

Interviewing Like a Pro in Five Easy Steps

By Linda Matias

It's an inescapable fact that interviews are the "make or break" factor on whether one lands the job. So it is surprising to find that most job seekers approach interviews with a cavalier attitude, without any preparation – they simply wake up the morning of the interview, cross their fingers, and hope for the best.

Unfortunately, walking into an interview cold rarely works. Human capital is the biggest expense an organization has. When all is said and done, a wrong hiring decision costs a company time and resources. Through a series of well thought out questions, a skillful interviewer will use the interview process to distinguish between those candidates who have experience and those who are experts in the given field.

An interview can be won or lost within seconds, and by implementing simple strategies, you can vastly improve your interview performance. Interviews can be challenging but they are manageable when approached as a five-step process.

1. A successful interview depends in part, on whether you understand your role and that of the interviewer. As an interviewee, you have two obligations – (1) to sell your qualifications and (2) to evaluate the position and leave the interview with a solid understanding of the job's requirements. Interviewing is more than just answering questions; it is about preparing, understanding and responding to the hiring organizations needs.

The role of the interviewer is to sell the company, assess your commitment to working for their organization and determine if you are the same person that is represented on paper.

In reality, your role and that of the interviewer overlap. Both of you are gathering information, selling a product and evaluating whether or not there is a match between you.

2. Before each interview select 3-5 accomplishments or skills that you consider to be your major selling points. Every time the interview shifts in a direction that doesn't support your agenda, figure out a way to steer the conversation back to your major selling points. When determining your selling points, consider situations where you demonstrated initiative, overcame challenges, and/or streamlined a process.

While it may be difficult to define the specific needs of every company that is hiring, all organizations are looking for an employee that has the following characteristics: advanced communication skills, teamwork skills, honesty and self-confidence. Whenever possible, integrate these qualities in your responses.

3. Build personal credibility by adapting your communication style to that of the interviewer. The way you communicate goes beyond the words that you choose. Your appearance, demeanor, posture and attitude all play a part in the way your message will be received.

Trust begins to form during the interview and by flexing your communication style you leave the listener with a subconscious message that says, "I can sit next to this person on a daily basis." Once you have accomplished that, you are one step closer to a job offer.

4. Turn the interview into a conversation by asking questions throughout the interview. Ask questions that reflect your interest in the organization. If you leave an interview without asking relevant questions, the interviewer will question your sincerity. By asking questions you show the interviewer your commitment to your profession and the industry.
5. Don't get blind-sided with questions that you should have been prepared to answer. There are several questions that are interviewers' canned favorites and they include: Tell me about yourself, Where do you see yourself in five years? Tell me about a time when you successfully handled a situation? What do you consider your major achievement?

Rehearse interview answers, but don't sound rehearsed. Practice your responses until you feel that they clearly reflect your skills and personality. Don't just make statements that you think the interviewer wants to hear.

Going in unprepared is a sure-fire way to sabotage an interview. When it comes down to the wire and it is between you and another candidate with a similar background, interview performance will probably be the deciding factor on who gets hired.

Job offers are not won by accident; time spent preparing for an interview produces significant results. The more you practice your interviewing skills the more confidence you will gain and the more polished your presentation.

-Linda Matias

Recognized as a career expert, Linda Matias brings a wealth of experience to the career services field. She has been sought out for her knowledge of the employment market, outplacement, job search strategies, interview preparation, and resume writing, quoted a number of times in The Wall Street Journal, New York Newsday, Newsweek, and HR-esource.com. She is President of CareerStrides and the National Resume Writers' Association. Visit her website at www.CareerStrides.com or email her at linda@careerstrides.com.