

# EFFECTIVE INTERVIEWING

Your resume and cover letters have one underlying goal – to get you an interview. You must be prepared to take full advantage of this face-to-face opportunity to show why you are the best candidate for the job. Careful preparation can reduce your anxiety to a manageable level and thus enable you to present yourself and your qualifications most effectively.

## **Know the Organization**

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If you want employers to take an interest in you, show interest in them by demonstrating knowledge of the position, the organization, and the employer's industry. A few places to find this information:

- Employer websites
- Professional associations
- Annual reports
- Current employees
- Friends and family
- Magazines and newspapers

## **Know Yourself**

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What are your top skills or strengths? You may want to emphasize three or four of these points when responding to interview questions (e.g., "I have strong sales experience, I am self-motivated, and I work well in teams."). Be sure your key points address the employer's needs and interests as indicated by the job description.

Illustrate each of your key points with a clear, relevant example. Also, be prepared to answer common interview questions, such as:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why did you choose your major?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What are your career ambitions?
- What motivates you?
- Why should we hire you?

Questions like these help interviewers assess your "fit" for the job and the organization. The content of your responses shows how well you know yourself.

## **Convey Professionalism**

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Behaving professionally communicates that you are a serious candidate.

- Dress professionally and conservatively.
- Arrive about 10 minutes early for an interview.
- Be confident and approachable. Smile, make eye contact, and use a firm handshake.
- Be positive when describing your experiences.

## Communicate with Impact

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Interviewers want to hear about *specific experiences* you have had. Structure your responses using the “**S/TAR**” method: **S**ituation/**T**ask, **A**ction, **R**esult.

**S/T** – Briefly describe the context in which the behavior or action took place.

**A** – Specifically explain the action you took to handle the situation.

**R** – Most importantly, describe the result or impact of your action.

For example:

*Interviewer:* “Tell me about a time when you demonstrated initiative.”

*Job Candidate:* “During my internship last summer, I was responsible for managing various events. I noticed that attendance at these events had dropped by 30% over the past three years, and I wanted to do something to improve these numbers (Situation/Task). I designed a new promotional packet to go out to local businesses. I also included a rating sheet to collect feedback on our events and organized internal round table discussions to raise awareness of the issue with our employees (Action). We utilized some of the ideas we received from the community, made our internal systems more efficient, and raised attendance by 18% (Result).”

- Outline your answers to the most common interview questions.
- Practice your answers out loud.
- Practice making eye contact to convey confidence and respect.

## Ask Questions

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Be prepared to ask questions to build on what you have already learned about the position, the organization, and the industry. A few sample questions you might ask:

- How would you describe the ideal candidate for this position?
- What would be expected of this person during the first few months on the job?
- What are the daily tasks and responsibilities of this position?
- What opportunities for advancement (or development) exist in this position?
- What are the biggest challenges currently facing your organization (or industry)?
- Could you describe the hiring process for this position? What is your expected time frame for making a hiring decision?

You may need to wait until the end of the session to ask your questions. Also note that asking about salary/benefits is generally considered to be inappropriate during a first interview.

## Finish Strong

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If you are genuinely interested in the position, be sure to communicate your enthusiasm before you leave the interview. Ask for the interviewer’s card so you can follow up. Thank the interviewer and project confidence as you shake hands and say goodbye. A strong closing leaves a good final impression.

Always send the interviewer a brief thank-you letter or email. If you do not hear from the organization within a reasonable amount of time, it is appropriate to call and ask about the status of the hiring process.