

## WHAT INTERVIEWERS LOOK FOR

### DIFFERENTIATION

A job interview is all about best fit. In most cases, job candidates interviewing for the same position will possess the same basic skills and qualifications. For this reason, it is important that you promote your unique skills and unique talents that will provide a distinct benefit for the position and organization. Go a little deeper than the basics and let the interviewer get to know YOU. What are your greatest strengths/personal qualities, relative to the position? How have you used them to achieve great results? In what areas are you particularly talented? What skills, that you enjoy, come easily to you? Why are you excited about the opportunity? What kinds of remarkable differences have you made in the past? In other words, what is your value proposition?

### COMPANY & INDUSTRY KNOWLEDGE

Sometimes interviewers ask, “What do you know about our organization (or industry)?” or some variation of this question. Such a question evaluates your interest. Sometimes they will want to know why you are interviewing for their organization and not their competitor’s. Don’t be caught off-guard. Use company web sites and press releases or news articles to research the following before your interviews. Doing so offers the additional benefit of preparing you to both answer questions and ask good questions of your own.

History of Company  
Company Size  
Financial Status  
Top Managers  
Career Paths Offered

Products / Services / Markets  
Recent Organizational Changes  
Geographic Locations  
Your Interviewers, When Known  
What’s Happening in the Industry

Market Share / Competitors  
Strategic Plans, Mission, Values  
Overall Reputation  
Contributions to Industry  
Current company news

### INNOVATORS / PROBLEM-SOLVERS

Most companies today have flatter organizational structures than they did in the past. Consequently, candidates who can demonstrate that they can help a company face its challenges and solve its problems are, in most cases, the most desired candidates.

## DEFINING YOUR VALUE PROPOSITION

- Think about the type of job or internship you are targeting. Now envision yourself already there, sitting behind your desk on your first day. If your new manager observed you on the job, what three things would he notice that tell him you are good at what you do?
- For each skill or quality you thought of above, write a brief story, from your past, about how you demonstrated it. In your stories, reflect upon the impact you made.
- Make a list of responses to the following question: “Tell me about a time you took action and achieved a great result.” Take a look at your responses and identify the skills they exemplify.
- Talk about these examples during your interview.

## HOW RECRUITERS WILL FORM AN IMPRESSION OF YOU

By *how you look, what you do, what you say, and how you say it.*

### HOW SHOULD YOU LOOK?

#### Dress:

- Demonstrate professionalism in your appearance. Have a clean and neat, well groomed look.
- Clothing should match the corporate culture. Dress in a comparable business level or above it. In most cases, a dark suit is most appropriate with conservative hair style and jewelry. Men, do not wear white socks and women, do not wear open-toe shoes. Women should wear pumps with a medium heel. Avoid spike heels and wear stockings if wearing a skirt. Skirt should be no shorter than two inches above the knee.
- Avoid brightly colored clothing and perfume/cologne.
- Not sure about the corporate culture? Always best to be conservative.
- Carry a brief case or solid-colored portfolio folder containing your resume and list of references. Women can carry a purse that looks professional.

#### Body Language:

- Portray confidence in the way you physically carry yourself.
- Relax your shoulders and keep them back. Keep your chin up and eyes looking forward (not downward).
- Give a firm handshake. Practice your handshake and get feedback from others.
- Maintain good eye contact and sit with good posture.
- Smile!
- When walking anywhere with the recruiter, maintain the same pace and do not fall too far behind.
- While sitting with the interviewer, keep legs and arms uncrossed and lean in, slightly.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU DO?

#### General Etiquette:

- Whether on-campus or on-site, the interview begins the moment you step foot within the vicinity of the employer. Be courteous and kind to all individuals that you meet. Everyone you encounter will form an impression of you and may be asked to volunteer that information to the hiring manager.
- Meet people easily and put others at ease.
- Please **put away your mobile devices and keep them turned OFF**. Use your wait time as another chance to glance at your resume or your questions for the employer. Do **NOT** check your cell phone during the interview.
- Be punctual. Arrive 15 minutes prior to the scheduled interview time.
- Do not sit down in the interview room until invited to do so by the interviewer.
- Take a few notes and bring an extra copy of your resume and list of references.
- Be honest! Always give honest answers and not answers that you think the interviewer wants to hear.
- Express energy and enthusiasm throughout the interview. This tells the employer that you really **WANT** the job.
- Send a thank you note to the interviewer(s) within 48 hrs. and provide any follow-up information in a timely manner.

### WHAT SHOULD YOU SAY?

- For site interviews, ask for an agenda so you know what to expect.
- Don't be perplexed if the interviewer asks if the office directions given to you were helpful or asks about the weather outside. Informal topics of conversation are important. Employers use this "**social warm-up,**" commonly referred to as "**small talk,**" to help put you at ease and also gage your casual conversation skills. Give more than a one-word answer.

- “So, tell me about yourself...” This question is often the first question an interviewer will ask and a golden opportunity for you to **promote yourself**. Don’t delve into your personal life. Instead, begin with the present – where you are now in terms of your educational background or professional career. Next, discuss some relevant qualities, competencies, or skills you bring from your education and past experiences. Don’t rehash your entire resume! Focus on those skills, etc. that best match the requirements of the position. Then, talk about why you are enthusiastic about the opportunity and how you can be an asset to the organization.
- Use an **example and a process** to express how successful and how good you are, rather than saying, “I am very good at...” The interviewer is more interested in “how” than “what.” In fact, there is a type of question that US interviewers use to determine “how” you approached a particular scenario in the past. This question is called the “behavioral interview question.” Behavioral interview questions typically begin with the phrase, “Tell me about a time when...” The recruiter will be expecting you to **tell a story** from your past to demonstrate a particular personal quality or technical skill. When asked a behavioral interview question, it is important to talk about your individual contributions. Talk about what *you* did (use the pronoun “I”) and not what your team did (avoid using the pronoun “we”) because the employer is not evaluating your team...the employer is evaluating *you*.
- **Keep it positive.** Never say anything negative about yourself, anyone else, or any place you have worked in the past. The only exception would be in answer to the question, “Tell me about your greatest weakness.” In preparing an answer to this question, choose something that is mildly negative, but be honest. Next, describe the steps you are taking to improve yourself. This question is asked to determine if you see the opportunity to grow, professionally, by realizing your shortcomings. Don’t be afraid of it.
- **Ask questions.** Think like a consultant. The level of sophistication of your questions as well as follow up comments will add great credibility to your candidacy. Think about what you might like to know about the company in terms of its growth, markets, challenges, suppliers, etc. Also prepare some questions to ask that show your interest in the company/position, corporate culture, geographic region, opportunities in the company, career opportunities, etc. Ask questions during the course of the interview as well as at the conclusion.
- When asked a question to which you do not know the answer, **do not just say, “I don’t know,”** and leave it at that. Try and relate your answer to a parallel skill (or) talk about how you would approach the problem to figure out a solution.
- If you are asked about your salary expectations, **try to defer** such a discussion for as long as possible. Your initial response to this question can be something like, “I’m not ready to discuss salary right now, but if we both feel this is a good fit between myself and the position, I’m sure we can work something out that will be agreeable to us both.” If the recruiter presses for a number, always give a range. Never give one number. You should conduct salary research prior to the interview (PayScale.com).
- **Prepare a “20 second commercial”** about yourself, highlighting your best technical skills and personal qualities, relative to the position. Explain why these qualities make you the best candidate. This can be the answer to the question “Tell me about yourself.” If not asked this type of question, you can insert this “commercial” at the end of the interview to help create a lasting positive impression of you.
- Prepare 4 or 5 **small talk** topics before an interview that will include a lunch or dinner or some other unstructured time. Some examples of appropriate small talk topics include:
  - Weather
  - Sports
  - Traffic (your trip to the site interview)
  - Current events in the area

- How long have you been in this career?
  - What do you like best about your job?
  - How long have you been with the company?
  - If you could change one thing about the company, what would it be?
  - Is flex time offered here?
  - What are your favorite restaurants in this area?
  - Where have you vacationed recently?
- **Ask about next steps** at the end of the interview and ask the interviewer for his or her business card so that you can easily address and send your thank-you note.

#### HOW SHOULD YOU SAY IT?

- Your voice should sound relaxed (conversational) and not rigid or “rehearsed” as if giving a report.
- Don’t be nonchalant, either (don’t confuse relaxed with disinterested).
- Speak with energy and enthusiasm.
- Speak up...do not speak in hushed tones.
- Speak with a positive attitude – a negative attitude will come across during an interview and really hurt your chances.
- Our voices tend to rise in pitch and increase in rate when we are nervous. Remember to speak lower, louder, and slower.
- Match the emotional tone of the interviewer. If the interviewer is a serious person, reflect seriousness back. If the interviewer is more light-hearted, reflect a light-hearted emotional tone.

#### AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- **Send a thank you note** within 24 to 48 hours of the interview. Even if you decide you wouldn’t want the position if offered, it is always best to maintain professionalism and follow through on this small, but courteous and meaningful task.
- **Follow up** if you don’t receive a decision from the recruiter by the time she specified when you asked about next steps. For example, if the interviewer says you can expect to hear back in two weeks then you should contact her in two weeks and one day if you don’t have a decision. Send an email or make a phone call, then wait four or five days and contact the recruiter again. Almost everyone has caller ID. Do not call and hang up when you receive voice mail. Leave a message. If you continue to do this for four or five weeks with no response, then it’s time for you to cut ties and move on.
- **Don’t be a stalker!** Do not call/email repeatedly as this will irritate the recruiter and significantly hurt your chances.

#### SITE INTERVIEW TIPS

- Be sure to ask the interviewer for an agenda/itinerary, for lengthy site interviews.
- Ask questions about the community in which the company is located during lunch, dinner, or other unstructured time, to demonstrate your interest in relocation.
- For interviews that span two or three days or longer, be sure to bring some business casual clothing in case you are taken to a casual dinner.
- If offered an alcoholic beverage, limit yourself to just one. You may certainly politely refuse an alcoholic beverage altogether if you wish. Doing so will not hurt your chances.
- Read interviewer’s biographies beforehand and find / discuss common ground.

## 10 BEST INTERVIEWING TIPS

**1. Practice**

Practice your answers out loud and not just in your thoughts. Review the doc on Traditional and Behavioral interview questions.

**2. Begin to Prepare Early**

Don't wait until you have been called for an interview to start preparing.

**3. Take Pauses Before You Start Your Answers**

- a) They give you time to think
- b) They slow you down/calm you down
- c) They get rid of the ums and ahs

**4. Words to Avoid**

Like / you know / kinda / sort of / stuff / things

**5. Words To Use**

"I" is better than saying "you" or "we". For example, read the sentences below:

"When you are the leader of a group, it's important for you to listen to your team so that you can be a better leader." Compared with, "When I was the leader of a group, I found it was important for me to listen to my team members and this made me a more effective leader."

**6. Be Positive, Confident, and Enthusiastic**

Talk about what you liked and not about what you didn't like. Show enthusiasm for your past experiences and for future opportunities. The interview is about you being the best candidate for the job – show confidence in your abilities.

**7. Use Examples**

Give evidence to the interviewer. Provide examples, situations, events that demonstrate you are a good leader, a good researcher, an excellent communicator, etc.

**8. Research The Company and Stay Up To Date on Current Events**

Doing research shows your interest, motivation and desire to work for the company. Be aware of what is currently happening in the company and industry news.

**9. Ask Good Questions**

Create questions that show you researched the company. See the following list of sample questions to ask employers.

**10. Don't Forget to Thank Your Interviewer**

After your interview remember to send an individual thank you note to each person who interviewed you. You may send this note via email or U.S. mail.

## SAMPLE QUESTIONS TO ASK EMPLOYERS

It is very important to ask your interviewer questions during and at the end of the interview. Create at least 5 questions prior to your interview and take the list with you. You may not get a chance to ask them all, but it is always best to be prepared. Below are some examples of general questions you can ask, however you should tailor questions to best fit your interview and your work values.

- What kinds of assignments might I expect during the first six months?
- What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
- What are the strengths of the organization or department? In what areas of the company do you expect growth?
- Is your company environmentally conscious? In what ways?
- In what ways is a career with your company better than one with your competitors?
- What is the largest single problem facing your staff right now?
- What is the organization's plan for the next five years, and how does the department fit in?
- What is the reporting structure in this department? What are the acceptable channels of communication?
- What is your management style and the type of employee who works well with you?
- Describe the team/project assignments and the mix of people involved.
- What is the management philosophy of this organization?
- What is the company's view on continued education?
- What is the company's policy on providing seminars, workshops or training so employees can keep up on skills or acquire new skills?
- How would you describe the company culture?
- How is the economic climate affecting your organization?

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

The interview is not a "test" to determine if you have studied the correct answers to interview questions. Employers want to know YOUR answers. You will never know which questions you will be asked. For this reason, it is not a good idea to memorize answers to specific questions. It is better to prepare for your interview by memorizing important points you want to make about yourself.

For sample questions, please see the Traditional Interviewing Questions Document and, more importantly, the **Behavioral Interviewing Document**. Both are contained in this Course Site.

In some rare cases, the interviewers will not ask you any questions. Instead, the entire interview will be based on YOUR questions.

Other organizations, such as consulting firms, ask case questions. Please see the case interview guide contained in this Course Site.

[Seven Smart Questions to Ask at the End of Every Interview](#)