

What to expect at interviews

Finding work is a job in itself

The employment interview is the most important part of your job hunt. Those 20 or 30 minutes may determine your future. Employers are amazed at the number of applicants who drift into job interviews without any preparation and only a vague idea of where they are going or what they are doing. Some people create the impression of indifference as they casually slouch in a chair. On the other end of the scale, some applicants arrive in the last stages of a nervous breakdown.

Don't get caught in either of these extremes. Whether you are employed or unemployed, looking for your first or 21st job, learning the skills of successful interviewing will increase your chances of landing a job. Making the most of a job interview requires advance planning, careful thinking and learning and practicing interviewing skills.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

It's natural to be a little nervous, and most interviewers understand that. Look directly at the interviewer when speaking and keep your hands still. Practice with a friend to see what your posture and movements are saying. For instance, feet together on the floor, arms crossed and shoulders slightly slouched are self-protecting gestures. On the other hand, squared shoulders show high energy; unbuttoned coat indicates openness; hands apart show relaxation, and a leg crossed toward the interviewer indicates assertiveness. Know the message your body language is giving the interviewer.

Your attitude is going to influence the interviewer's evaluation. Emphasize your strong points and remember the employer is looking for energy and enthusiasm. Young people are often criticized often for being so cool they appear to be uninterested, although many experienced workers have made the same mistake.

HANDLING THE PAST

If there are any skeletons in your closet — and almost everyone has at least one — wait until it comes up and then discuss it frankly. If you had to leave a previous job because of a personality clash, admit it was a problem but show that you have learned from the experience. By accepting personal responsibility for your mistakes and indicating you've grown as a result of



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them, you appear co-operative and willing to learn. You've turned a negative situation into a positive one. Personal references can help in a case like this. If you know several people who think well of you, bring along their names and telephone numbers.

But, make sure you clear it with them beforehand.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The interviewer will be the one to signal the interview is over. Most interviews end without a definite job offer. Usually the interviewer will tell you he

or she will get back to you. Following the interview, you should write a short note thanking the interviewer.

Even if you don't get the job this time, something that you're better suited for could come up later. If you've left the interviewer

with a good impression, he or she will be that much more likely to remember you.

Keep in mind that if you don't get the job, it's not a criticism of you. Being the right person at the right time is a combination of preparation, perseverance and just plain luck. If it wasn't right this time, it could be the next.

KEEPING A JOB

Getting the job is just the first step — keeping the job is the real test. The importance of getting started on the right foot cannot be overemphasized. Learn what the employer expects from you and understand the company policies. Here are some ways to help you keep your job:

- ▼ Always be on time.
- ▼ Be outgoing.
- ▼ Learn the names of co-workers.
- ▼ Dress appropriately.
- ▼ Learn the rules.
- ▼ Don't make snap judgments.
- ▼ Be willing to learn from others; try out co-workers suggestions.
- ▼ Learn how to co-operate and compromise.
- ▼ Don't make excuses if you make a mistake.
- ▼ Pitch in and help out in emergencies.
- ▼ Be sensitive to the feelings of others.

Pick right approach to suit your personality

If any method of contacting employers is generally acceptable for the type of work you want, choose the method that presents you in the best possible light. If you usually make a good first impression when you meet people, try contacting employers in person. If you sound pleasant and confident on the telephone (or could with practice), phone employers. If you can write a dynamite business letter, apply by mail.

If your work history has gaps that are difficult to explain, contacting employers in person or by phone is probably a better strategy than sending letters. On the other hand, if your qualifications look really good on paper, a well-written covering letter and résumé may be the most effective strategy.

If you are applying for a job in a community some distance away from where you live, you may not be able to drop in on employers or make lots of telephone calls. You may have to rely pri-

marily on a "letter campaign."

There are advantages and disadvantages to all three methods of contact.

CONTACT IN PERSON

Advantages

- ▼ Most effective for unskilled, some semi-skilled and some sales-related jobs.
- ▼ Impresses employers looking for outgoing people.
- ▼ Favorable first impressions can be created by your appearance and manner, regardless of your qualifications.

Disadvantages

- ▼ Some employers resent the intrusion on their time.

- ▼ Takes considerable self-confidence.
- ▼ Time-consuming.
- ▼ May involve costs for transportation.

CONTACT BY TELEPHONE

Advantages

- ▼ Can contact many employers in a short time.
- ▼ Harder to ignore than a letter.
- ▼ Can be effective for most types of jobs.

Disadvantages

- ▼ Requires good telephone skills.
- ▼ Only have one minute to convince an employer to talk to you.

CONTACT BY MAIL

Advantages

- ▼ Emphasizes good qualifications.
- ▼ May be more practical for someone who is still employed.

Disadvantages

- ▼ Maximum five to 10 per cent rate of response from employers.
- ▼ Not as effective in competitive fields.
- ▼ Time-consuming.
- ▼ Waste of time if not well written.
- ▼ Cost of supplies and postage.

60-second career checkup

Sometimes, it is worthwhile to stop, take stock and think about life at work. These questions can help with a 60-second checkup, whether you have a job, are looking for a job or are between jobs.

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| ▼ What am I doing? | ▼ What is my ability to deal with change? | ▼ Who can and will help me? |
| ▼ What got me to this point? | ▼ How often do I give myself positive feedback? | ▼ What training is available? |
| ▼ What do I want to do? | ▼ What are the steps to take to get there? | ▼ What training will I take? |
| | ▼ What must I learn? | |