What To Do Before, During, & After Your Interview

The interview is one of the most important tools in your job search. While the resume introduces you to the potential employer, the interview is where you will "walk your talk". That is, the interview will get you the job, while the resume gets you the interview – it is your opportunity to present your qualifications and experiences to the employer.

Checklist – Before an Interview

Research the Organization

- Gain knowledge about the company you're interviewing with and do your homework.
- Use the internet to find the company's website and read as much as possible. You can also ask librarians to help you locate trade journals or go to the local chamber of commerce for smaller companies.
- What is the company's mission statement or values statement?
- How long has the company been in business? What is its reputation?
- Is the company financially sound and profitable?
- What is the company's greatest accomplishment? Its biggest failure?
- Where does your potential job fit in the larger organizational picture?
- Take a test drive to the company's location in advance so you know right where it is.

Review your Resume

- Your resume should be as close to perfect as possible—it creates an image of YOU.
- Your resume should show how your experience makes you a suitable potential employee for the job. Make sure it highlights experience related to the job you're interviewing for.
- Review your resume carefully before the interview so you can address any item on it fully and confidently, and have suitable explanations prepared for any gaps in employment or other questionable items such as short jobs or career changes.
- Review the job description repeatedly, and make a list of ways you fit the qualifications and similar duties you have done at previous jobs. Bring this to your interview to help you make points.

Practice Answering Potential Interview Questions

- What is your greatest strength? Weakness?
- What prevents you from being more productive?
- Why are you interested in this position?

Prepare a List of Questions for the Employer

- Where do you see this company in five years? Ten years?
- What is management style of your supervisor?
- Is there room for advancement?

Checklist – Day of the Interview

Dress and Adjust your Attitude for Success

- Your clothes and attitude should reflect the level of position for which you're interviewing, so prepare your attire in advance and make sure everything is perfect.
- Give yourself a second "once-over" before you arrive at the interview. Make sure *never* to wear casual clothes such as sneakers, jeans, or sweatshirts. Professional clothing should *always* be worn to interviews.
- Studies show the first two things people notice about you is your hair and shoes. Make sure both are clean and presentable!
- Employers want to hire positive, confident, and enthusiastic employees! Make sure this is you!

Be Prepared and Manage your Time Effectively

- Make sure you have directions and the name and phone number of the person you are interviewing with in case of emergency.
- Bring two copies of your resume, a list of professional references, and any samples of your work if relevant to the position. You should also bring materials for yourself, such as a pen and pad of paper and list of questions you'd like to ask the employer.
- If you aren't sure where the company is located, get directions in advance of your interview—make sure you give yourself time to arrive to the building 15 minutes early.
- Realize that the impression you make starts the minute you arrive, even if you wait in the lobby for 20 minutes. Secretaries are often asked their opinion of candidates.

Conduct a Mental Rehearsal

- Imagine how the interview will unfold with as much clarity and detail as you can—the preview will give an idea of what to expect.

- Imagine the likely scenarios. Whom will you meet? What are they apt to ask? Rehearse how you are going to conduct yourself.
- Rehearse the interview. Call the Job Center for a mock interview!

Expect Success

- Expectations have the power to becoming self-fulfilling prophecies.
- In the same manner, you re-enforce your commitment and sharpen your focus by imagining yourself in the job.
- The exercise will bring feelings of confidence and an air of self-assurance to the interview. Your manner will show you're not just a candidate but the leading contender.

Checklist – During the Interview

- *Never* bring anyone with you, even if they wait in the lobby!

- Remember first impressions count—smile and make plenty of eye contact! A good, firm hand shake and a proper introduction of yourself is very important!

- Say the interviewer's name (ex. Nice to meet you, Mr. Smith). Studies show that people respond positively to their names.

- You shouldn't always say what first comes to mind—if you answer every question immediately upon hearing it, you may create the impression that you're over-eager or you don't take enough time to assess a problem before offering a solution.

- Listen closely. Often the kernel of your response is in the question. If your nervousness distracts you, you might miss the point.

- Don't sound like "everyone else"—you won't stand out from the crowd if you only reiterate your resume. Outstanding candidates discuss their successes and accomplishments that aren't on their resume to show their problem-solving skills!

- It is very important to build rapport: Mirror the interviewer's voice, tone, and gestures. Example: If the interviewer is sitting in his/her chair leaning toward you with his/her arms crossed on the desk, gradually move into this same position yourself.

- Always ask when they will be making the final decision, or what the next step in the process is.

- Always thank the interviewer and ask for a business card at the end of the interview.

Checklist – After the Interview

Analyze the Interview

- Now is the time to breathe a sigh of relief and think positive thoughts

- You also should analyze your interview performance objectively. What is your gut feeling?

- Consider how interested the employer seemed in you and whether you made particular points which really stood out. Were your questions answered?

- Did you feel like you left something out of the conversation that would help them to see what a great candidate you are for the position? Add this information into your thank you note!

Follow-Up

- Following up with a thank-you note is essential to the success of any job search endeavor. Send it via email or postal mail immediately after the interview!

- If you haven't heard from the employer in two weeks, make a telephone call to ask if you can provide other information to assist in the decision-making process, or to inquire if they have made a decision.

- Remind the employer that you're still very interested in the opportunity.

Keep Applying!

- Until you get and accept a firm job offer in writing, keep applying constantly for other positions! Never just wait to hear back. The more interviews you go on, the better they will go, since practice makes perfect!