Homeless Gear

Offering Hope and a Hand Up

Job Preparation 4- The Interview

Keys to Learn

- ✓ **Communication** – Not just words, but dress, attitude, & more.
- ✓ **Preparation** – It's the Key to Success!
- ✓ **Common Questions** – What to Expect
- ✓ **Tough Questions** – Turn Them Into Positives
- ✓ **Follow-Up** – Be Proactive / Land the Job!

Interview True/False Questions

T___ F___ 1. An interview should not last longer than ten minutes.

T___ F___ 2. It is okay to admit when you do not know something.

T___ F___ 3. The best-qualified applicant always gets the job.

T___ F___ 4. You can take your time to think when answering a difficult question.

T___ F___ 5. It is rude to ask an employer when you may expect a decision.

T___ F___ 6. Effective interviewing is a learnable skill.

T___ F___ 7. How you look and act is much more important than what you say in an interview.

T___ F___ 8. The job interview is an opportunity for the applicant to interview the employer.

T___ F___ 9. If an employer thinks you are nervous in the interview, you probably will not get hired.

T___ F___ 10. Employers are impressed with applicants who know a lot about the company.

The Interview: The interview is a very important part of the job seeking process; it is your time to show the employer who you are in person and not on paper. The interview typically serves two purposes:

- To give the employer an opportunity to find if **you are the best person for the job** To do this an employer will evaluate any applicant on four criteria:
  1. **Whether you have the knowledge and skills (including soft skills) needed to complete the job**
  2. **Whether you can fit in with the team**
  3. **Whether you can effectively communicate and follow instructions**
  4. **Whether concerns or 'red flags' are present and how you deal with them (Consider attending our class, "Breaking Down Barriers," held at 1 pm on the 3rd Thursday of every month)**
- The other purpose of the interview is for you to asses a potential job. You can do this by asking informed questions in the interview process. You could ask about the position, the company, or other related questions. Make sure that you relay that you are interested in this company and that you want them! This is a great time to share your hard and soft skills with an employer.

Your Skills – "Soft" & "Hard"

You have skills! "Soft skills" are personal characteristics you bring to the job. Soft skills are often equally important, if not *more important*, to employers than hard skills.

"Soft" Skills

- ☐ Reliable
- ☐ Punctual
- ☐ Willing to learn
- ☐ Enthusiastic
- ☐ Team player
- ☐ Flexible
- ☐ Eager to work
- ☐ Good communicator
- ☐ People person

"Hard" Skills

- ☐ Forklift certified
- ☐ HAZMAT certified
- ☐ Carpentry
- ☐ Electrical
- ☐ Warehouse, Shipping/Receiving
- ☐ Food service
- ☐ Microsoft Word and/or Excel
- ☐ Microsoft Excel
- ☐ Internet

- Your soft skills are going to be a very important part of the interview; they will be apparent in the way that you interact and respond to the interviewer. This is your opportunity to highlight verbally some of these skills that you would use in the job as well as physically display them in the interview process.

1. **Communication** – Not just words, but dress, attitude, & more.

The interview is going to help the employer decide if you get the job and the employer can potentially make this decision within the first 5 minutes of meeting you. Therefore, first impressions are a key to success.

- **Importance of first impression:** For many people, if we start off an interview 'on the right foot' it is easier to maintain that positive attitude, but the reverse is true as well. A strong introduction shows self confidence.
- **Steps to achieve a strong first impression:**
    - **What to Wear** – Employers make assumptions (fairly or unfairly) based on grooming and dress, so communicate professionalism. It is found that 40% of all unsuccessful interviews are due to poor appearance. You want to make sure that you are well groomed and demonstrate good hygiene. You want to be conservative in dress, and it is always better to be slightly overdressed rather than underdressed. A good tip is to be dressed one notch better than the daily attire.
        1. What you wear depends largely on the environment of the workplace to which you are applying. This can be a tricky balance; you want to look sharp, but not ridiculous. If possible, go to the site of the employer and see what current employees are wearing. Base your decision on their attire.
    - **Be on Time** – This means 15 minutes early. Being late communicates that you are unreliable. Use this time wisely, we suggest that you go to the bathroom, check your appearance, and take some calming breaths.
        1. What shouldn't you do during this time?
        2. Is it possible to be too early?
    - **Greet the interviewer with a confident handshake** – Have a firm handshake when you first meet an employer. Look them in the eye, address them by name, and introduce yourself. This means that you need to learn the interviewers name prior to the interview.
    - **Attitude** – Be enthusiastic, positive, motivated, and confident. Employers will assume that the attitude that you bring to the interview is the same attitude that you will have on the job. Try to be calm, but don't be afraid to appear a little nervous- the interviews understand and can expect this.
        1. Self-care could help with your attitude; try to get a good night's sleep, eat well, and relax the night before the interview. Do what it takes, if possible, to prepare yourself - mentally and physically - for your interview.
    - **Verbal vs. Non-Verbal Communication –** In an interview both verbal and non-verbal communication can make or break you. Posture, eye contact, handshakes & smiles are all important. Consider leaning forward slightly during your interview; this demonstrates that you are interested, and keeps you engaged in the conversation.

2. **Preparation** – The Key to Success!

- **Don't Wing It** – Reduce nervousness & boost confidence. Prepare for commonly asked questions.
    - Prepare a list of 5 relevant hard and soft skills that are relevant to the job.
    - Write down two strengths and weaknesses prior to the interview, and how you would illustrate your strengths to the employer.
    - If you have any problem areas, such as gaps in employment or anything negative pertaining to your record, prepare your answers ahead of time to questions regarding these matters.
- **Anticipate the Employer's Concerns** – Do your best to prepare responses that decrease/minimize the employer's concerns. If you can do this, you're halfway there!
- **Demonstrate your Alignment with the Company** – Show that you not only have the knowledge and skills to complete the job tasks, but that you also match their mission, vision, and work culture. Research the company beforehand and show your interviewer why your values/behaviors align with the company's (as long as it is true).
    1. In today's job market, many people just want a job—any job. But it is still important - to both you and the employer - that you and the company are a match. Employees are happier, more productive, and stay longer when their values/behaviors align with the company's.
- **Practice Interview!** With Hand Up Cooperative, a friend, family member, or by yourself!
    - Talk to Hand Up Cooperative about a videotaped mock interview. Sometimes, we do not realize what we are doing right or wrong until we see it on camera.
    - Use the Mock Interview Preparation Evaluation provided in the Hand Up Cooperative Workbook.
    - As much as possible, phrase all answers to show your relevant strengths and alignment with the job and company.

- **Get an Edge** – Other applicants often don't prep, so you'll have an edge.

3. **Common Questions** – What to Expect

"Tell me about yourself."	**"Your top 3 strengths & weaknesses?"**
• **Not** personal (age, family, hobbies); • Talk about skills – incl. **soft skills**! • _____ • _____ • _____	• **Strengths:** Soft & relevant hard skills. • **Weaknesses:** Be honest, but don't undercut your readiness for the job. **Strengths:** **Weaknesses:** 1. _____ 1. _____ 2. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 3. _____

How to Handle the Weakness Question:

2. In the past I struggled with (some minor issue) Ex: accepting criticism from my peers
3. I realized that (internal change) Ex: I was missing out on important opportunities for growth
4. Now I bring the ability to (new skills learned from internal change) accept criticism from my peers with grace

"Why do you want this job?"	**"What would last boss say about you?"**
• *"I feel my skills would be well used at your company. For example…"* • Talk about **interest** in their business. • _____ • _____	• Think **soft skills**: hardworking, independent, reliable, etc. • **Specific** – ex. of accomplishment, project, or assignment. • _____ • _____
"What did you dislike about your last job?"	**"Have you ever been fired?"**
• Try to be positive. • Dislikes shouldn't be part of new job. • _____ • _____	• Be honest—no details & no excuses. • What have you learned from it? • _____ • _____
"How long have you been unemployed?"	**"Do you work well with a team or do you work better alone? Why?"**
• Working? Talk about your current job! • Try to explain gaps – were you a housewife, caring for a family member, in school, doing unofficial work, etc. • _____ • _____	• Think about what the position for which you are interviewing would require. • Are you a little of both? Flexible? • _____ • _____

- **Research the Company:** Try to learn as many facts and characteristics about the company and open position prior to the interview. This will show that you are interested in the position. It will also look good when the employer asks you if you have any questions for him or her; you can ask questions to gain a deeper understanding or expand on what you have already learned of the company
- **Ask Questions Too!** – Show you're interested, come to the interview with some questions that you would like to ask the employer. In fact, not asking questions makes you look like you're not that interested in the job or don't care. By asking thoughtful questions, it shows that you are evaluating them too. Below are some good examples of questions to ask in an interview:
- **<u>Acceptable questions to ask:</u>**
    - What are the key responsibilities?
    - What would your ideal employee look like?
    - What does the most challenging day on the job look like?
    - What training and development is offered to employees?
    - What equipment, tools, uniforms, and/or certifications are needed?
    - What would an average work day look like in this position?
    - Who would I be working with most closely? Who would be my direct supervisor?
    - What are some significant challenges of this position?
    - Do you have any concerns that I may need to clear up in order to be one of the top candidates for this position?
    - Any informed questions that demonstrate you've researched the company.
    - Ask when they expect to make their decision and how soon you might expect to hear back from them.
- **<u>Questions to avoid:</u>**
    - Avoid questions concerning benefits or salary no matter how important they are to you. Asking about money in the first interview gives the impression that you are only concerned with the financial aspect of the opportunity and not the job itself. It just sends the wrong message.
        1. *If an employer asks for your salary requirements, and you have no idea what to say, it is okay to ask the employer for a range of what you might expect. One website, onetonline.org, can help you identify typical salaries for many jobs, arranged by state.*
    - If there is an education refund program? If so how it works?
    - What factors determine merit increases and promotions?
    - What benefits does the company offer?
      Themes to avoid: Pay, benefits, perks; anything related to your self-interest. The purpose of an interview is to demonstrate what you can do for an employer and to see if the job is a good fit for you.

4. **Tough Questions** – Turn Them into Positives

- **Felonies** – Be honest, don't share too much and say how you've changed. Take responsibility/it won't happen again/focus on goals andfuture.
    - **Good**: *"I made a mistake." "I paid my dues." "I learned a lot."*

    - **Avoid:** *"Inmate." "Conviction." "Crime."*
- **Substance Abuse** – Again, be honest but don't share too much. That time has past, and you are ready to work. Maybe volunteer for drug test any time.
- **Gaps** – Cash jobs, part-time jobs, caring for a relative? Describe it & be specific.

At the end of the interview be sure to thank the interviewer for their time and the opportunity to meet with them. Also make sure that you tell the interviewer that you want the job and look forward to hearing from him or her.

5. Completed the Interview? – Congratulations!! But you're not quite done—make sure to **Follow Up.**

- Send a personalized card thanking the interviewer(s) for their time. The card doesn't have to say very much, but it can be very powerful.

  Many people send a thank you email, but Hand Up suggests sending a hand written card. This serves a few purposes:

  - It displays a higher level of professionalism
  - It demonstrates that you 'go the extra mile' and that you have good soft skills.
  - It reminds the interviewer of you and your time together. Hopefully, this little reminder puts you in running with the top candidates.

Here is an example of a follow-up card:

Your Name

Address

Phone Number

Interviewer's Name

Title or Position

Company Name

Company Address

Dear Ms./Mr._____

Thank you for taking the time to interview me on (Day, and Date) for the _____ position at the (Company Name). I enjoyed the opportunity to meet with you personally and learn more about (Company Name).

I was very impressed by your (something that you liked about the company), and I am excited by the potential opportunity to contribute the this work environment.

Once again, thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to call me if you have any additional questions. Otherwise, I will call you in a week (include the actual date) to follow up.

Sincerely,

Your Name

Remember this is a sample letter and you should customize it and change it for each interview that you have an opportunity at, just like how you should change your resume for each potential job opportunity.

Top 20 Reasons People Don't Get Hired

To find out exactly what mistakes people make when applying for a job, Northwestern University Placement Director, F.S. Endicott, surveyed personnel directors at 153 companies. The following, listed in order of importance, are the most common errors job applicants make.

1) Poor personal appearance
2) Over aggressive
3) Inability to express information clearly
4) Lack of interest and enthusiasm
5) Lack of planning for career; no purpose and no goals
6) Too nervous; lack of confidence and poise
7) Overemphasis on money
8) Unwilling to start at the bottom
9) Makes excuses
10) Lack of tact and courtesy
11) Lack of maturity
12) Condemns past employers
13) No genuine interest in the company or the job
14) Fails to look the interviewer in the eye
15) Sloppy application form
16) Little sense of humor
17) Arrives late to the interview
18) Fails to express appreciation for the interviewers time
19) Fails to ask questions about the job
20) Vague responses to questions

Interview Preparation Worksheet

What type of job/field are you interested in?_____

Do you have any experience? ____Yes _____ No

How many years?_____

With what company (s)?_____

Doing What? (Be specific) _____

List several **relevant** soft skills that you may have (reliable, hard worker, trustworthy,) and write a short story for each how you have used these skills in previous work related experiences.

Example- *Dependable- One of my strengths is that I am a dependable worker. In a previous job the boss gave me a task to finish some important paperwork that was due for a deadline. He gave me the opportunity to be in charge of this task because he said I was the most dependable person on the team.*

1.) _____

2.) _____

3.) _____

4.) _____
_____
_____
_____

List two times that you have experienced one of your weaknesses in the work place and how you overcame that experience or what you learned.

1.) _____
_____
_____
_____

2.) _____
_____
_____
_____