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Job Interview Tips and Strategies

The Maroon Advantage

TOOLKIT
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Once you have landed the interview you have a fresh opportunity to impress an employer beyond your written materials. This section will outline the different types of interviews and highlight strategies to help you ace this crucial part of the hiring process.

Our goal is to make you feel confident about interview content and style so you can practice on your own to perfect your technique!

Identifying the different types of interviews and best practices for success.

Getting to the interview phase in a job search is a great accomplishment, but preparing for an interview is critically important and should be given at least as much time and effort as you spent on your application materials. Just as you took the time to write a personalized cover letter for each job you applied to, you will also need to do firm/organization/company specific preparation for your upcoming interview and be up-to-date on news in the industry you are planning to enter. Make a list of your accomplishments, challenges, goals, and experiences, and start to develop stories that showcase these areas with specific examples. Practice your interview material and try out your answers before you hit the interview so you can be relaxed and conversational in tone.

The two basic types of interview question formats are traditional and behavior-based.

The traditional job interview uses broad questions such as “Tell me about your strengths and weakness.” and “Why do you want to work for this company?” The bottom line is that employers want to know

1) Do you have the skills and abilities to perform the job?
2) Do you possess the enthusiasm and work ethic that is in line with the company expectations?
3) Will you be a team player and fit into the culture of this organization?
Tell Me about Yourself is the most common first question in an interview. Learn how to handle this question in this short video.

Communicate Your Strengths in an Interview – this short video illustrates how to best showcase your strengths.

Traditional Interview questions/prompts:

• Tell me about yourself.
• What motivates you?
• How do you define success?
• What two or three things are most important to you in a job?
• Where do you see yourself in five years?
• What is your greatest strength?
• What is your greatest weakness?
• What do you do in your free time?
• What type of leader are you?
• What has been your greatest accomplishment?
• How would your professors (or former boss, or classmates, etc.) describe you?
• What, on your resume, are you most proud of?
• Tell me something about yourself that is not on your resume.
• What do you know about our organization? Why do you want to work for us?
• Why are you interested in this (geographic) area?
• Who else are you interviewing with?
• Why should I hire you?
• Why is there a gap on your resume?
• What do you expect from a supervisor?
• What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
• In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?

The behavior based interview is based on the idea that past performance is the best indicator of future behavior. It can often give more information than if the interviewer was to simply ask “what would you do if…” questions, as the tendency for many people would be to give the interviewer the answer you think they want to hear. While you should provide examples for most every answer you give during an interview, behavior-based questions force you to give examples. This should be seen as a positive for you, as being able to tell your stories will make you more memorable to the employer. In preparing for an interview, it is very important that you to reflect back on experiences you have had to use as examples.

Click here to see a Behavioral Interview Questions video.
When answering behavior-based questions, you should use the STAR/SOAR technique.

**STAR/SOAR METHOD**

**Situation:** Differentiate and describe the organization/situation.

**Task or Obstacle:** What was asked or expected of you OR what challenge did you overcome?

**Action:** What did you—not the organization—specifically do to address the task or obstacle?

**Result:** Outcomes or impact that you had during the time that you were on task.

**Behavior-based questions/prompts:**

**Ambition**
- Describe a project or idea that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Tell me about an important goal you set in your past. What efforts did you make to accomplish the goal? Did you reach it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty to get a job done.
- Tell me about the last time you undertook a project that demanded a lot of initiative.
- What was the most competitive work situation you have experienced? How did you handle it?
- Tell me about the riskiest decision you have made? What was the outcome of that decision?

**Analytical Thinking**
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation. What kind of thought process did you go through? What was your reasoning behind your decision?

**Communication**
- Describe a situation where you felt you had not communicated very well. How did you correct the situation?
- Describe for me the most significant written document, report, or presentation you have had to complete.
• Tell me about a time when you had to explain a complex technical problem to a person who does not understand technical jargon. What approach did you use to make the information clear to that person?
• Tell me about a recent experience you had making a speech or presentation. How did you prepare for it? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
• Tell me about a time when you and your current or previous supervisor disagreed but you still found a way to get your point across.
• How do you go about establishing rapport with a customer/client/colleague? What have you done to gain their confidence?
• Tell me about a recent situation in which you had to deal with a very upset client or co-worker.
• Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.

Coping
• Describe a time in which you were faced with problems or stresses which tested your coping skills. What did you do?
• Tell me about a time when you were placed under extreme pressure and how you handled it.
• Tell me about a time when a project you planned did not go according to plan.

Decision-Making
• Describe an important decision you have made regarding a task or project at work. What factors influenced your decision? How much time did you take to make the decision? What was the result?
• We have all made poor decisions at one point or another. Tell me about a time you made a poor decision. What happened?
• Tell me about a time when you had to defend a decision you made, even though other important people were opposed to your decision.
• What has been the most difficult decision you have had to make in the past six months?
• Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

Initiative
• Give some instances in which you anticipated problems and were able to influence a new direction.
• Tell me about a project you generated that went beyond your job description.
• Describe something you have done during law school that goes beyond standard expectations?
• Give me an example of when you took a risk to achieve a goal. What was the outcome?

Interpersonal Skills
• Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.
• Tell me about the most difficult or frustrating individual you’ve ever had to work with, and how you managed to work with them.
• What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?
• Describe a situation in which you were able to use persuasion to successfully convince someone to see things your way.
Innovation
- Describe a situation when you demonstrated initiative and took action without waiting for direction. What was the outcome?
- Tell me about a time when you came up with a creative solution to a problem in your past work.
- Describe something you have implemented at work. What were the steps you took?

Organization
- Describe a time when you had to make a difficult choice between your personal and professional life.
- Tell me about a time when your schedule was suddenly interrupted? What did you do?
- How do you organize your life/time? How do you determine priorities in scheduling your time?

Teamwork
- Describe a team experience you found disappointing. What could you have done to prevent it?
- Describe the most rewarding experience you have had working on a team.
- Tell me about a time when you successfully led a group.
- Tell me about a time when you worked on a team but were not the team leader.

Be ready to explain:
- How your experiences and skills relate to the job duties, contribute to the employer’s mission, and add value to their work. Be perceptive about what skills the employer wants you to illustrate when using behavioral based questioning.

Questions you should consider ASKING the Interviewer:

Almost all interviews end with the employer saying “Do you have any questions for me?” The right answer to this question is ‘Yes’! Be sure to ask questions that relate to research you have done on the organization and/or that follow up on some things you have already learned during your interview. Never ask a question that could have been answered with adequate preparation for your interview. Some samples include:
• Is there a structured training program for new hires?
• How do you determine what type of work a new team member is assigned?
• How is the work of a new hire supervised? Is there a formal review process?
• Is continuing professional development encouraged and supported by your organization?
• What are the opportunities for growth within the organization?
• What do you like best about working for this company?
• It’s wise to ask a follow-up question about something you learned about the organization from their website or a networking connection. This shows that you have performed research about the organization.

Navigating the phone or teleconference interview.

In an effort to save money and resources, employers will often utilize a phone or teleconference screening interview to narrow their list of candidates to a manageable number. It is a widely used technique for long distance and international interviews. While a scheduled phone interview is ideal so you can prepare in advance, it’s not unheard of for a hiring manager to make a spontaneous call to conduct an interview. As soon as you submit your application materials you must be ready for an interview.

When an employer makes an unannounced call they are looking to see how you handle an extemporaneous conversation without warning. How you react will tell the caller a lot about you so think before you speak and always be at your professional best when you answer your phone.

When preparing for a schedule phone interview consider these tips:

• Keep your resume in clear view so you can use it to answer questions.
• Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
• Have a pen and paper handy for note taking.
• Turn call-waiting off so your call isn’t interrupted.
• Clear the room - evict kids, pets and anything else that makes noise. Turn off all gadgets that beep or buzz (TV, cell phones, iPad, computer, etc.).
• Unless you’re sure your cell phone service is going to be perfect, consider using a landline to avoid a dropped call or static on the line.
• Don’t smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink.
• Consider dressing up for your phone interview to get yourself into a professional mindset. It’s hard to be professional in your pajamas!
• Keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
• Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
• Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
• Use the person’s title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name.) Only use a first name if they ask you to.
• Don’t interrupt the interviewer.
• Take your time - it’s perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts. The pause is a powerful tool.
• Give short and to the point answers.
• Remember your goal is to set-up a face-to-face interview. After you thank the interviewer ask if it would be possible to meet in person.

For a teleconference interview with video or a Skype call, you must practice looking at the camera when you are speaking. The natural urge is to look at yourself on the screen but your interviewers want to see your eyes, not the top of your head so focus on the lens. Be sure to dress professionally and avoid sitting near a well lit window since this will reduce the clarity of your image on the screen. It’s best to do a test run with a trusted friend or mentor and Skype is a free and easy phone/video service well suited for this purpose.

Acing the call-back, panel, and blitz-day interview.
When you make it to the call-back round of the interview process you are on a short list of candidates. Typically, you will meet with multiple people in the organization in one-on-one meetings or a panel interview with several team members. At this point, the employer has determined you may be a good fit and they would like to get to know you better.

As with all interviews, you must adequately prepare for the call-back interview. Conduct comprehensive research on the organizations and the individuals with whom you will be meeting. You should ask for your agenda or itinerary in advance so you can research the players and it’s never too late to conduct informational interviews with those in the organization who are not participating in your interview process.

Tips for the Call-Back Interview
• Bring extra copies of your resume, writing/work sample(s), and references.

• Because you will be seeing many people you’ve never met, one after another, you are bound to forget who you talked to and what you talked about. Ask each interviewer for his or her business card. Then, when taking a rest break or after your interviews are complete, jot down something about the interviewer and/or your conversation on the back of the card. Make notes contemporaneously to the conversation to help you remember the interviewer and the content of your interview. This information will help you draft original thank you notes and other correspondence to the company.
• You may find yourself answering the same questions asked by different team members throughout the day. Do not assume that that anyone should already know the answer to your question because you have answered it before. Answer the question with as much enthusiasm as you did the first time it was asked.
• Make sure you have questions to ask your interviewers. It is appropriate to ask the same questions to different individuals, as you may receive different responses to your questions.
• Be sure to stand with each new introduction.
• Follow-up with a written thank you note for each person with whom you met. A group thank you note is not appropriate.

Blitz Day Interviews

In an effort to streamline the call-back process, many companies are opting for the blitz day interview technique. This protects the time and resources of employers in the organization that participate in the interview process since everything happens in a single day.

In a blitz day scenario you will be part of an interview pack of candidates and participate in panel style interviews, networking events, and often meals or receptions with your competitors who are also vying for the same opportunity. You must showcase that you are a good colleague, a solid team player, and that you can perform well under stress. The best strategy is to focus on what you bring to the table and be polite to your fellow candidates. But when the networking events take place be sure to seek out employees in the company and don’t cluster with the other candidates. Illustrate that you can play well in the professional sandbox and that you have relationship building skills by seeking out new introductions in the company.

Owning your self confidence and developing a compelling strengths story.

Practice makes perfect when interviewing so be sure to test drive you responses with friends, family, and trusted advisors before you hit the actual interview. If you have access to a video recorder or a webcam on your computer, recording yourself is a very useful tool that will help you iron out your rough spots.

If you are stuck developing your strengths stories, try writing them down first and then paraphrase your own prose out loud to make it conversational. Nobody appreciates canned responses so your goal is to have a conversation with your interviewer so it doesn’t actually feel like an interview. Bottom line – if you can illustrate your value-add to the organization with your strengths based stories and experiences you will be a successful interviewer.
Books, online resources.
Here are some of our favorite books and online resources to prepare for job interviews.

- Boost Your Interview IQ by Carole Martin
- High-Impact Interview Questions: 701 Behavior-Based Questions to Find the Right Person for Every Job by Victoria A. Hoevemeyer
- Killer Interviews by Frederick W. and Barbara B. Ball
- Win the Interview, Win the Job: Outshine the Competition With Great Preparation and Skill by Caryl and Ron Krannich