

## **YOUR INTERVIEW**

Many people feel intimidated by the interview environment because they feel like the "underdog". Dispel this idea immediately. Recognize that the person who will be sitting at the desk opposite you is just another human being, like you, doing a job. You both have the same goal in mind: to match up the right person with the right job.

If fear of rejection is causing the nervousness, recognize that also. You, as an individual, are not being rejected if the interview does not lead to a job offer. It simply implies that your particular combination of experience/background does not mix properly with the particular job opening/employer. And, if that match does not exist, you are really better off not being put into the position of having to decide whether to accept/decline the job.

Often, the anxiety is caused by the applicant not really being interested in a given position or employer. There is nothing wrong with that either, if you recognize it as such. If it is early in your campaign, proceed with the interview anyway. Remember that practice--the repetition of the interview process--is one of the best ways to acquire confidence.

As long as your time schedule permits, accept any interview offered. You are bound to learn something which may be useful in the future - more knowledge about an industry, a product or even the name of a new contact.

An interviewer must obtain relevant facts about a candidate's qualifications and evaluate them in the light of his company's requirements. A good interviewer will probe beyond work experience, education, appearance, ability to express one's self and sociability. He must be assured that the candidate employed is a person who not only has the ability to do the job but also the motivation to do it, the perseverance to stay with it, the stability to be depended upon and the personality that fits in with the other people in the organizational structure.

Because there is consistency in a person's behavior patterns, and because the best way to predict what he will do and how he will do it is to ascertain what he has done, an interviewer may look into your entire background for details and patterns that show your inner traits and operating style. To achieve this, he may ask you to complete application forms, create "stress" situations and (in a non-directive way) encourage you to reveal yourself as he explores your background and experience.

It is vital that whatever information is communicated presents you in the best possible image consistent with the truth. **YOUR BEST PREPARATION FOR THIS IS TO KNOW YOURSELF THOROUGHLY.**

The Job Interview is often referred to as a "listening interview" because success depends far more on the active listening than on talking. The "listening process" starts before you arrive at the interview; it increases in importance as the interview progresses; it ensures constant awareness of what is happening from the moment the interview starts; and it enables you to steer the interview to achieve your predetermined objectives.

### **A. PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW**

Do your homework prior to the interview, and do it as soon as possible, not at the last minute. Learn as much about the prospective employer as you can. First of all, it will impress the interviewer and, secondly, it will enable you to ask intelligent questions. The public library will be useful in this area.

Try to find out ahead of time why the opening exists. Is the vacancy the result of a promotion, a termination or company growth? Who was the previous incumbent? If appropriate, contact that person and solicit his/her comments. You may learn that there have been ten different people in the job within the past year. Maybe you do not want to be the eleventh!

Dress appropriately. Conservatism is usually the best guideline. Extremes -- too casual or too modish -- should be avoided. Although perhaps too elementary to mention, make sure your shoes are shined, nails are clean, socks are pulled up, clothes fit and are clean and pressed. Knowing that you are well-groomed will give you much more confidence.

Get sufficient rest the night before the interview; remember, "Those who fly with the owls by night, cannot soar

with the eagles by day".

Anticipate the types of questions which you will be asked during the interview and plan your responses. The information you provide during the process will answer four basic questions.

1. Does your employment history show constant development of the necessary skills and intelligent application of your energies?
2. Do you show consistent interest, motivation, self-appraisal and growth in related vocational areas?
3. Does your record show drive, resourcefulness, initiative, and that you can carry responsibility and be relied on to achieve results?
4. Do you reveal maturity, sound reasoning and a realistic attitude about yourself, your objectives and your relationship with others when you discuss your past employers, reasons for making changes and problem areas.

A word, again, about the importance of listening.

1. Listen to the QUESTION. Be sure that you understand exactly what is asked. If necessary, ask questions that will clarify the specific point the interviewer is pursuing.
2. Take enough time to think through all of the facts that could be used, and then decide on how you want to answer the question. Do not fear a reasonable period of silence.
3. Then, using only POSITIVE information (if at all possible), answer the question -- concisely and to-the-point. Give as much information as will clearly satisfy the question. Make sure that you do not open areas of difficulty. Of course you must be truthful, but this does not mean that you have to offer unsolicited negative facts which could detract from the value you are trying to communicate. Remember, a person's ability to distinguish important from less important facts is one good indicator of his executive ability.
4. When you cannot think of a "good answer", ask for time to deliberate and for an opportunity to answer later on. If you do not know the answer, say so!
5. Seek constantly to focus and re-focus attention to your best functional areas and accomplishments, relating their future profitability in the position being discussed.

Study the following questions carefully! Most are straightforward and relatively easy to understand and answer. Others are less obvious and will require considerable thought before you can communicate what you would really want to say. Certainly, no interviewer is going to ask all of them and few interviewers will follow any special sequence.

1. Tell me about yourself.
  - \* Don't ramble; answer in no more than 4 minutes.
  - Summarize your career - give overview including current position and how previous responsibilities and training have led up to current skills. Discuss formal education and major courses or training received beyond formal college education.
2. Why do you want to work for us?
  - \* You feel you can make a contribution
3. What would you do for us?
  - \* Relate successes in solving previous employer problems

4. What about your position do you find the most attractive? Least attractive?
  - \* List 3 or more attractive factors . . . only one unattractive factor.
5. You are over-qualified for the position we have open.
  - Employer will get faster return on investment because you have more experience than required
6. What is your management style?
  - \* What is it? You should know by now.
7. Are you a good manager?
  - \* Keep your answer achievement-oriented.
8. Why are you leaving your present job?
  - \* If this is an awkward question, rehearse answer with your consultant.
9. What do you think about your present employer?
  - \* Respond positively.
10. Why haven't you found a new position before now?
  - \* Finding a job is easy, but finding the right job is more difficult.
11. What do you think of your boss?
  - \* Be positive.
12. What would your previous boss say are your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
  - \* Be honest but not too negative. See answer to Question 18 below.
13. What kind of money are you looking for?
  - Try to avoid giving a figure first. If pressed, talk about salary ranges in the future; talk about worth -- not what you want or need.
14. What other types of companies are you considering?
  - \* Keep your answer related to this company's field.
15. How would you describe your own personality?
  - \* Even disposition.
16. What are your long-range goals?
  - \* Be realistic.

17. What are your strong "suits"?

- \* Relate two or three to interviewing company and job opening.

18. What are your weak points?

- \* Turn negative points into positive answers like, "I sometimes take my job too seriously".

### **Twenty Good Answers To Help You Master Even The Most Grueling Employment Interview:**

Most people make two devastating mistakes when they are being questioned in an interview. First, they fail to listen to the question. They proceed to annoy the interviewer either by answering a question that wasn't asked, or by giving out a lot of superfluous information.

Second, and more important, they attempt to answer questions with virtually no preparation. The glibbest person on earth, even the most skilled debater, cannot answer questions "off the cuff" without damaging the chances for success.

What follows are twenty questions that various surveys have indicated are asked most often, regardless of the job classification. Study them carefully, develop strong responses, and your candidacy will receive prime consideration.

1. Why do you want to work here?

- \* Because you have done your homework on the company, you know exactly why you want to work there. Just organize your reasons into several short, hard-hitting sentences like "You make the best product on the market today. Your management is farsighted enough to reinvest the company's profits so that you will soon be the leader in this category".

2. Why should I hire you?

- \* The interviewer does not want a lengthy regurgitation of your resume. They do not want a barrage of facts and figures. They are interested in testing your poise and confidence. So give a short, generalized summary like "I have the qualifications to do the job that needs to be done and my track record proves it".

3. What interests you most about this position?

- \* Give a truthful-but-brief answer like "The challenge" or "The future", "The environment" or "The competitiveness". This response will force the interviewer to ask you to explain, giving you yet another opportunity to demonstrate your profound knowledge of the company.

4. Would you like to have your boss's job?

- \* By all means, "Yes!". Ambitious, hungry people are always preferred over those who would settle for a safe routine. If you sense that this answer may threaten your interviewer's security, you might add "when I am judged qualified" or "should an opening develop in several years".

5. Are you willing to go where the company sends you?

- \* This is probably being asked because they intend to ship you off. If you answer "No", you may not be hired. If you answer "Yes", understand that once you are a trusted employee, you may not be able to exert any leverage to avoid those less desirable out-of-town assignments.

6. What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?

- \* Be human and admit that not everything comes easily. But be careful about what you do admit. "I find it difficult to decide which of two good employees must be let go" or "It is difficult for me to tell a client when he's running his business badly".
7. How do you feel about your progress to date?
- \* Never apologize for yourself. "I think I've done well, but I need new challenges and opportunities." This is a good time to drop hero stories. "No one in my company has advanced as fast as I have. I think you'll agree that I've accomplished quite a bit in the last five years."
8. How long will you stay with the company?
- \* A reasonable response would be, "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field".
9. Have you done the best work you are capable of doing?
- \* This is best answered with some degree of self-effacement. "I would be lying if I told you I was perfect, but I have always tackled assignments with all my energy and talents."
10. What would you like to be doing five years from now?
- \* To answer this question, make sure you know exactly what can or cannot be accomplished by the ideal candidate in your shoes. Too many job-hunters butcher this question because they have not done their homework and have no idea where their career will lead them. If you see yourself at another company, or in another department of the company you are interviewing with, then tread lightly. You can't afford to tell your interviewer that you think you'll be more successful than they.
11. What training/qualifications do you have for a job like this?
- \* Deliver a short, fact-filled summary of your two or three most important qualifications. "I have a background in accounting. I've demonstrated proven selling skills. I'm capable of handling several projects simultaneously."
12. Why do you want to change jobs?
- \* This is one of the first questions interviewers ask. Be sure you are ready to answer it satisfactorily. If you are currently in a dead-end position, locked out of advancement opportunities, explain this. The interviewer will understand. If your job has become a routine, void of learning experiences, say so. If you feel your present employer is losing ground to competition through no fault of yours, the interviewer will also accept that. If you say that your salary is too low, you'll become suspect. If you say that you hate your boss, you might also end up hating the interviewer. If you say you are bored, they'll view you as just another job-hopper. Careful.
13. Why were you out of work for so long?
- \* If there is a time gap in your resume, be prepared to explain what you were doing during that time. If you don't satisfy the interviewer's curiosity, you won't get hired. Try to explain very positively what you learned or accomplished during the hiatus and the interviewer will warm to your candidacy. For example, "I took several courses to strengthen my skills in ....", or "I used this time to re-examine my goals and reached this conclusion....". The interviewer must have a positive explanation!
14. Why have you changed jobs so frequently?
- \* This question is crucial. In fact, an unsatisfactory answer to this one is among the top reasons why candidates fail to get the jobs they want. If you feel it was a mistake leaving previous jobs so soon, say so, and at the same time remind the interviewer that your performance was never in question. Honesty is appreciated. If something in your personal or business life has recently changed and

would affect your future stability, come right out with the facts.

15. Have you ever hired or fired anyone?

- \* You are being asked this question for two very important reasons. First, to determine whether you are capable of performing these duties. Second, to determine if your previous experience was at a high enough level to include hiring/firing responsibilities. If you have no experience, you must convince the interviewer that you can perform in these areas.

16. How have you helped sales/profits/cost reductions?

- \* Have your hero stories ready and be willing to prove that you have made significant contributions in one or more of these basic areas. Keep your explanations short and try to include specific dollar amounts.

17. Why aren't you earning more at your age?

- \* This is a current favorite which can frighten the wits out of an unsuspecting candidate. One of the following responses should cover your situation: "I have been willing to sacrifice short-term earnings in order to gain valuable experience", or "I have received (been promised) company stock (or other benefits) in lieu of a salary increase", or "I was reluctant to gain a reputation as a job-hopper, preferring instead to build my career on solid, long-term achievement". These work.

18. How many people have you supervised?

- \* Similar to the "hired/fired" question. The interviewer is trying to determine the depth of your experience. Do not exaggerate!

19. What are the reasons for your success?

- \* It is best to keep this answer very general, permitting the interviewer to probe more deeply. Offer a short list of positive character traits that describe YOU. "I like to work hard." "I get along with all kinds of people and I know how to listen." Or, "I pay close attention to details, I know how to watch costs and I can keep difficult customers smiling".

20. What kind of experience do you have for this job?

- \* Summarize four or five key areas of experience which you know you can bring to your new job. Demonstrate how each one will help the interviewer's company solve their problems. For example, "My experience in new product introductions will be very helpful to your entire marketing effort", or "My industrial design background will strengthen your sales-force capability in dealing with large clients".

## **B. DURING THE INTERVIEW**

First, be on time! There is nothing wrong with being 10-15 minutes early. It will give you time to sit, relax and organize your thoughts, or to scan whatever literature about the company may be available in the reception area. See if a company newsletter or periodical is laying around and read it. Material from it may be useful in "breaking the ice" at the beginning of the interview.

Before the discussion begins, ask where you can place your coat and hat. It is unnerving to have to juggle these things on your lap. All you will probably need is a brief case and a workable pencil or pen.

If you think you have to "empty your bladder", do it ahead of time. Basic, but better to plan ahead!

Even though you may have previously mailed a resume to the company, bring at least two extra copies with you: one, in case the interviewer has misplaced the original, and the other for you to refer to during the discussion.

Obviously, the interviewer will lead and guide the conversation. This is not to say, however, that you have no control over how it progresses, because you do. Be an active listener. Extend your functional presentation through forcing questions -- "is this the kind of information you want? Would you like some additional details about \_\_\_\_\_?" Here is where your homework pays off. By having planned ahead, you can influence -- if not, at least, partially control -- the actual structure of the interview. This procedure will help you tell your interviewer what you can do and how you will do it.

From your perspective, an effective interview may be broken down into four logical segments. By planning ahead how YOU would like the conversation to proceed, you can strongly influence the end results.

The first of these segments may be referred to as "PRESENTING YOURSELF/ESTABLISHING RAPPORT". Here is where you can consciously contribute to putting yourself and the interviewer at ease. Following is a suggested sequence of conversation:

1. Greet the interviewer in a friendly manner.
2. Get the interviewer talking by asking an appropriate question; e.g., about something interesting he/she has hanging on the wall, about new construction you noticed on the way to the interview, etc.
3. Establish similarity with the interviewer. Indicate you are pleased to have been contacted and say why company is of special interest to you.
3. Indicate you are pleased to have the opportunity to spend some time discussing the position with someone in his/her position.
4. Ask what, from interviewer's point of view, most needs to be accomplished in the position and what abilities are required to accomplish the objectives.

The second phase is where you "GIVE INFORMATION ON TANGIBLE ACCOMPLISHMENTS". This is when you begin selling yourself.

1. Prepare to tell interviewer how at least two of your major accomplishments are related to the position under discussion.
2. Discuss the similarity between your past accomplishments and the interviewer's objectives.
3. Describe your major accomplishments and how you used your analytical, innovative and self-starting abilities.
4. Listen to interviewer's reaction and suggest other similarities between your strengths and requirements of the position.

"ASKING QUESTIONS" is the important next step. Following are some examples.

1. Ask the interviewer how the company is perceived in the industry in comparison to its competition.
2. What are the goals this department has set for the year? The next 5 years? The next 10 years?
3. Ask the interviewer how the major responsibilities of the available job compare with similar roles in other companies.
4. What would be the most difficult part of the job?

5. Identify staffing in the department (numbers of staff at certain levels; years of experience; secretarial or subordinate support -- also strengths and weaknesses of the team).
6. End discussion by thanking interviewer for being informative.

An effective "CLOSING SUMMARY" will assist in bringing the interview to an end.

1. Tell interviewer you have appreciated how informative he/she was, and that you enjoyed discussing the position.
2. Ask interviewer if he/she has any other questions or needs clarification on any issues.
3. Express your continued interest in position and ask about next step to explore it further.
4. Assure interviewer of similarities between your strengths and qualities needed for success in position.
5. Terminate by thanking interviewer and asking for general follow-up date of mutual convenience.

Included above are examples of the types of questions you want answered in the initial interview.

### **Questions Interviewees Should Ask At Later Meetings**

(Raise questions within self or ask others)

Successful "listening" (job) interviews lead to job offers. In order to evaluate such job offers and to negotiate intelligently for adequate compensation, candidates should have certain basic information which may not be offered voluntarily by the interviewer. A final decision to accept or reject a job may be -- or should be -- influenced by the answers to some of the following questions. Of course each candidate should select only those questions which pertain to his own situation. Some of the information should be obtained through careful research prior to the interview. Much will become evident during the interview. The remainder may require very discreet, tactful and carefully-timed questioning of the interviewer.

#### **Job Description**

- \* What are the job specifications for this position?
- \* Are the duties and responsibilities described clearly?
- \* Is there a clear statement of the extent of authority?
- \* Can the job description be altered? Upgraded?

#### **Job History**

- \* How long has this position been in existence? Open?
- \* Who had this position until now? Why is he/she being replaced?
- \* How long was he/she in it? Did he/she succeed or fail?
- \* What led to the success or failure?
- \* How many predecessors? What happened to them? Why?
- \* Why isn't the position being filled from "within"?

### **Reporting Relationships**

- \* Who are the people with whom I will work? My immediate superior? My subordinates? My associates in related departments?
- \* What are their titles, history in the company, previous background, education, age, personality, management and operating style, reputation, etc.?
- \* Any helpful suggestions?

### **The Department**

- \* Does the company have any long-range plans for this department? Growth or consolidation?
- \* Does the department have its own budget? Who controls it?
- \* Has this department been successful? What is its reputation in the company?
- \* In the opinion of the interviewer, is there sufficient staff to handle the work load? How is the morale of the staff?
- \* Is there anyone on the staff who expected to be promoted to this position but was by-passed?

### **The Organization**

- \* Where does this position fit into the company's organization plan?
- \* Are the reporting channels clear?
- \* Is there more than one "boss"?

### **Orientation Training**

- \* Does the company have an orientation program for new employees?
- \* How do I become familiar with company policies, practices and "etiquette"?
- \* Does the company have an Executive Development Program? Other training programs? What are its facilities? What resources does it utilize?
- \* Does the company sponsor courses at universities? At management association or industry conferences? Are suggestions welcomed?

### **The Company**

- \* How long has the company been in existence? Who owns it? Family dominated?
- \* How long has its present management been in control? What is its management/operating style?
- \* What has been its gross sales profit (or loss) pattern during the last ten years? Five years? Two years? Now?
- \* Does the company have a growth plan? (See Annual Report) What does the company's Annual Report and the D&B Report show about its credit rating and financial history?
- \* If the company is "public", what do recent stockbrokers' reports say about its management and its prospects?
- \* How does the company and its products rate in its industry?

- \* What is the economic trend of the industry?

### **The Community**

- \* Where can I get information on housing, cost of living, religious and social organizations, shopping, commuting, schools, libraries, educational and recreational facilities, etc.?
- \* Does the company encourage employees to participate in community activities?
- \* Does the company dominate the community? Social life?

### **Compensation, Advancement**

While negotiating "basic" salary or compensation --

- \* Does the company offer stock options or deferred payment plans? Bonus arrangements? What is the "executive package" at top levels?
- \* Does the company have an Employee Benefits Plan (medical, insurance, retirement)?
- \* Does the company reimburse moving expenses? Losses incurred in selling one's house? Living and travel expenses while employee is "commuting" and finding permanent housing for his family?
- \* Does the company arrange employment contracts?
- \* What is the company's policy regarding vacations and sick leave?
- \* When and how is salary usually paid?
- \* Does the company have a periodic employee appraisal or performance review?
- \* What are the prospects for salary increases? Promotions?
- \* Will there be opportunities for greater responsibilities and broader experiences?

### **Caution**

Many of these questions are of a sensitive nature. An improper attitude or approach could antagonize your interviewer and make him think you are overly suspicious, too careful, prying, etc. Be discreet. The following suggestions will help you minimize the risk of offending your interviewer.

- \* There is no good substitute for careful research prior to an interview
- \* Avoid self-serving questions that would tend to screen you out -- be company-oriented in your thinking.
- \* Be positive in your approach.
- \* Remember, you are not an "inquisitor".
- \* Pre-plan the wording of the questions you want to ask.
- \* Maintain a friendly, open, almost candid attitude.

Avoid asking questions just for the sake of "asking questions". Initially, at least, you should not be concerned about details of vacation, sick leave, holiday policies, etc.; you will learn this information later, after it is established that both you and the company are interested in each other.

Other points to keep in mind include:

1. Be yourself. Don't try to play a role.
2. Don't smoke even if invited to do so.
3. Be relaxed. If you were talking with a friend, you would not be drumming your fingers or continually looking at your watch, or straightening your tie, so don't do it now.
4. Postpone stating your salary requirement. That area can be covered later when you know more about the opening and the company.
5. Approach the conversation with a "what I can do for the company" attitude; not "what can you do for me".
6. Keep your attention on the interviewer. Maintain eye contact. Don't keep looking at the walls or the objects on the desk.
7. Don't be reluctant to blow your own horn to sell yourself.
8. Avoid making negative comments about yourself. Be honest but don't volunteer negative information.
9. Keep a positive attitude about the outcome of the interviews.
10. When you sense that the discussion is almost over, ask when and with whom the next interview will take place.
11. When the interview is over, don't just "get up and run for the door", thank the interviewer for being so informative. Make sure your handshake is firm and sincere.
12. There is nothing corny with a "have a good day", as you leave.
13. Take two seconds to say "thank you" and "good-bye" to the secretary outside the office.

### **C. AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

As soon as you can, take notes on important items covered during the discussion. Make sure you write down the full name and title of the interviewer. You will need this for your follow-up letter.

The next interview will probably be with the hiring manager. You will have learned his/her name during the conversation. Do more homework now. Research his/her background in the Standard and Poor's Register. Take notes so you can unobtrusively inject appropriate comments in that interview.

Within two or three days after the interview, send out a follow-up letter thanking the interviewer for his/her time and courtesy.

**THE EXECUTIVE GROUP**  
**Human Resource Consultants**  
**1645 Parkhill Drive Suite #4**  
**Billings, MT 59102**  
**Phone: (406) 252-7770**  
**Fax: (406) 252-7444**