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## PREPARING FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

### KNOW YOURSELF

What value do you bring to a job and the organization? It is crucial that you know your own skills and abilities, values, interests, and goals before you begin the interview process. Review your resume and also consider various accomplishments that will provide examples of your qualifications.

### RESEARCH THE ORGANIZATION

It's very important to research and identify as much information as possible about the selected organization. What are their products and/or services? Who are their competitors? What is their mission? What is their reputation in the community? Researching the organization also prepares you for being able to discuss why you want to work for them. This information is available on most company websites.

### KNOW THE OPPORTUNITY

Carefully review any information you have regarding the position you are interviewing for. Be sure you have a clear understanding of the job responsibilities and the qualifications. Clearly link your qualifications to those the position requires.

### REVIEW ANTICIPATED QUESTIONS

To prepare you for any possible questions you may encounter during the interview, refer to the list provided in this packet and use the resource in the Career Center called a mock interview. This can be arranged by calling the Career Center and making an appointment before your scheduled interview. Rehearse the answers to these questions several times until they become very spontaneous and natural.

### MAKE A GOOD FIRST IMPRESSION

In addition to having good responses to questions, you need to be aware of such things as posture and the non-verbal aspect of your presentation.

- Be on time: If you cannot be on time, be early.
- Handshake: A firm handshake is appropriate and projects confidence.
- Eye contact: Make eye contact when you greet and shake hands.
- Dress: Your clothing should be appropriate for the position you are seeking. Attire must fit well and be immaculate. Shoes should be polished; pants/skirts and shirts pressed. (See our "Professional Dress at Work" booklet for specific information)
- Grooming: Clean hair and fingernails. Hair should be clean, combed, and styled conservatively. Avoid excessive make-up, jewelry, and cologne. Be sure you have fresh breath.

## CRITICAL SUCCESS FACTORS

In addition to satisfying the employer's needs in terms of providing them with the necessary job skills, there are other factors and attributes an employer will be looking for during the interview.

Some examples are:

- Positive attitude, enthusiasm
- Communication skills (written and oral)
- Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Flexibility
- Self-motivation
- Teamwork

**Remember** that a job interview is a chance to sell yourself to the employer. It is up to you to showcase all your great qualities.

- **Positive Attitude/Enthusiasm**

Never underestimate the power and value of your genuine enthusiasm and a positive attitude toward work. A little goes a long way.

- **Communication Skills**

Employers are relying on your ability to communicate well, not only verbally, but in writing. What evidence can you provide that conveys your communication skills?

- **Critical Thinking and Problem-solving Skills**

Can you see the big picture and yet analyze the smaller parts? Do you see more efficient and effective ways to get the job done and/or increase productivity/success?

- **Interpersonal Skills**

How well do you get along with others? What do you do to ensure good relationships with internal and external customers and clients?

- **Flexibility**

Can you demonstrate or convey your ability to adapt to new, different, and/or changing work requirements and environments?

- **Self-motivation**

Show the employer that you can take initiative or that you are able to work on projects with very little supervision or oversight.

- **Teamwork**

Describe/demonstrate how you work as a member of a team. Do you volunteer to help others?

# THE INTERVIEW

## WHAT TO EXPECT

The job interview is a strategic conversation to determine whether a good fit exists between you and the employer. The employer's objective is to find out:

- **What** you know (your skills, ability to do the job, and basic job knowledge)
- **Who** you are (your personality, character, and interests)
- **Why** you should be hired (what makes you unique)

The interview that you are *most likely* to face is a **STRUCTURED INTERVIEW** with a traditional format. It usually consists of three phases – introductory, middle, and closing.

## INTRODUCTORY PHASE – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

This is probably the most important phase and you want to make a good impression. Remember you only have a few seconds to create a positive first impression, which can influence the rest of the interview and even determine whether you get the job.

### **When greeting the interviewer:**

- Be certain your handshake is firm and that you make eye contact.
- Your posture shows that you are interested in what is being said.
- Smile naturally at appropriate times.
- Avoid keeping your briefcase/purse on your lap.
- Pace your movements so that they are not too slow.
- Try to appear relaxed and confident.

## MIDDLE PHASE – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

You will be asked questions about your work experience, skills, education, activities, and interests. You're being assessed on how:

- You will perform the job in relation to the company objectives.
- Be sure your responses are concise.
- Use specific examples to illustrate your point whenever possible.
- Incorporate any information you obtained earlier in the interview with responses you prepared in advance.

## CLOSING PHASE – STRUCTURED INTERVIEW

- You will be asked if you have any questions.
- Ask relevant questions that have not been answered.
- Reiterate your interest in the position and why you should be hired.
- If another interview has been scheduled, get the necessary information.
- If it's a final interview, find out when the decision is to be made and when you may call.
- Thank the interviewer by name and say goodbye.

## FREQUENTLY ASKED INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

### PERSONAL

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your long-range and short-range goals?
- What are your major strengths? Weaknesses?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
- What are your salary expectations?
- What qualifications do you have that make you feel that you will be successful in this field?
- What personal characteristics are necessary for success in your chosen field?
- How do you determine or evaluate success?
- What qualities should a successful manager possess?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

### COMPANY AND POSITION

- Why are you interested in our organization?
- What do you know about our organization?
- What type of position are you most interested in?
- What position in our organization do you want to work toward?
- What qualifications do you have that will allow you to be successful with this company?

### WORK EXPERIENCES

- What jobs have you held? How were they obtained and why did you leave?
- What did you learn about yourself from some of the jobs you have held?
- What jobs did you enjoy the most? Least?
- Do you prefer working with others or by yourself?
- With what type of management style do you work the best?
- Discuss a difficult or stressful work situation/problem and how you dealt with it.

## QUESTIONS YOU MAY WANT TO ASK THE EMPLOYER

What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?

Does your company encourage further education?

What are your growth projections for next year?

In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?

What is the largest single challenge facing your staff now?

Has there been much turnover in this job area?

Do you fill positions from the outside or promote from within first?

What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?

Is there a lot of team/project work?

Where does this position fit into the organizational structure?

What is the next course of action? When should I expect to hear from you or should I contact you?

**“TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF”  
SKILLS STATEMENT WORKSHEET**

Sometimes the most challenging interview question is, “Tell me about yourself”. It is crucial you provide the interviewer with a clear and effective summary of your qualifications - **not** your personal history. This worksheet will provide you with the framework for a skills statement to “sell yourself” to the employer.

**Job Objective:** \_\_\_\_\_

**First Sentence:** Describe your relevant experience, emphasizing two or three key duties and/or qualifications and include any information about related certificates or degrees.

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**Second Sentence:** Provide more detail, highlighting special knowledge or functional skills that make you unique. You could also outline a particularly relevant accomplishment.

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**Third Sentence:** Focus on your special talents and personal qualities. Help the employer to see you as a human being, not just a collection of technical abilities.

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**EXAMPLE:**      **(TARGET JOB) ACCOUNTING CLERK**

Recently, I completed a certificate program in Accounting emphasizing Accounts Payable and Accounts Receivable as well as general bookkeeping. I have over five years of experience utilizing mathematical principles and performing very detail-oriented tasks. I am a dedicated, friendly employee committed to producing consistently accurate and quality work.



## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

The following are different types of interviews that jobseekers will encounter during their job search:

### **Behavior-Based**

Also called “situational”, candidates are asked to describe how they responded or behaved in various work situations.

Purpose: To measure your responses against pre-determined standards. This approach is often used as one part of a traditional interview rather than as an entire interview format.

### **Group**

You are interviewed with several other applicants.

Purpose: Interviewer is using the group settings to glean information not thought to be readily accessible in a one-to-one interview. In group interviews, the employer will observe applicant’s interpersonal skills.

### **Informational**

Once you have an objective and identify what you do well, talk to people in the industry.

Purpose: To give you valuable information about particular jobs and careers and helps develop referral networks.

### **Multiple/Series**

Involves a series of interviews in which you meet individually with various representatives of the organization. In the initial interview the representative usually attempts to get basic information about your skills and abilities.

Subsequent interviews are focused on how you would perform the job in relation to the company’s goals and objectives.

Purpose: After interviews are completed, the interviewers meet and pool their information about your qualifications to determine which unsuitable candidates will be screened out at each succeeding level.

### **Panel**

You may be interviewed by two or more company representatives.

Purpose: Same as the structured interview.

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

### **Screening**

Preliminary interview either in person or by phone.

Purpose: For the company representative to determine whether you have the basic qualifications to warrant a subsequent interview.

### **Stress**

You may be asked questions that make you uncomfortable. You may be interrupted when you are speaking.

Purpose: To see how you react under pressure. Although it is uncommon for the entire interview to be conducted under stress conditions, it is common for the interviewer to incorporate stress questions as part of a traditional interview.

### **Structured**

Interview explores certain predetermined areas using questions which have been written in advance. Interviewer has a written description of the experience, skills and personality traits of an ideal candidate.

Purpose: To determine whether your experience and skills match the specific job tasks. This type of interview is very common and most traditional interviews are based on this format.

### **Unstructured**

Interviewer is not given instructions on what specific areas to cover.

Purpose: Same as the structured interview.

### **Targeted**

Similar to structured interview, but the areas covered are much more limited. Key qualifications or success on the job are identified and relevant questions are prepared in advance.

Purpose: To determine if your experience and skills are a match for the organization.

## INTERVIEW STRATEGIES

### THE T.O.D.A.Y. STRATEGY

The TODAY method works by helping you see job interviews as a one-on-one presentation and provides a framework to review experiences in preparation for the interview.

**T - Teamwork:** Give an example of a time when you were part of a team or functioned in a team environment.

**O - Overcoming Obstacles:** Give an example of a time when you faced a particular challenge, such as financing college or a car, or finding a part-time job.

**D - Duties:** Accurately describe the duties of previous jobs or internships and try to relate skills to the job opening.

**A - Achievements:** Give an example of any achievements or accomplishments, such as awards, scholarships, or placing in sporting events.

**Y - Your Strengths and Weaknesses:** Strengths should be unique and you should provide specific examples. Try to think of something that you have overcome, such as a fear of public speaking, and explain how you overcame the fear.

### S.T.A.R. TECHNIQUE

The STAR technique is used to prepare for a *behavioral-based interview*, as outlined below.

<b>Situation or Task</b>	Describe the situation you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation. This situation can be from a previous job, from a volunteer experience, or any relevant event.
<b>Action you took</b>	Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did -- not the efforts of the team. Don't tell what you might do, tell what you did.
<b>Results you achieved</b>	What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?

## QUALIFICATIONS WORKSHEET

Carefully review the position announcement and the qualifications required for the job, and then match your skills and experience. On the left side, make a list of what the employer is looking for; on the right side, make a list of the skills and qualities you possess that fit those requirements.

POSITION REQUIREMENTS	MY SKILLS AND EXPERIENCE
<b>Example:</b>  Customer Service Skills	<input type="checkbox"/> 2 years experience working with customers as a bank teller at Bank of America. Provided efficient and accurate banking transaction service to customers, explained various products and services, and resolved customer complaints.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

### INTERVIEW EVALUATION

Questions to ask yourself:

- Was my personal appearance at its best?
- Was I punctual, courteous, and enthusiastic?
- Did I make a good first impression?
- Did I talk too much or too little?
- Was I really prepared for the interview?
- Did I clear up any doubts about my qualifications?
- Did I give specific reasons for wanting to be affiliated with this company?
- Did I portray myself as a potential and worthwhile asset to their organization throughout the interview?
- Did I end the interview positively?
- What am I going to do now? Call? Write? Return?
- What did I learn?

### TAKE NOTES

Before leaving an interview you should be clear as to the next step. Your interviewer will usually tell you when you can expect to hear from them. If he or she says nothing, you may ask, "How should we proceed from here?" or "When might I expect to hear from you?"

The first 30 minutes after your interview is a critical time, therefore, before your interview becomes a fuzzy memory, jot down notes about your meeting.

### SEND A THANK-YOU NOTE

Within 24 hours of the interview, write a thank-you note or letter to the interviewer. Thank-you notes are not only common courtesy, but because most people do not write them, your note will set you apart from most applicants. Today many consider emailed thank you notes acceptable – others are still strong supporters of handwritten notes.

Tell the interviewer you appreciate him/her taking time to meet with you and restate how you feel your skills and qualifications would meet the needs of the position. Send the interviewer a thank-you note even if you are turned down. This will create a favorable impression should a position become open in the future.

## NEGOTIATING YOUR COMPENSATION PACKAGE

Do not discuss your specific compensation package, especially salary, with the employer until you've been offered the job and you think it's one you should consider.

Remember, during salary negotiations you are not only talking about your monetary salary but also:

- Sick leave
- Vacation time
- Health insurance
- Tuition reimbursement
- Other benefits the company may offer

Base salary and performance base raises are the most negotiable parts of the compensation package.

Make sure you consider all the benefits the company has to offer before you begin negotiating, decide which benefits are most important to you so you'll be ready to talk.

### How to find salary information:

- Library
- Professional organizations
- Networking
- Career Centers – which provide computer-based labor market and other information

### The negotiating meeting:

- Don't sell yourself short.
- Don't be overly aggressive, but you want to receive a fair compensation package.
- If you receive an offer that doesn't seem equitable, discuss it with the employer.
- If you really want the job, but the offer is still low, see if the employer will consider a salary review three to six months from your starting date, or ask for a couple of days to consider the offer.



## THANK YOU LETTER – SAMPLE 1

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**PATRICIA STEVENS LONGO**

43 123<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Bellerose, NY 11426  
(516) 555-8652

July 18, 2011

Ms. Roberta Gregory  
AT&T Corporation  
32 Avenue of the Americas  
New York, NY 10013-2412

Dear Ms. Gregory,

I'd like to thank you for taking the time to talk with me Monday about the **Corporate Adjuster** position you have open at AT&T.

Your energetic presentation was enough to brighten anyone's Monday morning. I really appreciate that you took so much time to acquaint me with the company and its benefits.

I also enjoyed the challenging, thoughtful talk I had with Mr. Wilson. I felt a rapport and respect for him that I know would facilitate a good working relationship.

I feel I have a good understanding of the requirements of the position, and I am very interested. I am even more confident than before of my ability to make a real contribution to AT&T.

Should you or Mr. Wilson want to talk with me further, please contact me at your convenience. I look forward to the possibility of working with you.

Sincerely,

Patricia Stevens Longo

## THANK YOU LETTER – SAMPLE 2

**PATRICIA STEVENS LONGO**

43 123<sup>rd</sup> Street  
Bellerose, NY 11426  
(516) 555-8652

July 18, 2011

Mr. Arnold Jones  
Baker-Smith and Company  
65 Boardman Place  
San Francisco, CA 94014

Dear Mr. Jones,

Thank you for seeing me yesterday in response to my application for employment with your company. I enjoyed meeting you and your staff and seeing your offices. You have certainly made the work environment an exceptional one.

I am more convinced than ever that my experience and skills would be an asset to your company and the particular projects you have in mind. It is my hope that your feelings are the same. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

Patricia Stevens Longo



**“NOT SELECTED FOR THE JOB” LETTER**

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Alvin Crawford  
4646 Doty Street  
Madison, WI 53744

January 30, 2011

Ms. Susan Anderson  
Human Resources Director  
Waterfront Company, Inc.  
3848 River Walk Parkway  
Green Lake, WI 54911

Dear Ms. Anderson:

Thank you for your recent letter notifying me that I was not selected for the position of Merchandising Manager. Of course, I was disappointed. However, I do appreciate your prompt decision and notification.

Your letter mentioned that my résumé will be kept on file for six months in the event that other openings occur within your company. I appreciate this courtesy, as I remain highly interested in employment with Waterfront Company. I know that my analytical, communication, and managerial skills would benefit your organization.

Once again, thank you for your time and consideration. I hope to hear from you again in the near future.

Sincerely,

Alvin Crawford

