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aligning talent with today's workplace

Preparing for the Interview



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Preparing for the Interview



The interview is your best opportunity to gain insight into the position and company, and to determine how your experience and talent can contribute to the company's growth and profitability.

We have included a list of suggestions for how to make your interview as successful as possible.

- Do your homework - on the company. Find out as much about the company, its history, its current situation and its future as possible. Be prepared to ask good questions about the company and its objectives. Great sources of information:
 - Your Accuro representative
 - Company's website
 - Other business websites (Google Finance, Wikipedia, WSJ, etc.) for objective articles
 - Annual reports and SEC filings (10-K, 10-Q reports)
 - Friends and business associates (keep the position confidential)
- Do your homework - on the position. Have a thorough understanding of the position, its responsibilities and what will be expected of you. Be prepared to ask good questions: Who has been successful in the role (or at the company) and why? Who has not succeeded in the role and why? Who does the role report to? Who will you supervise? What needs to be accomplished in the first 6 months, in the first year?
- Do your homework - on the interviewers. Memorize the names and titles of those you will be interviewing with and research their backgrounds. LinkedIn is a great source for finding information about someone's interests and work history. Ask your Accuro recruiter for pointers too, as they have close relationships with the hiring managers and may be able to provide guidance on talking points.
- Do your homework - on yourself. Review your career history thoroughly. Review dates, positions, duties and responsibilities, and accomplishments. Know your strengths and weaknesses. Be prepared to cite specific examples of accomplishments and how your experience will help the company achieve its objectives. Concentrate on your most recent positions, but don't neglect your early career.

HOW TO ANSWER DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Good and thorough preparation will allow you to enter the interview relaxed and confident. However, you are only a part of the way there. During the interview you may be asked difficult questions. We have included a list of typical stress questions, and depending on your level of experience, a few examples of how some of them might be answered.

1. What are your short-range objectives? Long-range?
2. What do you think is the difference between a good position and an excellent one?
3. Why are you leaving your current position?
4. Why are you interested in working for us?
5. Why should we hire you? What can you do for us that someone else cannot do?
6. Tell me about yourself.
7. Can you work under pressure, deadlines, etc.?
8. What is your management philosophy? How are you best managed?
9. How has your career background influenced your progression & current management style?
10. What kind of salary are you worth and why?
11. What are your five biggest accomplishments in your present or last job? Your career?
12. What is your biggest strength? Weakness?
13. What mistakes have you made in your career? How did you fix them?
14. What business, credit or character references can you give us?
15. What qualifications do you have that make you think you will be successful in this business?
16. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our firm?
17. How long would it take you to make a contribution to our firm?
18. How long would you stay with us?
19. What new goals or objectives have you established recently? Why?
20. What qualities have you liked or disliked in your boss?
21. What was the most difficult ethical decision you have had to make? What was the result?
22. Why haven't you obtained a job thus far?
23. What features of your previous jobs have you disliked?
24. Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?
25. How would you evaluate your present firm?
26. How successful have you been?
27. What is the worst situation you have faced in your professional life? How did you deal with it?
28. How do you spend your free time? What was the last book you read? Movie you saw/etc.?
29. What interests you most about the position we have? The least?
30. Don't you feel you might be better off with a different size firm than ours?
31. Why aren't you earning more by now?
32. Are you a leader? A good manager? Analytical? Give an example we can verify.
33. How do you build a team?
34. How would you describe your own personality?
35. Have you helped increase sales? Profits? Reduced costs?
36. What do your subordinates think of you?
37. Have you hired people before? What do you look for? Have you fired people? When and why?
38. Do you prefer working independently or with a team?
39. What are you passionate about?
40. Do you have any questions for us?

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As we indicated earlier, there are no “right” answers to these questions. Review the questions and your responses. While some of the questions seem difficult, the keys to answering effectively are to remain direct, truthful, positive and succinct. If you are unsure how to answer any of these questions, feel free to contact your Accuro representative.

What are your short-range objectives? Long-range?

Sample Response: “My current short-term goal is to obtain a _____ position (whatever you are interviewing for) that will expand my skill sets and overall functional business knowledge. This opportunity fits in well with my long-term goal of pursuing my Certification in _____/MBA/Graduate Degree in _____ (whichever is appropriate for you) and ultimately becoming part of a management team.”

Why did you select my organization to interview with?

Sample Response: “I understand that you need someone who has extensive experience in _____, as well as strong exposure in _____. With the experience I already have in _____, I am excited to have the opportunity to help you achieve this. I also believe that an employee should show a certain level of loyalty his employer, and, I think your policy of promoting from within shows an equal level of loyalty to its employees.”

QUESTIONS TO ASK DURING YOUR INTERVIEW

1. Tell me about the history of growth of the company.
2. In the recent history of the company, what has been the biggest advance and what has been the biggest setback?
3. What is your highest priority in the next 6-12 months, and what could I do to be of assistance?
4. Can you describe a typical month in this position?
5. What can you tell me about your training program?
6. What are some of the traits or characteristics of your top performers?
7. Where do you see your company going in the next 5 years?
8. What are three main qualities you are looking for in a candidate for this position?
9. How do you see me fitting in with your company?
10. How will you measure success in this position?
11. Based on the discussion we have had about my background, what do you think would be MY greatest challenge?
12. Assuming everything goes positive today, what is the next step?
13. Tell me about your career path and what has made you successful here.
14. If you are invited back at the initial interview, consider asking to meet a few current employees (peers, subordinates, other managers).

BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWING

Today, more employers are conducting a different type of interview than they conducted in previous years. Known as "behavior-based interviews," these interviews are filled with behavior-based questions designed to elicit *patterns of accomplishments* relevant to the employer's situation. They are specific and challenge interviewees to provide concrete examples of their achievements in different types of situations. Such interviews are based on the simple belief that how a job candidate has responded to certain types of situations in the past is a good predictor of how that person will behave in a similar future situation.

This is an opportunity for you to sell your positives with an example or two. Briefly describe the situation, enthusiastically explain what you did, and indicate the outcome. Obviously you want to select examples that promote your skills and have a positive outcome. Even if the interviewer asks about a time when something negative happened, try to select an example where you were able to turn the situation around and something positive came out of it. In other words, try to pull something positive - either that you did or that you learned - out of even a negative experience you are asked to relate.

As you prepare for your interview, jot down examples of situations where you:

- Demonstrated leadership or creativity
- Showed a high level of technical competence
- Solved a complex technical or personnel problem
- Increased company profits
- Made a good decision/made a poor decision
- Adapted well to change, or implemented a change
- Handled criticism
- Met a deadline/missed a deadline
- Worked as part of a team
- Improved a process or policy

The following are some examples of questions you should be prepared to answer:

- What do you think are your top technical skills or strengths? Give an example of how these skills have enhanced your job performance.
- What was the hardest work-related decision you've had to make? What process did you go through to arrive at the decision? Would you make the same decision today?
- Describe a time when unanticipated events came up and threw off your priorities or schedule. How did you deal with the conflicts?
- Describe a project that you have worked on independently and with limited supervision. What methods did you use to manage your time? What was the result of the project?

HOW TO HANDLE THE SALARY DISCUSSION

The discussion regarding compensation can be very sensitive and unnerving to reach a figure that is fair and acceptable to both the company and the individual. Some points to remember:

- Most companies want to make a fair offer. They want to bring new employees on board at a salary level that provides an incentive to change jobs and is consistent with the company's existing salary structure for that position.
- Be realistic in your expectations. Corporations are conscious of maintaining consistency in existing salary structures and the competition for better positions has increased. Reasonable (not guaranteed) percentage increases usually range from 5% to 10%. Research the salary range for the position in its location, and the cost of living for the area.
- Be flexible. Compensation packages are often a combination of salary, bonuses, reviews, benefits, titles and perks. Nowadays, many companies offer sign-on bonuses, extended vacation time, etc. in lieu or in addition to salary negotiation.
- Ask your Accuro recruiter about quoting a specific figure. Your Accuro recruiter will discuss both the client's and your own salary expectations before the interview, though there may still be room for negotiation. Expect to be asked what you are currently earning, and the salary you desire. Look to your Accuro recruiter for guidance on naming a specific figure or salary range (remember to consider your benefits package and company perks as well). If it seems best to avoid a specific figure, try something like this: "I'm very interested in working with you, and I feel I can make a meaningful contribution. I am currently earning \$ _____ per year and would hope that you would make me your very best offer."
- Restate what you are earning. If you are asked again later in the process, you want to restate what you are earning and ask what the position will pay.
- The position and opportunity is the single most important element of you decision. No amount of money will turn a bad fit into a good one. A quality position and working with quality people in a dynamic work environment offers rewards that money can't buy. Question companies offering salaries significantly above fair market value, as there is usually an underlying reason (i.e., regular overtime, travel requirements, etc.)

FOLLOWING UP AFTER THE INTERVIEW

We cannot emphasize enough the importance of a follow-up thank you letter. A well-written and timely follow-up note will leave a positive impression of what kind of employee you would be and will make you stand out when they are interviewing multiple candidates. It also provides examples of both your work habits and writing skills and conveys your eagerness.

To gain full advantage of this opportunity, here are a few points to consider:

1. Ask for a business card from every person that you meet during this interview process. This ensures all addresses, names, titles and spellings are correct. Your Accuro recruiter is also a great resource for verifying the names and titles of those you met.
2. Send the letters as soon after the interview as possible. This communicates a sense of urgency and importance to your candidacy.
3. Send the thank you notes via email. This is the modern expectation, and it ensures that your letter reaches the right people as quickly as possible. Interview processes can be fast-paced and competitive, so timing is everything!
4. Be as brief as possible. This shows respect for other people's time.
5. The body of the letter should include:
 - a) Thanking them for their time.
 - b) Expressing interest in and enthusiasm towards the company and position.
 - c) Highlighting experiences or accomplishments that amplify your qualifications.
 - d) Asking for the next meeting to be set up.
 - e) **BE SURE TO PROOFREAD BEFORE YOU SEND IT!**

Remember - your Accuro recruiter is here as a resource!

If you are not sure what to say in your letter, would like an example of a great thank you letter, or simply want them to review your message before sending, don't hesitate to ask.

PREPARING FOR PHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone interviews are frequently a first step in the interview process. To minimize expenses and narrow the candidate pool, companies often opt for an initial phone interview for screening of potential candidates. These phone conversations are, in most cases, your first contact with a company. **Do not underestimate the importance of this first impression.**

Here are a few useful hints to help you through the process:

- Work with your Accuro representative to set up either a specific time or “window of time” for the call. This will allow you to be fully prepared and avoid situations where you are unable to conduct an effective interview. Phone interviews typically last no more than 20-30 minutes; do not be discouraged if the phone interview is shorter than expected, as this is fairly common.
- Make sure your phone is in good working order. Ensure you’re in an area with reliable connection to avoid possible dropped calls or bad reception.
- Record a voicemail greeting that is both professional and courteous.
- Remember, you’re relying on your tone of voice during the phone call. Try to stand up and/or smile during the phone interview to increase your energy and convey a positive attitude.
- Avoid any potential distractions, i.e. radio, television, background conversation, etc. and make sure you are not on the road during the scheduled time frame.
- Do not ask more than 1-2 questions during a phone interview. Work with your Accuro representative to strategize appropriate questions.
- Be fully prepared with your notes with regard to: 1) the company, 2) the position, and 3) yourself (resume). This will help you come across as an organized and articulate interviewee.

Again, do not take this step in the interview process lightly. This is a great opportunity to sell yourself and to find out more about the position. Thank the interviewer for their time and emphasize your excitement for the opportunity. **After the phone interview**, work with your Accuro representative to discuss the interviewer’s feedback and plan next steps.

GIVING YOUR RESIGNATION

While resigning from your current position can be emotional and sometimes stressful, there are several things you can do to make the process go smoothly and quickly.

- Put it in writing. Handing your boss a resignation letter is the most effective way to handle an uncomfortable situation.
 - It is in writing and will become a part of your employment records, which protects you.
 - It helps you keep the focus on the positive aspects of your career move rather than any negative aspects of your old situation.
 - It relieves the pressure of having to speak first. (We've included a sample letter on the following page.)
- Give fair notice (minimum of two weeks), but ask to be relieved as soon as possible. You're in a lame duck position - the company will get by without you, and you owe your energies and loyalty to yourself and to your new opportunity.
- Talk to your Accuro representative and keep us updated. We can help keep this as smooth and painless as possible.

(SAMPLE) RESIGNATION LETTER

Date

Former Supervisor
Former Supervisor Title
Former Company

It is with mixed emotion, yet with firm conviction that I write this letter of resignation from (company name).

My association over the (#) years with this excellent firm and its many fine people has been a significant part of my professional and personal life.

Please understand that I have made my decision after considerable deliberation, only because an outstanding opportunity presented itself to significantly further my career and help me achieve my own goals.

I am therefore resigning from (company name) effective (date). This will allow sufficient time to complete current commitments prior to commencing with my new employer on (date). In the interim, I will work with you and the staff to effect a seamless transition of my duties.

I hope that you will understand and accept my decision, and that I will have your support in making this change as easy as possible for the staff and the department.

Sincerely,

Your Name
(be sure to sign)

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Top 10 Tips for a Great Interview

1. Arrive early - few things can shake you more than running late to an interview! However, do not enter the office building more than 10 minutes early.
2. Stop rehearsing! You want to do your homework, but don't over-prepare to the point of sounding inauthentic. Trust that you know your stuff, and the interview will take on its own natural flow.
3. Check a mirror! You'll feel a lot calmer with the reassurance that everything is "in its place." Wash your hands to ensure your palms are dry, and give yourself a smile in the mirror - you've got this!
4. Take a few deep breaths before you go in. This helps you enter a calm state of mind. If it suits your personality more, another method is to harness the adrenaline you feel - embrace the energy, and think of it as excitement rather than nervousness.
5. Be mindful of your speech. Avoid talking too quickly and using filler words like "um." Instead, simply allow a brief, silent pause or say, "That's a great question" while you collect your thoughts.
6. Have an interview "cheat sheet" on hand with details including the hiring manager's name, the job description and any questions you have. Check the sheet before you go in as a final review to boost your performance.
7. Give yourself a pep talk - it's scientifically proven to motivate yourself!
8. Wear something you feel GREAT in (but keep it very professional, regardless of the position or company dress code). This is an easy way to maximize your confidence and make a good first impression.
9. Sleep well and eat a nutritious meal beforehand. This may seem like common sense, but it will really help you be at the top of your game for the big day!
10. Remember: the pressure isn't all on you. The company wants to make a good impression, too! They're hoping you're the right fit as much as you are, so treat this as a conversation to determine mutual compatibility.

Best of luck!

- *The Accuro team*



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