



Tips and Guidelines for Successful Interviews

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Preparing for interviews is something you can do even while waiting for opportunities to present themselves. In fact, doing the right background preparation in advance can go a long way to fostering the right frame of mind for when you do have an interview lined up.

First impressions have an enormous impact when meeting a prospective employer, so feeling confident and on top of your game will ensure that you present yourself in the most favourable light possible.

In this document, Enshrine has compiled some tips and guidelines to assist you with adequately preparing for interviews. This includes some process work which will help you to position your unique value and navigate your career trajectory in a comprehensive way, and it is recommended whether you are in the process of looking for a new position or not.

The longitude and latitude of attitude



A good interview begins with having the right attitude. Like GPS co-ordinates, your attitude effectively positions the way in which a prospective employer will perceive you. Embrace the possibility that an interview can be fun as opposed to daunting - representing as it does new opportunity, growth, change and adventure.

Remind yourself that there is also pressure on the client to make the right placement, so if you are nervous it potentially cuts both ways and you are effectively in the same boat. The more relaxed both you and the client are, the better the chances of a clear, sober and informed decision being made for mutual benefit.

Remind yourself that in many respects you are interviewing the client as much as they are interviewing you. It is a two way process. The offer on the table should satisfy your financial needs and also your inner sense of personal worth and value. The climate and culture of the organisation or company should reinforce your values and principles. The position being offered should meet the requirements of your envisioned career trajectory.

Very often there is a tendency to see the client as the one holding the power in the interview context. This is not true, your skills and expertise represent equal value and are a solution to the client's needs. Remind yourself of this repeatedly. Even though you are the one in the hot seat, you should meet with a prospective employer on equal terms.

Do your homework: the 'golden rule' of thorough research



Set aside some time before the interview to prepare yourself emotionally and psychologically. Don't leave this until the last minute.

Visit the client's website well in advance to get a sense of the territory. One of the biggest 'put off's' for an employer is an applicant who comes into an interview without having any sense of what the organisation does or how it does it. Don't only look at the technical details of the company or organisation; try to get a feel for the 'spirit' of the company, its culture and the mood or atmosphere the website projects. How does this environment make you feel; does it suit your nature and personality?

Another thing that raises a red flag for an employer is when an applicant goes into an interview without having a clear sense of the job description or open position. If you don't know what the job entails you simply won't be able to position your expertise in the most appropriate manner. Remember that a client has a need and sees you as a potential answer to that need. Your task in the interview is to evidence clearly that you can solve their problem.

Once you have a sense of the context of the company and the specific position you are applying for, jot down some ideas that join the dots between your attributes, your relevant experience and passions and the open position and company. Match your skills, strengths and abilities against what you find out about the company and what you sense their expectations in a likely candidate will be. This consolidates in your mind your compatibility with the context you are applying to enter and means that during the course of the interview you will be suitably prepared to motivate how/why you believe you will be a good match/fit and in what ways you see the potential to add value.

Getting your ducks in a row: revisiting your wants and needs



Irrespective of the reasons for seeking a new opportunity (these may include personal growth, taking the next step on your career trajectory, the expiry of a contract period, retrenchment, or looking for a more appropriate and worthwhile application of your skills and talents), consider your current or previous employ and position and note down the following:

- What would you like less of?
- What would you like more of?
- What could be better?
- What inspires you to be productive?
- What is your passion?
- What stunts your growth?
- When are you most in flow?
- What conditions make you thrive?

Revisit your value add in the past, your track record, achievements and contributions to industry; they will then be fresh in your mind and will automatically surface during the course of the interview. Reflect on your career to date, perhaps re-read your CV, and jot down some ideas regarding the following:

- In what ways could a new employer, context and environment suit your temperament better?
- In what ways might you need to grow in order to leverage your value contribution more effectively, and how could a new context create the space for this personal growth?
- What working conditions might draw forth your effectiveness?
- What kind of team or people would you like to work with?

Very often, especially when you may feel like making a move is circumstantial and not necessarily a personally motivated choice, there is a tendency to simply take what you can get in order to secure your financial security. Even in such cases it is important to retain a positive attitude. Trust that whatever your motivations for seeking a new employer or position are, and whatever the level of pressure is that surrounds the need to move, a transition of any kind always represents an opportunity for growth and improvement. Don't undervalue yourself and make sure you retain your sense of dignity and power, don't come across as being desperate, it always rubs the wrong way.

WHY? Carefully frame your motivation to move



Your motivation to move is something a prospective employer takes into serious consideration, it speaks volumes to who you are and who you aspire to be.

Take some time to revisit your motivation to move. Make a list of a few key factors that are contributing to your desire to seek new or alternative employment opportunities. Be very clear about your intentions so that if the question arises during the course of your interview, you can be concise and confident in your response. Signs of doubt, indecision or confusion may cast doubt on your bid for a position. Once again, try to focus on the positive potentials and motivations rather than on any negative motivations that might be playing a role.

To assist this process, make a list of what the 3 or 4 most important things are that you are looking for in a new company and position.

It takes two to tango: find out what you need to know



Based on your summary of what you are looking for in a new company and position, prepare a couple of questions to ask the prospective employer, so that you are certain you will glean all the information you need to make an informed decision. For example:

- You might ask what some of the major challenges the position, division or company is facing right now, to gain insight into the context and level of expectation you may encounter. The more insight you have into what the positions entails the better you will be able to present yourself based on your track record and previous experience in relation to the company or organisation's current needs.
- To be sure you understand what the responsibilities and accountabilities of the position are; you might enquire about the 3 or 4 most important functions of the position, and how these will be measured.
- To assess if your personality, temperament, skills and abilities match the client's expectations, you may wish to ask what the client's expectations of likely or suitable candidates are.
- Ask about the other employees and what kind of person the company or organisation's culture seems to attract.

Close your eyes for a few moments and visualise yourself working for the company:

- How would you feel? Does the fit feel right? Does the position and the company or organisation's culture suit you?
- What might you be responsible and accountable for? Do you feel you are a match for the client's needs based on the job description?

The game plan



Set some clear goals for what you want to achieve at the interview. For example, you might determine that you want to:

- Secure a second interview.
- Get a job offer.
- Get clarification on the position.
- Gain more experience and lose your fear of being interviewed.
- Expand your ideas of what possibilities exist out there.



Dress for success and feel good about yourself. Don't over, or under dress. Be presentable but also comfortable; it is important that you feel at home and like yourself. Take the context in which you will be working into account. Decide the evening before the interview what you are going to wear so that you aren't flustered in the morning. If you need to dry-clean that special suit, do so well in advance.

Make sure you have the right directions and ensure that you have sufficient time to get to the interview on time; there is nothing worse than arriving late or arriving in a stressed state because of having to rush. Having 15-20 minutes at your disposal once you arrive at the client premises will give you a chance to acclimatise, relax and revisit your goals for the interview; as well as give you a chance to tune in to the atmosphere and observe the context and other employees as they go about their business.

Interviewing the interviewer



Your interview of the client begins the moment you leave your front door. If the premises where the interview takes place are where you will be working, consider how you would feel driving this route to work.

Before you enter the premises, perhaps in the parking lot, take a moment to stand up straight and tall, shoulders back and feet planted firmly on the ground. Take three very deep breaths, and centre yourself. As simple as this might sound, this immediately makes you feel more powerful and confident.

As you enter the premises, take note of how you feel. Be observant of the context and environment. Could you envision yourself working there? Do you feel welcome or alienated? This all forms part of your process of interviewing the client.

Take note of the employees you encounter; what kind of energy do they have? Are they active and enthusiastic or do they appear bored and under stimulated? Do they seem content or stressed? Are they friendly? Could you see yourself as one of their peers?

When you meet the person or people who will be interviewing you, take note of their demeanour and how they make you feel. Do they treat you with respect? Do they make you feel at home? Would you be able to respect these people as your superiors? Trust your gut feelings in this regard.

Do's and don'ts on the day



As you enter the interview itself, take some more deep breaths and centre yourself.

Remember to turn your cell phone off for the duration of the interview.

Avoid smoking or drinking alcohol on the premises even if you are invited to do so. Avoid chewing gum or sucking sweets of any kind during the course of the interview. Have tissues or a handkerchief close to hand should you need one for any reason.

For shaking hands when greeting the person or people who will be conducting the interview, make sure you don't have sweaty palms, mirror the handshake (the strength and quality) and always make eye contact.

Use verbal and body language that is respectable at all times.

Think of trying to put the client at ease instead of the other way around; let them sense that they can be themselves with you.

If you are nervous, don't be afraid of saying so. This often breaks the ice and it also means that you don't have to expend unnecessary energy on trying to uphold the appearance of being relaxed when you aren't. Be honest and authentic.

Take your time in the interview; don't feel pressured to rush because you may wind up speaking in circles or gabbling. Try to be succinct and clear in your answers but at the same time don't make the client do all the work. Give of yourself freely, and endeavour to see the motivation behind the questions you are asked. The client is seeking a solution to their needs, be sure your answers give them the information they are looking for.

During the course of the interview, be sure to ask open questions (avoid questions which have 'yes' or 'no' answers). The basic: what, where, how, when, and why questions are always effective.

If something arises during the course of the interview that conflicts strongly with you or that you have an objection to, refrain from drawing attention to it; rather raise it with your consultant after the interview to pursue it further.

Sell yourself



An interview is ultimately an opportunity for you to sell yourself. Your recruitment specialist can only go so far in this regard, and the rest is in your hands. Many of us feel uncomfortable selling ourselves but the truth is that nobody can sell you like yourself. If selling your skills and talents is difficult for you, think of a creative way to side-step the discomfort. Treat yourself as a product or friend that you are passionate about. See yourself objectively and speak to the product that you are, rather than getting stuck in the personal experience of unease.

Selling yourself during the course of the interview should always be focused on motivating how your background and experience qualifies you to do the job in question. In so far as possible relate your skills, abilities, experience and personal passions to the specific position requirements. Doing this in a successful manner means drawing on specific examples that highlight your capability:

- Describe specific situations
- Describe what role you played in resolving the situation or instigating changes
- Present the outcome or end result
- Reinforce everything with measurable results and numbers

Be clear and honest about your value; beware of overselling or underselling yourself. This is not the time to be humble, nor is it the time to be arrogant and make promises you will struggle to keep. Avoid representing yourself as someone that you are not, as you will end up in a job that doesn't fit you. We are all unique!



During the interview, try to refrain from presenting any of your personal traits as weaknesses, rather endeavour always to position anything that might be construed as a personal limitation within the context and needs of the job. For example: "I am driven to succeed and can be exacting on myself and my team to deliver according to high standards and a stringent timetable. Sometimes I might be considered to be a taskmaster, but this is a misinterpretation of my drive to get results on time and within budget." OR "My attention to detail can sometimes be misinterpreted as procrastination, but the results I have achieved speak for themselves; especially when it comes to ensuring that all contingencies have been accounted for and projects run without compromise to safety or long-term sustainability."

When called upon to list your strengths or positive attributes always endeavour to make a direct link with the requirements of the company or open position. Here exists a good opportunity to draw on specific examples:

- Describe specific situations
- Describe what role you played in resolving the situation or instigating changes
- Present the outcome or end result
- Reinforce everything with measurable results and numbers

If you are asked to motivate your reasons for leaving a company, try to substantiate your reasons and explain your choices in a positive manner. The interview is not a chance to vent or express criticism for your current employer or to list promises that weren't kept by your previous employer. If you express negativity it is likely that you will do the same of your new employer. Talking behind backs and looking for problems never casts a good light on you. Endeavour to cast the best light possible by giving the company what it wants to hear: focus on the potentials for better prospects, challenges that will serve your personal and career growth and skills development.

Know where you are going



If you are invited to make a projection as to where you see yourself in five years time, refrain from saying that you envision being where you are now. Companies are looking for employees that are motivated and driven to succeed, so it is always good to have clear goals and present a pre-meditated career trajectory, including the job descriptions that would service your personal vision as you progress. The best answer is a clearly articulated one, but if you seriously don't know where to next, a good rule of thumb is to turn the question into a question and identify the growth opportunities the company offers. Being able to map the potential positions an organisation may be able to offer against your own growth gives the impression that you foresee a long term relationship.

Room to manoeuvre: negotiating power



If the client asks what your salary expectations are, avoid giving an immediate answer; rather turn the question into a question and ask them what they are willing to offer the position; or say that you will think about it and come back to them. Another approach is to share your current package and to use this as a means to deal with the question. For example: "Currently my package is 'X' and includes the following benefits (list them). Based on the discussion we have had I see the opportunity you are offering as an excellent challenge (explain why). So I have no doubt that you would offer a relevant, appropriate and market related compensation, in which case I would certainly be open to considering it".

Very often in the interview context there is a pressure to please and you may give a figure that is not necessarily appropriate. It is hard to go back with another figure once you have already put something on the table. Ultimately though, the best advice is that your recruitment specialist is there to assist with the negotiation side, so wherever possible leave this up to them.

Covering the bases



Remember to ask all of the questions you identified during your preparation process before the interview concludes. Not only does this consolidate your interest in the position in the employer's mind, it also means that you will glean the vital information you need to make an informed decision.

If you are keen on the position, then tell the employer so. Something along these lines will suffice: "I must say the position and what your organisation offers is really appealing, and I am confident based on my skills, experience and drive that I can add value to you."

It is crucial that the employer gets a measure of your interest and enthusiasm. Reinforce and motivate this by commenting on what specifically stands out and appeals to you about the position and your impression of the company.

At the conclusion of the interview, there is no harm in asking: "So what is the next step" Or "where do we take things from here?" Or "what might you expect from me now?"

Finally, thank the client for taking the time to interview you.



After the interview



As soon after the interview as possible, perhaps even in the car in the parking lot, close your eyes for a few moments and again (based this time on your expanded experience of the company or organisation), visualise yourself working there:

- How would you feel? Does the fit feel right? Is this a suitable place for you?
- Would you be comfortable with the responsibilities that accompany the position?
- Is there anything that is 'niggling' or troubling you?

Should you be called for further interviews, this exercise will give you insight into questions you may need to ask at the second or third stage of the process.

Reflect on the interview itself and make a personal note of what you could have done differently or better for future interview experience purposes. Then let it go and don't dwell on it. Trust that what will come will come and that you did your best at the time.

Give your consultant a call straight after the interview. It is important that your consultant speaks to you before the client has spoken to them because this evidences your enthusiasm. If the client calls your consultant and they haven't heard from you yet, the client might question your level of engagement and commitment.



"On behalf of the team at Enshrine I wish you all the best with your future interviews, and sincerely hope our Tips and Guidelines have been beneficial to you. Please see below for further resources and services we offer". Best wishes, Caryn Darley

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