



PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

Next to your resume, the most important component of the job search process is the interview. How you approach the interview and how you prepare for it will determine whether or not you are considered a viable candidate for the position.

There may be two or more interviews and it is critically important that you prepare for each interview.

You may be required to participate in one or more of the following interview types:

- 1) Telephone interview
 - a. This is a screening interview and is intended to determine if you meet the qualifications for the position. This can be very short with the interviewer confirming your credentials and experience. Or the interviewer can probe into your background and address some of the issues on your resume that they find very attractive or of concern.
 - b. This process will also assess your communications skills and your reliability (i.e. were you available at the time you said you were available).
- 2) Initial in-person Interview
 - a. After the field of candidates has been narrowed, a few are invited for in-person interviews. Depending on the position, the interview can be with one or more individuals. Candidates for leadership positions may interview with five or more individuals. It is also possible that the candidate will be asked to interview with a group.
- 3) Second Round Interviews
 - a. Candidates invited to return for the second round interview are serious candidates for the position. This interview may include individuals the candidate will work for or with. A group interview is also possible during the second round especially with members of the department or unit that would report to the candidate.
 - b. You may also request to speak with individuals within the organization.

Moving successfully from the initial telephone screening interview through the in-person interviews requires preparation and practice.

Preparing for the interview requires the following:

- 1) Researching the organization
- 2) Knowing who you will meet (or talk to in a screening interview) by name, title and their role in the organization
- 3) Networking with colleagues who may know the organization or the individuals who will interview you
- 4) Thinking about the questions you may be asked
 - a. Ask friends, colleagues or your recruiter questions you may get during the interview. The more input you receive about possible questions the more prepared you will be with answers.



- 5) Practicing the answers to potential questions
- 6) Role playing a question and answer session.

While preparation and practice are not considered important by some candidates, your degree of preparation and practice will provide you with a competitive advantage in the interview process. Hiring managers appreciate and value candidates who are prepared, confident and focused on what they can contribute to the organization. Preparation and practice positions you to convince the interviewer or the interviewers that you want the position, that you can do the job and that you will make a valued contribution to the organization.

The key objective is to get an in-person interview. Sometimes you will be asked to participate in a telephone interview. This is a screening tool to determine if you meet the qualifications for the position. The interviewer will tell you about the position and what the organization is looking for. Oftentimes, little else is mentioned about the position unless you ask qualifying questions, which you should. You will be asked about your past work history, to explain gaps (if any) in your resume and about your interest in the position. They may or may not mention a salary range. This is also an opportunity for the interviewer to assess your communication skills, potential interest in the position, the quality of your response to their questions and your punctuality (are you available when you said you would be available at the number you gave them). Remember this is a screening interview. The interviewer may have a large number of calls to make and the objective is to identify the small number of candidates who will move to the in-person phase of the process. If you are interested in the position, your job is to convince the interviewer of your interest and to effectively answer their questions.

Preparation for the telephone interview involves some of the preparation issues defined below. But the most important factors to address in a telephone interview are to:

- 1) Be punctual
- 2) Have an objective:
 - a. To get an in-person interview
 - b. To learn more about the position to determine interest
- 3) Be prepared to speak about the entries in your resume
 - a. Explain work history gaps
 - b. Discuss accomplishments and your contribution
- 4) Have questions such as:
 - a. Why are you searching for this position at this time?
 - b. What happened to the previous incumbent?
 - c. Other questions that may arise based on the specific nature of the opportunity

This interview could take 10 minutes or it could take an hour or more. Understand before hand if the screening interview is superficial to verify your credentials and interest, or in depth. If the screening interview will be in depth, prepare for the interview using the suggestions below.

Research the Organization

This step is vital. With today's available technology, there is little excuse for not checking out an organization's website and familiarizing yourself with its history, mission statement, press releases, new program development and initiatives and other relevant information about the organization. Brochures, catalogs, and other promotional literature are also excellent sources of



information. It also helps you prepare questions you will want answered during the interview process.

Second, find out as much as possible about what the position requires. If you are working with a recruiter, ask for a copy of the job description before hand. You should match your skills with the requirements of the position and the needs of the hiring organization.

Third, network with colleagues who may have worked in the organization, know people who currently work in the organization or who may know about the organization. Your informal network can be a treasure chest of valuable information about the organization and the individuals you may be working with.

Know Who You Will Meet – By Name, Title and Their Role in the Organization

Find out who you will be meeting with by name, title and their role in the organization. The person coordinating the interview process can provide the name (correct spelling) and title. Understanding the person's role in the organization can be a little more challenging at times. Knowing their role in the organization is especially important because it begins to provide you with a window into how the organization works, who is important with regard to the position you are interviewing for, and whose opinion is important especially if it is unclear to you why you are interviewing with a particular person. Once again, your network of friends and colleagues may provide an important perspective.

Network with Colleagues Who May Know the Organization or the Individuals Who Will Interview You

As noted in *Research the Organization* and *Know Who You Will Meet* an important source of information about an organization and the people within it is your network of friends and colleagues. Oftentimes friends and colleagues will be candid with you about what they know about an organization, the job you are interviewing for and the people who you will interview with. But there is an important caveat: bias. Your friends or colleagues may have heard rumors about an organization, the nature of the job or the people you will be working with. These rumors may be true, they may be partially true, or they may be false. In all cases receive the information with an open mind and consider it as you prepare for the interviews. If the information you receive is consistent from person to person, there may be truth in what you hear. If there are discrepancies and inconsistencies, the information may be less useful. Use caution.

Think about the Questions You May be Asked

Interviewers vary in their interviewing skills. Some are very good; some are very poor. Most lie somewhere in-between these two extremes.

Good interviewers should listen more than they talk, ask questions to help them assess your suitability for the position and probe your work history to determine what you accomplished, your role in the accomplishment and how you handle challenging work situations. Good interviewers believe that past work history is prologue to future performance on the job. They are interested in your potential for success and your fit within the organization.



Poor interviewers will be disorganized, talk more than they listen and are likely to be unprepared for the interview. They often are more concerned with initial impressions and will only review your past credentials superficially.

To be successful and to achieve your objective of getting an offer, you will need to perform well regardless of the interviewers skills.

Some questions you may be asked (they are in no particular order):

- 1) Tell me something about yourself.
- 2) Why do you want this job? And its variants: what interests you most about our position?; why do you want to work for us?
- 3) Why are you looking for a change now? You may also be asked why you left each organization you worked for in the past.
- 4) What can you bring to our organization?
- 5) Why should we hire you?
- 6) What is your biggest weakness (or your biggest failure) or some other variation on this question
- 7) What are your greatest strengths?
- 8) If there are gaps in your resume, you will be asked about them
- 9) How did you do that (a question about a major accomplishment listed on your resume) and follow-up questions such as: what problems did you encounter?; how did you deal with the problems?; were there surprises?
- 10) Where would you like to be in 5 years; in 10 years?
- 11) How have you grown professionally in the past 5 years? Where have you made the greatest strides?
- 12) Give me an example of a long range goal you set for yourself and did you accomplish it?
- 13) Tell me why you chose to go to (the school you attended, the past jobs you held)
- 14) What is your management style?
- 15) How long do you think it will take you to make a contribution to our organizations?
- 16) If you could start over again, what would you do differently?
- 17) What do you think of your last (or current) boss?
- 18) If we asked your employees, peers and boss, what you they say about you?
- 19) Do you see yourself as a good manager? Give me some examples.
- 20) What didn't you like about your last job?
- 21) What is your current salary?
- 22) What are your salary expectations?
- 23) Do you have any questions?

The list is not exhaustive but indicative of the type of questions you may be asked. We do not provide judgment on whether the questions are good or bad. In fact, we think some of the questions are sophomoric. But they are questions that may be asked and as such you need to prepare answers.

One consideration is to prepare stories in response to some of the questions. Stories are telling a real event that happened to you (such as a job accomplishment) in a way that is conversational and interesting. When you talk with your friends, you often tell stories. Prepare short stories as a response to some of the questions. This will help you remember your responses and deliver the response in a more comfortable and conversational tone.



Practice Answers to Potential Questions

Think about the questions above and how you would answer them. Remember, you want to position yourself such that the answers reflect positively on your candidacy for the position. You do not want to mislead the interviewer or state a mistruth. Misleading the interviewer or stating a mistruth could be exposed during reference checks or through informal contacts the interviewer may have with individuals who know you and your work. Consistency and honesty are critical to your credibility and opportunity to be given an offer.

You also do not want to be surprised by a question. Many of the questions above are stock questions (again we do not posit that they are good questions) and should not come as a surprise. As you mentally prepare answers to each question, look for inconsistencies in your answers, questions that make you feel uncomfortable, questions you would rather not answer. The more you think about these questions and your answers in advance, the better prepared you will be to tell a convincing story about you and your qualifications for the position.

Role Play a Questions and Answer Session

When you feel that you are prepared to answer the questions above, and any other questions you can think of, ask a friend to role play an interview session with you. The session should include the questions above, follow-up questions that come from your answers and any other questions the mock interviewer has. Identify areas where you did not feel your response was effective, or where you struggled with an answer that did not sound convincing to the mock interviewer. Identify areas where you did very well and felt very comfortable with your answer. Ask for and get honest and candid feedback from the mock interviewer. This is the time to be candid about your performance. The more candid you are, the more effective you will be in identifying areas for improvement.

If you want the job, you must work for it. The more prestigious the job, the more important it is for you and your career advancement, the more important it is to prepare properly.

Copyright 2006 – Navin Group, Inc.