

## Interviewing To Land A Job

*By Vanessa Vidal*

In today's ultracompetitive job market, getting an interview is an achievement. However, according to hiring managers many top candidates blow their changes by being too aggressive, appearing desperate, or looking bitter about their situation. The saddest part is that most candidates don't even realize what they are doing wrong.

The key to conducting a successful interview is to make an impression, but an impression made for the right reasons. When you consider everything that goes into an interview such as choice of dress, timing, conduct, questions, responses, and materials, you soon realize that there are several ways a person can make a wrong impression. However, there are also many ways a person can make an incredible first impression and land the job.

Before a big interview, a smart candidate carefully chooses his or her outfit, researches the company, prepares answers to questions the interviewer might ask, arrives on time, and brings a positive attitude to the process. However, under the pressure to succeed candidates trying to make a good impression are sabotaging their chances of success. What are they doing?

Take the case of Jane Doe who interviewed for an Assistant General Counsel position with a Fortune 1000 Company. After sending hundreds of resumes, Jane finally landed an interview and wanted to make a good impression. Jane arrived an hour before her scheduled interview time with a bound portfolio of her transactions ready to be distributed. When introduced to the interviewer, she said, "Thank you so much for seeing me. I really need this job." Before she was asked for anything, she offered her bound portfolio and started to talk at length about her various transactions. After answering one of the questions, she added, "I hope I answered that sufficiently for you. I really want this job." As the interview was ending, the last thing she said was, "Thank you for the opportunity to interview for this job. I really hope I get it!"

Jane, like many other candidates, believed that showing up early and letting the interviewer know she really needed the job would help her get it. Unfortunately, all Jane Doe got the following week was a rejection letter.

Here are a few tips to follow to improve your chances of landing the job during the interview:

### **1. Be On Time, But Not Too Early**

Nearly 20 percent of hiring managers say they'd eliminate a candidate who was just 10 minutes late for an interview; so make sure you're on time. Want to make a good

impression by arriving an hour early? Think again. All you are doing is putting pressure on the hiring manager, and not being mindful of his/her schedule. Imagine getting a call from the front desk telling you that your interview has arrived a full hour before you are ready for it. It would feel pretty uncomfortable, right?

While you should make an effort to arrive early for your interview, you should arrive no more than 10 or 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Double check the address of your interview, give yourself more time than you think you might need to arrive at the location, and if you arrive more than 15 minutes early, just make yourself comfortable at a coffee shop nearby and wait until that 10-15 minute window. If you do arrive a few minutes before the scheduled time, it is appropriate to tell the receptionist or other receiving party your name and that you are aware of your earliness. Do not expect anyone to bend over backward for you; you are simply at the person's disposal when he or she is ready.

In the oft chance you are running late, call and apologize.

## **2. Dress Professionally, Not Casually**

I recently had a candidate ask me the company's dress policy prior to his interview. We'll call him John Doe. John wanted to know if the company had a "business casual" dress code. While that was the case, I quickly reminded him that even if his interviewers were all going to be dressed casually in jeans and Dockers, he should nevertheless be wearing his dark navy suit for the interview. John seemed a little surprised by my response, but nevertheless put on his suit. Fortunately, he made a better impression than his competitor who showed up wearing a pair of Dockers and a collared shirt to "fit in" with the company's dress code.

Leave the casual pants, low-cut dresses, and jeans at home. While interview attire varies depending on the job for which you're applying, this rule of thumb always applies: It's better to dress up than be too casual. Dressing up not only shows that you respect the employer and the interview process, but also that you have style and polish. So dust up that interview suit and dress shoes, and always err on the conservative side.

## **3. Bring a Positive Attitude and Leave Your Woes At Home**

If you are sitting in an interview chair in this tough market, you undoubtedly already have had your fair share of rejection: unanswered resumes, rejection letters, and no second interview offers. You may have been fired, laid off, or left unemployed to face increasing financial pressures. No matter what your personal situation or feelings, you need to leave your woes out of the interview process.

The interview is not a therapy session or a place to share your bitterness. This is not an opportunity to vent about your former boss, or the difficulty of being unemployed. You need to come to the interview room confident and positive about the process. This is a time to turn negatives into positives. For instance, if you were laid off, talk about what you've done to improve your skills or make yourself more

marketable. You need to show a prospective employer that you can face challenges and overcome obstacles in a positive manner. People who can show toughness in the face of adversity are more likely to make a good impression over those who complain about their situation.

#### **4. Do Your Homework and Sell Yourself**

Assuming that you don't show up in your jeans, with spinach in your teeth, telling everyone what a jerk your former boss was, showing up with a thorough knowledge of the organization and position for which you are interviewing can go a long way towards getting the job. Once upon a time, candidates could land an interview simply by skimming the prospective employer's annual report, wowing the hiring manager with a few company facts, and walking away with a firm handshake. Those days are over.

In a labor market tightly controlled by employers, candidates have to give it their all when preparing for interviews. Doing your homework before your interview includes mounting a broad, deep search for relevant information about the position, the company, the industry, and even the interviewer. Luckily for you, many resources are available on the Internet that can enable you to achieve that competitive edge if you're willing to put your nose to the grindstone. What should your research look like? Be sure to consult the company's website, recent company press releases, annual reports, media coverage and industry blogs, and seek advice from members of your network.

If you have done your homework on the company, you need to take it a step further and demonstrate how your background and track record relate specifically to the position. In other words, you need to sell yourself. Some people don't feel comfortable "bragging" about their accomplishments. It's not bragging if you've done what you're describing. Besides, there is a difference between openly bragging and simply describing your accomplishments with confidence to a hiring manager. You need to examine your career for examples of how you have solved problems, minimized risks, saved money, or improved processes for your former employers. Be sure to quantify your contributions, and to provide specific examples of your various accomplishments according to the position's requirements.

Finally, be careful not to oversell or come across as overeager. Don't make false claims about your past job performance or skills. You will be found out. Employers will look up your references and check on your claims. Also, do not offer to work on a trial basis or to take a lesser salary than what a job pays. While these moves may seem bold and aim to convey "interest," they also tend to undermine the value you bring to the position. No matter what the state of the economy, employers want to hire the best candidates available, not necessarily the cheapest.

#### **5. Test Drive Your Interview Skills Before The Big Day**

Beyond doing your homework on the company, you also need to prepare for your interview. The easiest way to approach a job interview with a high confidence level

is to prepare answers to questions you might be asked, and then to practice answering them until you can do it naturally. It doesn't matter whether you're applying for a position as an associate with a law firm, a general counsel with a company, or a law student for a summer internship. Interviewers generally use the same type of general questions to assess candidates. If you prepare in advance for these questions, you'll be able to tilt the odds of a job offer in your favor.

Before you do the real thing, try a practice interview. Invite a family member or friend to practice with you, each of you taking turns as the interviewer and the interviewee. That way, you'll become accustomed to both asking and answering questions. The key is to develop some ease with respect to potential questions and answers so that your interview becomes more natural and conversational.

## **6. Wait For The Job Offer Before Discussing Salary**

There is no routine or schedule for when companies will discuss salary with you. Some companies will ask for salary requirements in a cover letter. Some will actually ask you to accept the offer before they even mention the word salary. However, you should always hold off on discussing salary until after you have been offered the position.

The first thing you need to do is to conduct research on the average pay range for the position, this will allow you to provide a reasonable range if you are asked to name your salary requirement. If you are asked to name your salary requirement in a cover letter or resume, do so. It may be the criteria used to weed out resumes. If you do not include the information at all, your resume will be quickly set aside because you don't follow directions. Put down a reasonable range, according to your research, and depending upon the responsibilities of the position.

Do not lie about your salary history. Employers can verify this information. If you do not wish to tell your salary history, answer with the salary range you are willing to negotiate within. If it is a reasonable range, employers will more than likely drop the question of salary history. Once you have been offered the position, and it is time to discuss the salary, you should ask what the typical range is for others in the company with that position, what they had budgeted for that job, and let them know your willingness to consider any reasonable offer.

## **7. Follow-Up After Your Interview, But Don't Become a Stalker**

When closing the interview you probably asked for information about what happens next in the interview process. How do you conduct a proper follow-up? When and how should you follow-up to keep the focus on your application but avoid becoming annoying?

If you know approximately the time frame for the hiring decision you will have a better idea of how soon to follow-up. For example if they have told you they expect to make the decision within the next week you will need to follow-up more quickly,

after a couple of days. If it is a longer time frame or they have not given you a specific time frame, it is usually best to wait about a week before making contact.

After an interview, make sure to promptly send thank-you letters. Use the business cards you gathered during the interview to address your letters to the right individuals, spelling their names correctly. Also, make sure to proofread your thank you letters thoroughly to avoid typos, spelling mistakes, or grammatical errors.

Finally, don't stalk the interviewer. After waiting a reasonable amount of time following the interview, one to two weeks, it's okay to email or call an interviewer or recruiter and ask for a status update. What's not okay, though, is stalking an interviewer after the interview. Do not try to reach employers multiple times without leaving messages, today everyone has caller ID and will be able to tell if you are calling repeatedly. Also, if you get voicemail, leave a message. Sending a thank you letter and following up once by phone is more than enough. Anything more and rather than coming across as enthusiastic, you will start to look desperate and annoying. Remember to be patient in awaiting the company's response.

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