money is always a motivator, more often, there are also other factors that drove you to look: personality fit, dislike of your boss, boredom with the work, lack of recognition, insane deadlines--whatever it might have been. Those factors aren't going change, and will likely start bothering you again as soon as the glow from your raise wears off.
- » Even if you get more money out of your company now, think about what it took to get it. You needed to have one foot out the door to get paid the wage you wanted, and there's no reason to think that future salary increases will be any easier. The next time you want a raise, you might even be refused altogether on the grounds that "we just gave you that big increase when you were thinking about leaving."

- » You may be told to take the other offer, even if you don't really want it--and then you'll have to follow through. Using another offer as a bluff is a really dangerous game.
- » Good luck getting that new employer to ever consider you again. If you go all the way through their hiring process only to accept a counteroffer from your current employer, then the former is going to be wary of considering you in the future. If it's a company you'd like to work with, you might be shutting a door you'd rather keep open.

Now, are there times where accepting a counteroffer makes sense and works out? Sure, there are always exceptions. But it's a bad idea frequently enough that you should be very, very cautious before doing so.

Alison Green writes the popular Ask a Manager blog, where she dispenses advice on career, job search, and management issues. She's also the author of *Managing to Change the World: The Nonprofit Leader's Guide to Getting Results* and former chief of staff of a successful nonprofit organization, where she oversaw day-to-day staff management, hiring, firing, and employee development.

CONTACT ACCRUEPARTNERS WITH ANY QUESTIONS OR CONCERNS THAT MAY ARISE WHILE PREPARING FOR YOUR INTERVIEW. WE LOOK FORWARD TO UTILIZING OUR FULL SUITE OF RESOURCES TO HELP YOU SUCCESSFULLY ADVANCE YOUR CAREER!