

Tips and Techniques: *The Interview*

These tips are designed to place you in the best possible position to succeed. Keep in mind, a little confidence goes a long way.

Eye contact, posture and body language are all important components of a successful presentation. Yet if you can't answer or ask questions effectively, you'll never get the job you want. The more prepared you are, the more confident you are. The more confidence you convey, the more likely you are to win the job.

It is most important to prepare in advance and then actively listen during the interview.

Many of these tips work best in conjunction with one another. Answers to questions you ask about the job should be targeted to address any objections the interviewer might have.

At KBW Financial Staffing & Recruiting, we will help any candidate prepare for an interview at no additional charge!

Interview Preparation checklist:

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Name, Title and contact number of person you are meeting | <input type="checkbox"/> Highlights you want to discuss |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Address | <input type="checkbox"/> Questions, questions, questions |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Notes on Organization | <input type="checkbox"/> Don't forget your resume |

Interview Tips:

- **First impressions count:** dress appropriately, be on time and be pleasant.
- **Everyone you meet in the organization is important.** Do not discount your interaction with an administrative assistant while waiting. Their input could help or hinder your process.
- **Hiring managers are evaluating you:**
 - **abilities** (can you do the job?)
 - **motivation** (will you do the job?)
 - **personal qualities** (will you fit in?)
- **Practice your Active Listening skills!** The information obtained in your interview using Active Listening is the key to developing a base of knowledge from which you can answer all your interview questions.
 - Often when people talk to each other, they don't listen attentively. They are often distracted, half listening, half thinking about something else. When people are engaged in a conflict, they are often busy formulating a response to what is being said. They assume that they have heard what their opponent is saying many times before, so rather than listen intently, they focus on how they can respond to win the argument. *Active listening is a way of listening and responding to another person that improves mutual understanding.*
 - Active listening is a structured form of listening and responding that focuses the attention on the speaker. The listener must take care to attend to the speaker fully, and then repeats, in the listener's own words, what he or she thinks the speaker has said. The listener does not have to agree with the speaker--he or she must simply state what they think the speaker said. This enables the speaker to find out whether the listener really understood. If the listener did not, the speaker can explain some more.
 - Paraphrasing, restating and the use of empathy are common approaches to Active Listening.
- **Answer all questions positively!**

Common Interview Questions:

BE POSITIVE! This seems to be an obvious point but is often over simplified. Many people who aren't normally upbeat and positive have difficulties with this at the most basic level. It requires practice if it's not a typical trait.

Question: So you think you can handle this position?

- » Negative answer: *"All these projects seem like a lot of work. I would love the job."*
- » Positive answer: *"These projects seem quite challenging. I look forward to helping."*

Interview answers should be from **30 seconds to two minutes**. They should positively never be one word answers.

Employer Questions:

What is your reason for leaving your current organization?

- » Don't offer a selfish explanation. Take a broader, simpler view. *DO NOT* mention you didn't get along with your last manager. You will be viewed as a difficult candidate.

What is your current salary?

- » Answer with a range if possible or couch your answer if you have no idea what the position pays. Working with recruiters will eliminate much of this concern as we match salary ranges and expectations prior to presenting candidates for specific openings.

Have you ever been fired?

- » These things do happen and it need not hamper your job searches forever. There are many reasons a person can get fired. Keep in mind that these are often complex. Personality issues with your manager could potentially label you as someone who can't get along. Consider how much you wish to disclose. In any event, admit that it happened and note that you *certainly learned from this experience*.

How does this position compare with other opportunities you are considering?

- » Okay, so the goal here is not to disclose that this is one of many, or the only job you are considering. You want a manager to feel comfortable that you are genuinely interested in their position. Keep the answer to the unique opportunity being presented. This puts your active listening skills to use because it allows you to showcase your level of understanding to the interviewer. This turns a potential risky question into a positive affirmation of your interest in their opening.

Tell me about yourself?

- » Should you get this question on the interview you should realize you are being interviewed by a novice interviewer. They are probably crunched for time and really don't know what other questions to ask. That being stated: you have two minutes or less to tell them your career progression since school, progressing through the positions/organizations you've held and ending with where you are today on your job search. Be certain to include accomplishments. It's not a bad idea to have these hot points bullet-pointed on your notepad for reference info.

This is a good format to practice: "after graduating from ABC College with a degree in accounting, I accepted a position at XYZ Inc. working as a staff account. XYZ was a mid-sized manufacturing firm making widgets. After 4 years of increased responsibility I was promoted to Accounting Manager overseeing a group of 5 accountants. I was then recruited to DEF Corporation to lead their Oracle implementation. I am here today because DEF has been sold to an international firm and our jobs are being sent overseas."

So how long have you been looking for a job?

- » Positive attitude! If you are going to admit you've been looking for awhile, spin it towards a positive career move. Just be prepared to discuss what's been offered to you.

Describe a goal you have recently set for yourself or achieved?

- » Find the right job. If they ask about a past goal achieved, be prepared but make it meaningful.

What do you like most/least about this position?

- » This presents another opportunity to display what you've learned. State the two or three most important parts of the position, including perhaps the special projects discussed. For the least favorite, perhaps note that there are no significant drawbacks. If you must expand, then empathize with what the hiring manager has discussed as a difficult scenario.

What are your three biggest strengths/weaknesses?

- » This is where you can use some of your business clichés: loyalty, strong work ethic, goal oriented, good communication skills (please don't say you are a 'people person') are all good answers. For weaknesses, please avoid the workaholic syndrome. It may be best to address items that are not critical to the position. If you're not working with Oracle Financial reports you might say you've never really been able to get the hang of Excel Macros.

What are your career plans over the next five years?

- » This is a standard question without much bite but still a popular one. It therefore requires a standard answer. Repeat after me: "I hope to continue to grow within this organization in positions of increased responsibility. During this time my career growth would continue to contribute to the organizations success and ultimately learn from each other and my colleagues."

What do you know about the position?

- » Do not go into an interview without ANY information. Disclose what you know and be prepared to ask a lot of questions to clarify the manager's expectations?

Have you ever worked for a difficult person?

- » Difficult is a relative term. What you define as difficult may not be the same as the hiring manager. Ask them to explain what they mean by difficult? Doesn't trust anyone? Doesn't delegate? Establish impossible deadlines?

Describe a situation when you made a quick decision.

- » The hiring manager is not trying to determine if you should be the leader of the free world, but whether or not you can assess risk quickly. *Are you a team player?* No better way to answer this than to make it clear that you understand a team player is someone who is fair, accepts responsibility for problems, shares compliments, supports management decisions, offers constructive criticism, has a positive attitude, and uses "We" instead of "I" in your answers.

The Transition from Interviewee to Interviewer:

No matter how many people you've met, always ask questions. If you don't, that one person could simply pass since they thought you were disinterested. Remember, the last person you meet probably exerts the most influence on all the others – make a positive lasting impression.

As a recruiter, the number one reason we hear why people didn't win a position was because they didn't ask any questions.

Asking questions demonstrates that you are the right person for the role by communicating your: interest in the role, intelligence in understanding the role, confidence that you can take on the role, your personality is a fit and you are assertive.

Interviewee Questions:

Do you think I can do the job?

- » The vast majority of candidates upon leaving an interview feel that it went well. Yet rarely does one ask this question. This offers instant feedback but it takes confidence. If they love you they will say 'yes' in which case you ask when you should start. More likely they will hedge and offer some objectives. This is also a great situation since you have something to immediately re-address.

"I can see why you might think that... however, if I can take you back to my time with..."

Or *"I am willing and eager to put in the extra time to get caught up to speed."*

Alternatively, you could ask: *"Is there anything I have said that would indicate that I'm not the best person for the job?"*

What criteria are you selecting the person for this role?

- » This allows you to be assertive and confident but it also allows you the time to take notes about all the key items this particular manager will want answers for in about 3 minutes. Don't interrupt them but once they list one, ask for the next and so on.

Why did you come to XYZ Corp? What are the best/worst parts of working here?

- » This is a personality question for both interviewer and applicant. You are complimenting the interviewer too by showing an interest in them and potentially modeling your career path similar to theirs.

Can you describe the work environment here?

- » *"So as I understand, the title is ..., the duties are ... within the ... department. I would report directly to... Is that right...?"*

Followed by...

"Can you tell me more about my day-to-day roles?" Listen to what may have been repeated to make sure you will cover or re-emphasize their critical issues.

Can you tell me about a typical day?

- » Slightly different than above... used in combination it will give you an idea of the job needs and some insight into their corporate culture. Also, it may indicate whether this is a proactive or reactive organization.

What major projects is your team currently working on?

- » Or for the confident candidate... *what projects are WE currently working on.* Either way, these are all questions you can better address your candidacy for.

How soon are you looking to fill this position?

- » Have you ever left an interview and wondered when they would call you back? If you asked this question at each level, you probably wouldn't wonder.

Is there a structured career path?

- » Keep in mind smaller companies won't have the same corporate ladders as larger companies do.

What challenges would I encounter in this role/department?

- » This question is another great indicator of expectations. Is the manager describing something that would require a Herculean effort to succeed? It is also useful to compare with other answers about the general work volume. Is this a career you want to explore if the requirements sound like it will be 70 hour weeks?

Other managers/interviewers (perhaps HR) have indicated that work/life balance is an important benefit of working at XYZ. How do you balance the tensions and time commitments of your role and still encourage your staff to have private lives?

- » Once again, another clue towards the manager and companies potential conflicting views of work/life. Hopefully they agree, but if not, ask for clarification.

Do you see this job requiring extensive overtime or weekend work?

- » It's direct. So don't qualify it with "I mean, how long do you work during the close?" Just ask and get a straight answer.

What weaknesses do you see in your current department that you are looking to improve?

- » Their answer is probably your first challenge on the job, or simply perhaps the reason for the opening.

What is the reason for the opening?

- » If this is the fourth person in the same role over the last year, you may want to seriously consider passing on this role.

What is the most important thing I can do for you during my first 90 days here?

- » This question focuses on confidence, inquisitiveness and attention to detail. The answer accomplishes two goals – reasserts your interest in the role or leads to an objection for which you can counter with your closing or next comments.

■ Follow-up:

Never underestimate the impact of a courtesy thank you note. Most candidates neglect this most basic component of *Emily Post* etiquette. Make sure you have the interviewers business card so you can thank them for your time. The best form of thank you is a note mailed directly. However, if you know the decision to hire is imminent, do not rely upon the postal service, send it via email.

Your best bet is to send one the following morning. Be sure to mention your interest in the role and emphasize any areas that may have remained in question during the interview. Send thank you's to all the people you met and spent any one-on-one time with.

E-mail is acceptable especially if you discovered in your interview that they are heavy email users. Keep it simple and sweet.

Don't forget KBW! If a recruiter has coordinated an interview for you, call them back immediately following the interview to share your feedback with them. It is also a good idea to thank recruiters for their time when interviewing with them... most candidates don't so it's a great way to promote yourself by indicating your interest in working together and showcasing that you will represent them well.