

Effective Interviews – from the MassBay Office of Career Services

An interview is a conversation between you and a prospective employer about your skills and how they meet the organization's needs. It is an invitation extended to you because you made a positive impression via your resume and cover letter. The employers' goals during the interview are to confirm this positive impression, to develop a better understanding of your ability to contribute to the organization, and to determine "fit." Your goals during the interview are to help them achieve their goals, to generate a job offer and to collect information that allows you to make an informed decision about whether to accept or decline the job offer.

Generating a job offer

The amount of time you'll have face-to-face with an interested employer in which to generate an offer (or an invitation to the next round of interviews) is limited. Use that time strategically – be well prepared. There's much you can't control about the interview (e.g., the mood and/or skill of the interviewer, the qualifications and interviewing skills of the other candidates). There's much you can control. Much of what you can control falls into the category of advance preparation. To be a more relaxed, articulate, knowledgeable, convincing and ultimately effective interviewee, you can:

Increase your knowledge base – expand on the research you conducted for your resume and cover letter (e.g., become familiar with the web site, check professional publications and local newspapers for articles about the organization, speak with people you know who work there)

Know the plan – confirm with whom you'll be meeting, their role within the organization and how long the interview is expected to take; you can then better anticipate questions, target your answers to different audiences (e.g., your future boss will be interested in different things than your future co-workers) and determine what questions you need to ask

Anticipate questions – based on what you know about the field/position and your skills and experience, what are you likely to be asked?

Prepare answers and practice aloud – know what points you want to make about how you can meet the employer's needs and then get used to hearing yourself saying that; practice saying the same thing in different ways – be sure to provide real examples

Generate questions – determine what you will ask that demonstrates your interest and qualifications and helps you determine if this is the right job for you

Select your "uniform" - be aware of the appropriate professional attire for the field – generally, suits for men and business suits or dresses for women; be sure it is clean and pressed the day before

Be geographically savvy – make a trial run to determine how long it takes to get there, where you can park and how much it will cost –add extra time to account for surprises

Remember, you can't accept or decline a job offer you don't get.

Great interviewers transform an employer's image of them from an outsider to an inside contributor. Here's how:

Own it - clearly state your critical skill or competency

Prove it – provide an example of when/where you've used it effectively

Connect it – discuss how it directly benefits the employer by meeting their needs

- OVER -

It ain't over 'til it's over/it's almost over/it's not quite over

You know the interview is ending when the interviewer says “well ...” You still have some critical tasks to accomplish before you leave:

- Ask your questions if you haven't already done so
- Summarize your key qualifications for the job
- Express your enthusiasm for the position
- Confirm what happens next and when
- Confirm correct spelling and titles of your interviewers

After you've left

- Write thank you notes to each person with whom you interviewed
 - Underscore your continued interest
 - Take advantage of the opportunity to remind them of your skills and/or mention something you didn't discuss during the interview
- Follow-up to learn the status of your candidacy if you've not heard back within the time frame established during your interview
- Reflect on your interview practicing things you'd like to do differently

Your questions – and you must ask some

Don't ask questions that focus on what the organization can do for you (e.g., questions about salary and other benefits). Rather, ask questions that demonstrate your interest in and understanding of the position and/or those that will help you decide if the position is right for you. Examples:

- How might the results of the upcoming election impact the funding for this project?
- How does this position/division fit in the organization's strategic plan?
- I understand that the person previously in this position was promoted; what role did you play in facilitating their promotion?
- What training do you provide for new hires?

Their questions –

Tell me about yourself.

Why are you interested in this position? Working for our firm?

What are your strengths and weaknesses?

What are your long-range career goals?

Tell us about a time when you ...

made a mistake on the job

worked as part of a team

Why should I hire you?