

THE INTERVIEW

Presentation

The interviewer will expect to see your smartest, most professional side during this meeting. For example, those of you with a laid back manner should aim to sit up straighter.

First impressions matter.

Punctuality

Be punctual. If you do find yourself unavoidably delayed, notify us immediately, or the company directly, giving the reason and your estimated time of arrival.

Conduct

Ensure a strong handshake and smile on first meeting, and maintain a high level of eye contact throughout. Be alert, keen and enthusiastic. If more than one candidate is suitable for the job, it will often go to the candidate who shows most interest in and desire to do the role in question.

Useful hints

Do ask about career progression but do not let enthusiasm about future roles outweigh the current position on offer - your interviewer will not want to feel that you will be lost from this position 6 months after you've been trained!

If, at any point, you begin to have reservations about the role and/or the company, do **not** show it. You may later hear details which revive your interest substantially, but your chance by then may have been lost. You can always turn down second interviews or job offers when you have had time to appraise them in the cold light of day.

It is best not to ask detailed questions about terms and conditions - these will be clarified with Amdas at the offer stage. If the interviewer opens a discussion on salary, indicate a range rather than a specific salary so that your options remain open for negotiation at any subsequent interviews.

After the Interview

If you are not successful at an interview, ensure that you receive feedback from the consultant at Amdas. Although at times you may not agree with the impression the company formed of you, something in the interview gave that impression, and it is up to you to amend your style / responses to prevent the situation arising again.

THE INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Research

Find out as much as possible about the company. The interviewer will rightly see your efforts as a sign of commitment. Make sure you obtain clear directions for the location of the interview - and plan your journey.

Your CV

Review your CV and make sure you have positive answers if the interviewer wants more detail on the information you have supplied.

Job Description

Read the job description carefully and think of ways in which your experience would benefit the company and where the challenges would lie for you.

Your Questions

Prepare the questions that you want answered and ask them. After the interview is too late! Always ask open questions, e.g. those beginning: How? What? Which? Where? Why? When?

Consider asking the following if not already covered:

- * "How has the position become vacant?"
- * "How does the role fit into the structure of the finance department, and how does the department fit into the organisation as a whole?"
- * "What encouragement is given to undertake further training?"
- * "What are the longer term opportunities for promotion?"
- * "How will you assess my performance?"

EXAMPLES OF QUESTIONS OFTEN ASKED AND SOME RESPONSES

To increase your chances of receiving a job offer, you need to learn how to confidently and successfully respond to the questions you will be asked.

Listed here are 10 common questions with some comments as to the reasons they are asked and the response expected. Remember, these responses are only suggestions - do not use them if you feel uncomfortable about them, and try to individualise them as many candidates will receive the same suggestions!

Practice your own responses before interviews.

Q: Tell me about yourself. The interviewer is really saying "I want to hear you talk."

A: This is a loosener but is a common question so your response can stay the same. Write a script, rehearse it so it sounds impromptu. Spend a maximum of 4 minutes to describe your qualifications, career history and your range of skills - emphasising those skills relevant to the job on offer.

Q: What have your achievements been to date? The interviewer is saying "Are you an achiever?"

A: Again, this is a common question so be prepared. Select an achievement that is work-related and fairly recent. Identify the skills you used and the achievement and quantify the benefit. For example "passing my GCSEs, my greatest achievement has been to design and implement a new sales ledger computer system - bring it in ahead of time and improve our debtors' position significantly saving the company £50,000 per month in interest."

Q: Are you happy with your career to date? The interviewer is really asking about your self-esteem and self confidence, your career aspirations and whether you are a happy, positive person.

A: The answer must be 'yes' but if you have hit a career plateau or you feel you are moving too slowly, then you must qualify the answer.

Q: What is the most difficult situation you have had to face and how did you tackle it? The interviewer is really trying to find out what your definition of difficult is and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving using your initiative.

A: This can be a trap! To avoid it, select a difficult work situation which was not caused by you and which can be quickly explained in a few sentences. Explain how you defined the problem, what the options were, why you selected the one you did and what the outcome was. Always end on a positive note.

Q: What do you like about your present job? The interviewer is really trying to find out whether you will enjoy the things you will experience in the job on offer.

A: This is a straightforward question. All you have to make sure is that your 'likes' correspond to skills etc required in the job on offer. Be positive, describe your job as interested and diverse but do not overdo it - after all, you are leaving!

Q: What do you dislike about your present job? The interviewer is trying to find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities you will dislike or which will make you unsuitable.

A: Be careful with this one! Do not be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses which will leave you open to further problems. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company such as its size - its slow decision-making etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride as part of the job.

Q: What are your strengths? The interviewer wants a straightforward answer as to what you are good at and how it is going to add value.

A: This is one question that you know you are going to get so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four explanations of how they could benefit the employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency; ability to learn quickly; determination to succeed; positive attitude; your ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. You may be asked to give examples of the above so be prepared.

Q: What is your greatest weakness? The interviewer is really asking about your self perception and level of self awareness.

A: This is another standard question for which you can be well prepared. Don't say you have none - this will ensure further problems. You have two options - use a professed weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part in an area that is not vital for the job. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered a strength and the steps you have taken to combat it. An example would be, "I know my team think I'm too demanding at times - I tend to drive them pretty hard but I'm getting much better at using the carrot and not the stick." Do not select a personal weakness such as "I'm not a morning person - I'm much better as the day goes on."

Q: What kind of decision do you find most difficult? The interviewer is really saying "I need someone who is strong and decisive but who has a human side."

A: Your answer must not display weakness. Try to focus on decisions that have to be made without sufficient information. This will show your positive side. For example "I like to make decisions based on sufficient information and having alternatives. When you have to make quick decisions you have to rely on 'gut feeling' and experience."

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer? The interviewer is trying to understand and evaluate your motives for moving.

A: This should be straightforward. State how you are looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience and a change of environment. NEVER be negative in your reasons for leaving, and rarely will it be appropriate to cite salary as the primary motivator.

OTHER QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- * How does your job fit into your department and company? (Give an idea of level or responsibility.
- * What do you enjoy about accountancy?
- * Have you worked under pressure? (Meaning - can you?). Give examples.
- * What kind of people do you like working with?
- * Can you give me an example of when your work was criticised? (Be prepared for the next one of how you coped and the outcome)
- * What is the worst situation you have faced outside work? (as above).
- * Give me an example of when you have felt anger at work? (and how did you cope and still perform a good job?).

- * What kind of people do you find it difficult to work with? (Take care! You won't know all about the staff at the company at which you're interviewing).
- * Give me an example of when you have had to face a conflict of interest at work (Testing interpersonal skills, team and leadership opportunities).
- * Tell me about the last time you disagreed with your boss.
- * Give me an example of when you haven't got on with others.
- * Do you prefer to work alone or in a group, and why?
- * This organisation is very different to your current employer; how do you think you are going to fit in? (you may not be able to answer until you have established what he/she perceives as the differences).
- * What are you looking for in a company?
- * How do you measure your own performance?
- * What kind of pressures have you encountered at work?
- * Are you a self-starter? Give me examples to demonstrate this.
- * Describe the biggest problem you have faced recently and how you resolved it.
- * What changes in the work place have caused you difficulty and why?
- * How do you feel about working long hours and / or weekends?
- * Give me an example of when you have been out of your depth.
- * What have you failed to achieve to date?
- * What can you bring to this organisation?
- * What area of your skills do you want to improve? (try and relate to role on offer).
- * Which part of this role is least attractive to you?
- * Why do you think you would like this role?
- * Where would you like to be in five years?
- * How would your workmates describe you?
- * What would your references say about you?
- * Why should I give this job to you instead of the other people on the shortlist (strengths).
- * What reservations should I have about you as an employee? (weaknesses).
- What do you do in your spare time?

LIST OF QUESTIONS THAT CONSULTANTS WILL ASK AFTER THE INTERVIEW

1. Who did you see?
2. How long were you there for?
3. How did it go?
4. Did the client give you enough information about the company?
5. What sort of questions were you asked?
6. Were you able to answer all the questions?
7. Do you feel as though you can do the job?
8. Did the client ask what you knew about the company?
9. Did the client say what would happen next?
10. Was there anything you forgot to ask or would like us to find out?

Notes