



Interview Handbook

Ideas and Tips for Turning Interviews into Offers

Interview Confirmation

Candidate: _____ Date: _____

Your Interview is confirmed for

_____ at _____

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Objective of the Interview

An interviewer has just one objective: to decide whether or not to make you a job offer. While the interviewer will examine your work history and educational background, your strengths and accomplishments will also be important criterion. He or she is also interested in evaluating your level of motivation, values, attitude and personality. In other words, to find out if you're the right person for the job, what your income potential is and whether or not you will fit into the company's cultural environment.

While it's true that an interview is an important screening tool for companies, it also allows you to learn those things you need to know about the position and the company so that you can make an intelligent decision about the job. Always approach an interview focused on your objective: getting a job offer.

As with many situations, preparation is the key to success. The job market is very competitive and you probably will not be the only qualified candidate for a position. The deciding factor may simply be the way you present your skills and qualifications relevant to the position and how well you conduct yourself during the interview.

This material has been made available for your use by your STAFFING TREE Placement Manager. It will help you prepare for and succeed at the interview. Take the time to review this material. The tips and techniques outlined herein have been tested, and they work! They will improve your chances of receiving a job offer. Should you have any questions about your upcoming interview, the company, the opportunity, or the suggestions provided here, consult your STAFFING TREE Placement Manager or Account Manager.

Ten Reasons why Candidates are Not Hired

1. **Poor attitude.** Many candidates come across as arrogant. While employers can afford to be self-centered, candidates cannot.
2. **Appearance.** Many candidates do not consider their appearance as much as they should. First impressions are quickly made in the first three to five minutes. Review appearance checklist.
3. **Lack of research.** It's obvious when candidates haven't learned about the job, company or industry prior to the interview. Visit the library or use the Internet to research the company, talk with friends, peers and other professionals about the opportunity before each meeting.
4. **Not having questions to ask.** Asking questions shows your interest in the company and the position. Prepare a list of intelligent questions in advance.
5. **Not readily knowing the answers to interviewers' questions.** Anticipate and rehearse answers to tough questions about your background, such as a recent termination or an employment gap. Practicing with your spouse or a friend before the interview will help you to frame intelligent responses.

6. **Relying too much on resumes.** Employers hire people, not paper. Although a resume can list qualifications and skills, it's the interview dialogue that will portray you as a committed, responsive team player.
7. **Too much humility.** Being conditioned not to brag, candidates are sometimes reluctant to describe their accomplishments. Explaining how you reach difficult or impressive goals helps employers understand what you can do for them.
8. **Not relating skills to employers' needs.** A list of sterling accomplishments means little if you can't relate them to a company's requirements. Reiterate your skills and convince the employer that you can "do the same for them."
9. **Lack of career direction.** Job hunters who aren't clear about their career goals often can't spot or commit to appropriate opportunities. Not knowing what you want wastes everyone's time.
10. **Job shopping.** Some applicants, particularly those in certain high-tech, sales and marketing fields, will admit they're just "shopping" for opportunities and have little intention of changing jobs. This wastes time and leaves a bad impression with employers they may need to contact in the future.

Overview Preparation

1. Know Yourself

- What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses?
- What are your short- and long-term goals?
- Evaluate yourself in terms of the position you seek.
- Formulate responses by asking the question: "Why should they hire me?"
- Remember that you're there to sell yourself and secure a job offer.
- Can you honestly visualize resigning from your current position? (If applicable: See "Dealing with Counteroffers")

2. Research the Company

- Research the company overview provided to you by your STAFFING TREE account team.
- Utilize the library to review annual reports, trade magazines and newspaper articles.
- The Internet offers a wealth of company information and industry statistics. Please visit the company website provided by your STAFFING TREE account team prior to the interview.
- Know the company's products and services.
- Be prepared to tell the interviewer why their company is attractive to you.

3. Items to Bring to the Interview

References

- Bring any reference letters you may have. (These should always be from your current or previous supervisors or end clients).
- Bring any letters of commendation, recognition, etc.

Resume

- Review your resume thoroughly and be prepared to discuss all points.
- Always bring a resume copy identical to the one supplied to the interviewer.
- Bring along work samples or a portfolio, if possible. Never discuss or show proprietary information.

Other Items

- Bring a folder and pen to the interview to jot down notes.
- Prepare and review your questions as well as specific responses.
- Bring directions to the interview location as well as the interviewers phone number in case you are running late.
- Bring along your Placement Manager's phone number to give immediate feedback after the interview.

4. Arrival at the Interview

- Plan to arrive 15 minutes before the interview. (If meeting your STAFFING TREE Account Manager, please be prepared to arrive earlier).
- Allow adequate time for traffic, parking, and a last minute appearance check. If possible, scout the location the day before the interview to avoid last minute problems. Being late for the interview may cost you the job offer.
- Review your notes and go in with confidence.

Appearance: Men

- A dark suit is appropriate for most positions. Be sure it's cleaned and pressed.
- Shirts should be white, freshly laundered and well pressed.
- A quiet tie with a subtle design and a hint of red is suitable for a first interview. Avoid loud colors and busy designs.
- Jewelry should be kept minimal.
- Use deodorant and avoid colognes or fragrances completely.
- Shoes that are black and freshly polished (including the heels) are a safe choice for an interview. Socks should be black or blue.
- Fingernails should be short and clean.
- Hair should be clean, well groomed and freshly trimmed.

- Maintain good eye contact.
- **TURN OFF PORTABLE PHONES OR BEEPERS IN THE INTERVIEW!**

Appearance: Women

- Wear a suit or a conservative tailored dress. Blouses should also be tailored and color coordinated. Don't wear big bows or ties.
- Hair should be neat and clean. Makeup should be light and natural looking.
- Use deodorant and avoid colognes or fragrances.
- Jewelry should be limited and subtle.
- A close toed pump that is color coordinated with your outfit is appropriate for an interview. Avoid open-toed shoes or sling-backs.
- Fingernails should be clean, manicured if possible.
- Maintain good eye contact.
- **TURN OFF PORTABLE PHONES OR BEEPERS IN THE INTERVIEW!**

The Interview Itself

Typical sequences of events are:

- Interview with the immediate supervisor and peers.
- Interview with the hiring authority (managers, etc.)
- Shake hands firmly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer.
- Maintain a high energy level. Sit with back straight. No coffee (to spill) and no smoking.
- It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises, but do not fake knowledge. Be yourself. Poise, confidence, and self-respect are of great importance.

Conduct yourself with confidence and determination to get the job. You have other options, of course, and your interviewer knows this, but wants to think that you want a job with this company. Don't play coy. Sell yourself. You must present a positive attitude to the prospective employer. You must NOT seem disinterested or appear to be job shopping.

The interview should be a two-way conversation. Ask questions of the interviewers. This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision afterwards. The questions you have prepared can be asked to the different people you see.

Remember that the objective of the interview is to obtain an offer. During the interview, you must gather enough information concerning the position to make a decision.

Typical Interview Questions & Responses

You should give complete but brief and relaxed answers to questions. When possible, use questions as a basis for developing information that you want to make sure is presented. Continue to sell yourself in a positive way:

- Describe jobs in terms of duties and give indicators of good performance such as raises, promotions, recognitions, and awards.
- Include short stories involving problems or challenges and how you were able to solve or overcome them. Describe the results you achieved.
- **DO NOT USE PROFANITY DURING THE INTERVIEW.**

A. Exploring your Background Questions

TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.

- The interviewer does not want to know where you were born. Answer these questions in terms of the qualifications required of the position.
- Keep responses concise and brief and avoid being derogatory or negative about previous jobs and bosses.
- “Tell me about yourself” means, “Tell me about your qualifications.” Prepare a one to two minute discussion of your qualifications. Start with education and discuss your experiences. Describe your performance (in raises, promotions, innovative designs, sales volume, increased profits, etc.).

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST STRENGTHS?

- Interviewers like to hear abstract qualities. Loyalty, willingness to work hard, eagerness, fast-learner, technical skills, politeness, and promptness, expressed in concrete terms are good examples. Avoid the simple generalization “I like people.” It is not a good answer.

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESSES?

- Don't be intimidated. The interviewer probably wants reassurance that hiring you won't be a mistake. This is not a time to confess all of your imperfections. (Do not state “not being able to go to work on Mondays,” or “coming in late,” etc.) Present your weaknesses as professional strengths (i.e., “I sometimes work too hard to make sure things are done accurately.”).

B. Personality Questions

WHAT DO YOU DO IN YOUR SPARE TIME?

- Workaholics are not always the best employees. Present yourself as a well-rounded person. Your answer gives you dimension. Name some hobbies.

C. Motive Questions

Answer motive questions enthusiastically. Show the interviewer that you are interested in the position and that you really want the job. Remember to maintain eye contact and be sincere.

WHY SHOULD I HIRE YOU FOR THIS POSITION?

- Explain your qualifications and how they “fit” the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why you enjoy this type of work. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK FOR OUR FIRM?

- State a positive comment about what the company does, its location or its people. Other positive remarks might be about the company’s products or services, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement. Research about the company is important here.

WHAT INTERESTS YOU MOST ABOUT THIS POSITION?

- Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one or two-word answer such as, “the challenge,” or “the opportunity,” will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

D. Job Satisfaction Questions

WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR PREVIOUS EMPLOYER?

- NEVER speak poorly about a former employer. Be pleasant, be positive and be honest. Your answer will probably be checked. Mention your desire to work for a more progressive company that offers more growth opportunities and recognition.

WHAT DID YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT YOUR PREVIOUS JOB?

WHAT DID YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT YOUR PREVIOUS JOB?

- An employer can evaluate the type of worker you will be by the items you choose. Cite specifics. You are also providing clues about the environment you seek. What you liked most can include a strong teamwork atmosphere, high-level of creativity, attainable deadlines. What you liked least should include any situations that you are unlikely to encounter in your new position.

WHY ARE YOU LOOKING FOR ANOTHER JOB?

- Again, be positive: “I have to say that I have really enjoyed my years at _____ Corporation. There are a lot of good people there. But I am looking for a more progressive organization with greater opportunities for growth and recognition. I am looking for a team to join where I can make real contributions and advance my career.”

ARE YOU APPLYING FOR ANY OTHER JOBS?

- In your answer, show that your search is geared for similar positions. This demonstrates a well-defined, focused objective. Make it known that your talents are applicable to other businesses and that you have explored ways to maximize your potential and are serious about finding the perfect opportunity. Don’t give an indication that you are just shopping.

E. Past Performance Question

(To determine behavior based on past examples)

WHAT KINDS OF DECISIONS ARE MOST DIFFICULT TO YOU?

- Again, be truthful and admit not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit so as to not instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

WHAT ARE YOUR GREATEST ACCOMPLISHMENTS?

- Be ready to recant one or two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

WHAT KIND OF WORKER ARE YOU?

- Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable, but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.

F. Other Questions

YOU SHOULD BE PREPARED TO ANSWER TRUTHFULLY

- Are you willing to relocate?
- Answer a question to the best of your ability and then relax. If there is a period of silence before the interviewer asks the next question, stay calm. Interviewers often use silence to see if you can handle stress and maintain poise.

Questions for You to Ask

Your interviews should be a two-way conversation. You must ask questions and take an active role in the interview. This demonstrates the importance you place on your work and career. Asking questions gives you a chance to demonstrate your depth of knowledge in the field as well as to establish an easy flow of conversation and relaxed atmosphere between you and the interviewer. Building this kind of rapport is always a plus in an interview.

Remember, you are not just there for the interviewer to determine if you are right for the position, but your questions can help you determine if this job is right for you. **Some of your questions should evolve from research you have done on the company in preparing for the interview.** Guidelines for your questions as well as some examples include:

Tips to Asking Great Questions

- Don't cross-examine the employer.
- Ask questions requiring an explanation. Questions which can be answered with a "yes" or "no" are conversation stoppers.
- Don't interrupt when the employer is answering YOUR question.
- Ask job-relevant questions. Focus on the job, the company, products, services and people.
- Prior to the interview, write your list of Interest questions and take them with you.
- Ask about your potential peers, subordinates and superiors. Take notes.
- Ask the employer how s/he got where they are today.

A. Interest Questions

WHY DO YOU WANT SOMEONE FOR THIS JOB?

- Force the interviewer to explain why this job can't be done by one of the current employees. The answer may give you a valuable job description.

B. Job Satisfaction Questions

Ask questions that relate to the responsibilities, importance and authority of the position as well as those investigating the rewards for a job well done and the long-range career opportunities.

C. Past Performance Questions

HOW DID YOU GET STARTED IN THE COMPANY?

- A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF THE BEST RESULTS PRODUCED BY PEOPLE IN THIS JOB?

- Here you may discover you are overqualified or in a position to ask for considerably more money.

D. Additional Questions

WHAT WOULD MY RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES BE?

WHAT ARE THE MOST DIFFICULT ASPECTS OF THE POSITION?

DESCRIBE A TYPICAL DAY ON THE JOB.

HOW DO YOU THINK I WOULD FIT INTO THE JOB AND INTO YOUR ORGANIZATION?

WHO WOULD I BE WORKING FOR AND WITH?

WHEN WOULD YOU NEED ME TO START?

Interview Conclusion

If you are sincerely interested in the position and are satisfied with the answers given, you should ask the interviewer if s/he feels that you are qualified for the position. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully.

Ask for the job. Make a positive statement about the position. Emphasize that this is exactly the type of opportunity you've been looking for and would like to be offered the position. Ask when you should expect an answer. A typical conclusion might be:

"Thank you for this meeting, _____. I like what I've heard today and I'd like to join your team. I know I would be an asset to you/your department because you need someone who can _____, _____, and _____. As you know, I have (match your qualifications with the employer's "hot buttons"). Before I leave, do you have any more questions about my background or qualifications or can I supply you with any more information?"

The farewell should also include a smile, direct eye contact, a firm but gentle handshake.

Interview Follow Up

Immediately following the interview, call your STAFFING TREE Placement Manager. It is very important to convey your impressions of the position and the company. Let the recruiter know whether you are interested in the position or not, and if there were questions you forgot to ask in the interview, express them at this time. Only after we get your feedback about the interview and the company do we contact the employer for theirs. Finally, we follow up with you regarding the employer's thoughts.

Dealing with Counteroffers

Quitting a job is never easy. Career changes are tough enough and the anxieties of leaving a comfortable job, friends and environment for an unknown opportunity can easily cloud anyone's judgment. But what should you do if your current employer asks you to stay?

A counteroffer is an inducement from your current employer to get you to stay after you've announced your intentions to accept another job. In recent years, counteroffers have become more common.

If you are considering a counteroffer, remain focused on your primary objectives. Why were you looking for another job to begin with? If an employee is happy with their current job, employer, and/or salary, they're usually not paving the road with resumes. So, often times a counteroffer that promises more money never really remedies the real reasons for wanting to leave in the first place.

Apart from a short-term bandage on the problem, nothing will change within the company and, when the dust settles, you can find yourself in the same situation. Recruiters report that more than 80 percent of those who accept counteroffers leave, begin looking for another job or are "let go" within six to 12 months after announcing their intentions.

Counteroffers are certainly flattering and make an employee question their initial decision to leave. But often times they are merely stall tactics used by bosses and companies to alleviate the upheaval a departing employee can cause. High turnover also brings a boss' management skills into question. His reaction is to do what's necessary until he's better prepared to replace you.