



Job Interviewing: Ten Tips for Success!

WHETHER THIS NEXT JOB INTERVIEW IS YOUR FIRST OR YOUR 51st, it never hurts to brush up on your skills and do some advance prep work to ensure success. Learn how to play up your key strengths, minimize your weaknesses, and make a great impression overall. Here are 10 tips from my arsenal of career advice.



1. Relax, you'll be more authentic and confident if you do.

The best suggestion I can give to prep for an interview is to relax. Easier said than done, right? It helps to remember that you have your education, training, and experience working in your favor. Think of all the ways you provided value to your previous employers. Did you land a huge account? Go above and beyond on a certain project? Take a deep breath, recall your accomplishments (even better, make a list of them), and let go of the tension. Breathe!

2. Remember, you're interviewing them, too.

So many people view the job interview as a test—and they'd better pass with flying colors or they're in trouble. On some level, yes, you're being tested, but the "test" is simply to see if you're a good match for the company. It works the other way, too. This is your chance to see if theirs is the kind of culture that fits your style. It's possible that you'll get there and find out you don't even want the job! Or, you might figure out that it's only worth it if they meet you at a certain salary amount. Ask lots of questions... know what you're getting into, and then weigh your options carefully.

3. Be prepared, know the organization.

You'll notice that many companies not only have a specific "personality," but they're mighty proud of the little perks and quirks that make them unique. Do they have their own brand of soda, like Microsoft? Do they offer flex time for working parents? Find out if they're noteworthy in the news. Visit their Web site and do your online research. Were they part of a recent merger or did they just win a government contract? There is no better way to show your sincere interest than actually being interested. You might learn something cool about this organization that tells you, "Go for it!" Or, you could uncover some hidden dirt that makes you think twice before working there.

4. Take the pressure off...you have options.

Think of the job interview as an opportunity to cast seeds and check things out. This is a "get to know you" or feeling-out phase, not a contest or do-or-die situation. Try to avoid becoming too attached to any one job. That old saying, "Don't put all your eggs in one basket" could not be more true than for the career search. Sometimes things take an unexpected twist or turn. You could be "90 percent sure" that you'll be on company X's payroll next month...and suddenly the phone rings with an even better offer.

5. If they ask about your weaknesses, answer honestly.

Each person excels in some areas more than they do in others. If you are honest, you stand a better chance of being placed in the best possible career for you. So when the question about your weaknesses comes up, tell the truth. Just be sure to spin it in a solution-oriented way that tells the interviewer you know how to overcome and manage such challenges. For example, if you're not detail-oriented, you could say so—but also add that you always give yourself extra time on projects that involve lots of detail. Or, you could say that you make a great “big picture partner and strategist” when paired with someone for whom little details are their strong suit.

6. Write a list of five key points you plan to express in your interview.

You're almost certain to feel more confident and at-ease if you prepare for your interview in advance. One way to do this is to make a list of your best qualities and accomplishments—what you bring to the table that is relevant to the position. On the day of the interview, two things potentially can happen. One, the interviewer will ask you specific questions where you can simply “slant” your responses around the points you planned to mention. Or, two, you'll end up talking about other things—but when the time comes that they ask for your questions or thoughts, you can use this opportunity to make your points.

7. Write a list of questions about things you need to know.

Sometimes when the pressure's on, it's hard to know what to ask. But do take some time to consider what's most important to you in your career and the organization where you'll be spending the majority of your time. A good way to remember “what you want to know” is to flash back to the last job you had. Let's say you didn't care for the way you had four different managers to report to. On interview day, you can ask, “Who will I be reporting to and what's the general workflow for the department?” Asking good questions is a great way to find out if this new place offers similar perks as you had before—and if they'll fill the gaps where your old company fell short.

8. Find out who you are interviewing with.

If you know that you will be speaking to the head of human resources, keep in mind that you'll be asked more general questions. In this case, be prepared to talk about your career history and background as well as your personality, work style,

and unique qualities. If you have certain items that you'd like addressed, such as day-to-day responsibilities and what the positions demands of you, know that these questions are better left for your potential boss or the head of the department where you'll be working.

9. Do a quick mini-visualization beforehand.

Professional athletes do it—you can, too. Picture how you want the interview to go and the ideal outcome. Set your intentions. “I am going to show these people exactly why I'm more qualified than any of the other candidates who apply. I will do this by pointing out my accomplishments and core strengths, which are X, Y, and Z.” Imagine that at the close of the interview, you're smiling, shaking hands with the hiring manager, and feeling on top of the world—like you really nailed it! Envision getting a call-back from them that clearly indicates how impressed they were with your professionalism and capabilities.

10. Dress the part.

Look professional and wear something that shows your personality as well, depending on the type of job. Consider the environment. For example, many jobs where employees meet with clients and vendors require the gold standard suit and tie/skirt and blazer. Other places have changed with the times, and now offer “dress down Fridays” or adopt “corporate casual,” which means khakis for guys, and skirts or nice pants for the ladies. So if it's formal, be a little more formal. If it's not, tone it down and be casual yet crisp and neat. Look put together, cleaned up. Add a bit of personal style—maybe a favorite watch or silk scarf.

Chances are that after reading this article, you're already feeling more confident about your professional abilities. Don't lose the momentum—go grab a pen and paper right now and begin to formulate your strategy for interview success. Go into this feeling proud of your many accomplishments. Know that even if it doesn't turn out to be the job of your dreams, that's okay. The career search is an ongoing process and learning experience. You're one step closer to landing the job you've always wished for! **CM**

About the Author

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