



CAREER
CENTER INTERVIEW COACH

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7 Steps to Successful Interviewing

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**by Carole Martin
The Interviewcoach**

Interviewing is about selling!

In this case, the product you are selling is **YOU!**

As with the selling of any new product, you need a plan and a strategy to get people to buy your product.

PREPARATION
will make the difference in the success of your sale.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW - PREPARATION

STEP #1. GET IT TOGETHER

Taking the time to prepare for the interview is the equivalent of getting ready to give a presentation or a performance. Would you even consider standing in front of people to sell them something without first doing some prep work? Of course not! So, why would you think you could "wing" an interview?

Organize

Prepare a "job hunting method" for yourself - a binder, a box, a card file, a database. You need a place to keep information that you can access quickly.

TIP - If you receive a call from a company or a recruiter, ask the caller to hold while you quickly retrieve your information. This will allow you to have all your "cheat sheets" in front of you while you talk.

Tools

- * An excellent attention-grabbing resume (essential to getting that interview).
- * A template cover letter (instantcoverletters.com).
- * A reference list (be sure to ask permission, as well as how they would like to be contacted: email, home phone, business, etc).
- * A professional message on an answering machine or service.

Image

* Good grooming is essential (the first impression begins immediately).

Check for spots, missing buttons, loose threads - you want to look good.

- * Personal hygiene - Bad breath or body odor could lose you the interview. Pay attention to insure neat hair, nails and shoes. Please, no cologne or after shave (people can be turned off by strong smells - good and bad).
- * Look professional - what impression do you want to create? Even if the company is casual, you are the one interviewing. You are not one of "them" yet!

Homework

- * Research is essential - the Internet will be "your friend" - a great source for a wealth of information.
- * Check out the company, the industry, and the position - the future outlook.
- * Check out salary norms for your position/skills/background - "your worth."

STEP #2. INVENTORY

Taking stock of "what you have to offer." Matching it against "what they are looking for" is the first step toward determining a job fit. The employer is looking for a solution to the problem - work that needs to get done. Do you have what it takes? What sets you apart from the competition?

Assessing your skills

List the skills you have that are appropriate for the position. Not just the required skills, but also the skills that make you unique - your strengths.

These skills fall into three categories:

Knowledge based Skills - learned through past experience and education.

Transferable Skills - portable skills that you take to any job: communication, problem solving, time management skills, etc.

Personal Traits - who you are - your personality: friendly, dependable, flexible, detail-oriented, independent.

When you think of yourself as the product, it is imperative that you know what your product has to offer. The more knowledgeable you are about the features of your product, and the more you are able to articulate this information the more effective you will be in portraying yourself as a desirable commodity.

TIP - If you feel reluctant to "brag" about yourself, you can use someone else's endorsement. "My co-workers call me 'Ms. Organized' because I am always planning ahead." You are saying that you are an organized planner without bragging.

Scripting - The words to use

Writing out scripts before the interview will greatly assist you in being focused. This is especially true for areas where you are uncomfortable or have a problem; e.g. time gaps, being fired, bad previous boss. Scripting will also help you with those difficult questions that require introspection on your part.

- Tell me about yourself.
- What five adjectives describe your personality?
- What are your goals?

TIP - Scripts are guidelines and should not be memorized. You want to sound smooth and natural - not like a robot. Writing out your answers is a way to check yourself so that you are focused and can confidently answer the questions.

STEP #3. PRACTICE

Practice will make you feel more prepared, and in turn your confidence will rise significantly. When you practice, listen to yourself on a tape recorder or answering machine. How do you rate your performance?

- * Observe your feelings while listening to your answers.
- * Are you coming across the way you intend?
- * If role-playing, how are you being perceived through someone else's eyes?

Whether you practice with a family member, a friend, or a professional coach, it is important to role-play and receive feedback. This is how you will improve and become more sure of your answers. Using actual interview situations, as practice sessions can be very costly.

TIP - *Listen to the feedback given with an open mind - not defensively.

DURING THE INTERVIEW - CONFIDENCE

STEP #4. THE SALE

It's not unusual to feel nervous before and even during the interview. We fear rejection; we feel we are being judged; we feel inadequate for not knowing the answers. The best way to deal with these feelings is to change your thinking about the process. Begin to think of the interview as a two-way process. You are going in to check them out, and at the same time they are checking you out. Think to yourself: "If it works - great! If not - there will be other opportunities."

TIP - if you get sticky or sweaty hands when you're nervous, try applying an antiperspirant gel (deodorant) to your hands. It smells good, and keeps your hands soft and sweat free.

Learn to accept the fact that being nervous is the way that most people feel when they go into these types of situations. With experience you will find yourself feeling more confident and less nervous.

Nonverbal communication

Even before you say your first word, the interviewer is sizing you up: your posture, handshake, and eye contact are being observed. Sit and stand straight, and appear confident - not ramrod straight, but erect and alert. Your handshake should be hearty - not bone crushing, but firm. Your eye contact should be direct - checking out the color of your interviewer's eyes.

While your interviewer is reading you, practice reading him or her. What personality type is this person? (Quiet and professional; warm and friendly; grumpy and unfriendly?) Adjust your style and conversation in accordance with the interviewer's personality type.

TIP - Regardless of your interviewer's personality you should bring energy and enthusiasm to the interview.

Listen

If you think interviewing is only about answering questions, you've been missing the point. Listening is one of the most underused skills in a job interview.

When you concentrate only on the questions you miss an opportunity to gather valuable information and, to impress the interviewer in a way few people do. When you ask questions about what is said and asked during the interview, you show the interviewer that you have been listening to what was said and are interested in more information.

TIP - By turning up your intuitive and listening skills - reading between the lines - you will learn a great deal about the company and the culture, and whether you want to work there.

STEP #5. THE QUESTIONS

There is no way to predict the questions that will be asked in an interview. Each interview is unique. Some companies use a structured approach and some a casual, conversational approach. Thinking about how you would answer some of the more common questions will help you prepare and focus on how you will answer questions and where you want to focus the interviewer's attention.

Dreaded Questions

- * Why did you leave/are you leaving your last position?
(Script the answer before the interview)
- * Why did you choose this job/company/industry/?
(Research will get you through this question)
- * What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
(Stay positive - focus on something you are improving)
- * What do you know about this company?
(The Intranet is your source for the best information)

- * Why do you feel qualified for this job?
(Assess your skills - summarize what you have to offer)
- * What has been your most significant achievement?
(Tell a success story - "been there and done that")
- * How would your last boss/colleagues describe you?
(Assess your skills - read through your past performance reviews)
- * Why should we hire you?
(A summary of your past experience, skills, and what you bring to the job)
- * Do you have any questions?
(Yes, I do - and they are great ones!)

Asking Questions - Your turn

Depending on the interviewer's style, you will have an opportunity before or during the interview to ask questions. Timing of your questions is key here. The first round of interviewing is usually about discovery; learning about the job and the company and not the benefits or vacation policy. Good questions to ask in the first round are about the job content and the company's culture.

As the interview process unfolds, you can ask those other questions about benefits, stock options, and time off. Obviously, you will need this information to assess an offer but all in good time.

The best questions to ask come as a result of your listening to what is discussed during the interview. Ask for clarification or for more information.

"You've been discussing your system, could you tell me what has been tried in the past, and what you anticipate to be the future challenges?"

Listen carefully to the answer, as this may be your chance to inform the interviewer of your past experience with the same type of problem and how you solved the problem.

It is a good idea to have a list of five to ten questions to take along as a back up in the event you haven't come up with any good questions during the interview. Use these questions as appropriate - depending on the length of time of the interview and the rapport you've developed with your interviewer.

TIP - Observe the interviewer's pace and ask questions from your list if you think that there is a mutual interest to continue the interview. Once again - turn up your intuitive senses.

STEP #6. THE ANSWERS

- * Your answers should demonstrate the skills you want the interviewer to know about you.
- * Your answers should indicate that you have had similar experiences and proven successes at past jobs.
- * Your answers should give specific examples of your previous work or education, as proof that you have "been there and done that."

Specific examples will be required when you are asked "behavioral" questions: This type of question usually begins with a statement like: "Tell about a time when..." or "Can you give me an example..." It is important that you give a "specific" story when answering this type of question. For instance, "I had a similar experience when I worked for XYZ company...I was the leader of a team that...The result was very positive and saved the company time and money."

If you are not asked for specific behavioral examples, you can demonstrate your success by saying,

"Let me give you an example of how I handled a similar situation in the past."

Telling a past experience story is the most effective way to prove that you have had the experience before - and, that you can do it again.

The answers you give to the questions are the only information the interviewer will have to judge whether you are the right person for the job. Stay focused on your strengths and what you can bring to the job. The more information you can tell the interviewer about your skills and past successes, the better chance you have of making the sale - getting the job. "He who sells himself best - gets the job."

TIP - keep your answers to two or three minutes in length. If their eyes glaze over - you've lost them.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW - THE CLOSE

STEP #7. THE FOLLOW UP

The follow up is more than a polite way of saying "Thank you for the interview." It is your opportunity to put yourself in front of your interviewer one more time and sell yourself one more time as a fit for the position. Never assume that the interviewer remembers everything you said or has an accurate picture of who you are. When several candidates are interviewed and compared, some of the highlights you hoped would be considered may be lost or forgotten.

- * Thank you for the time taken.
- * Express your interest in the job
- * List the reasons you know you are a "great" fit for the job
- * Address any concerns you picked up during the interview
- * Offer ideas or thoughts you have on how you could bring added value, or solutions, to the

position.

- * Let them know you are ready and eager to begin as part of their team
- * Ask, "When can I start?" (This comment will depend on your style, situation, and the personalities involved. It is an aggressive close.)

Send a separate follow up letter to each interviewer. Each person has his or her own agenda and point of view. Try to keep track of what each interviewer focused on during the interview.

TIP - Whether you send by regular mail or email, it is important to send within 24 hours of the interview.

Your follow-up letter could be what sets you apart from other candidates. It could land you a job, so put some thought and effort into what you say.

SUMMARY

As with any new skill, the best way to achieve success is to prepare and practice, practice, and practice some more. This will require time and effort on your part. You are developing a skill, and the effort you put into this project will reap the benefits. You will feel more prepared and confident; which will result in more successful interviews - and job offers!

Best wishes on successful interviewing!

Carole Martin
The Interview Coach

How much is it costing you to blow the interview?

Boost your Interview IQ now!

Practice, practice, practice - with an expert who will give you straight feedback and encouragement. Prepare yourself to confidently face any questions asked during the interview.

- We will plan a strategy and view the process from the "Interviewer's perspective" - what are "they" looking for. We will develop answers to show the interviewer that you are the best person for the job - what makes you unique and why they should hire you.
- You will develop your skills and get focused on what you want the interviewer to know about you and what makes you unique. You will hear a marked improvement in each session.
- Includes resume tune up, Interview preparation exercises, telephone mock interviews with direct feedback about how you are being perceived.

Resume tune-up: The first step in this process is to send me your resume for review. I will reply with specific suggestions to tighten and strengthen your resume.

Interview Prep: Next, send me a job posting that is of interest to you. I will analyze the job posting from the interviewer's point of view (What will it take to get the job done?) and send you exercises, via email, to focus your preparation.

Telephone Coaching Session: We will schedule our phone "mock interview" session(s). This session is taped and we listen to your answers together, while I will give you feedback on how to sell yourself more effectively - how to tell your success stories to emphasize your past experiences and show the interviewer that you are the best person for the job. We will role play in-depth questions and situations that are of concern to you.

Visit www.interviewcoach.com to set up your appointment today!