



Interviews—Making the Gate

Preparing for the Interview

What You'll Learn in this Chapter

- preparing for interviews
- interview etiquette
- key questions to practice before your interview
- exiting an interview professionally
- following up after the interview

To make a favorable impression, your work starts before you arrive at the interview. By preparing well in advance, you'll be more confident and better able to present yourself and your skills. You want to be able to show and tell why you are the right candidate for the position.

First, know the client and position for which you're interviewing. You should be able to express:

- why you want to work there.
- what you can offer.
- what you hope to get back.
- where you best fit on a team.
- what your A-list skills are and what your B-list skills are.
- your bill rate.

Note: If you're represented by an agency, don't talk about rate with the client. Refer that discussion to the agency, it is their job to negotiate on your behalf.

Next, know your resumé. For each entry in your resumé you should be able to:

- describe it like a case study that overviews the project, the responsibilities completed, and the technologies used.
- give technical details, what you did and how you did it—know how much you contributed.

- show specific instances in which you brought value to the team, improved revenue, or increased productivity.
- describe how each experience has aligned with your goals and ambitions.

Use the following guidelines when planning what to wear to your interview:

- Dress consistently by ensuring that not only are you well-groomed, but also that your shoes are not scuffed or dirty—people always notice shoes.
- Find out in advance what the dress code is and dress a notch above that level (even for an interview with a company where everyone wears jeans and t-shirts).
- Ensure your clothes are pressed and clean.
- Avoid wearing extravagant jewelry or shocking colours.

Look at your shoes—it's the first thing people notice!

Rescheduling an Interview

You must always be open to the client's schedule for interviews as many companies set aside blocks of time to interview multiple candidates. If, however, an emergency occurs and you have to reschedule the interview, don't offer elaborate excuses or gratuitous apologies. You don't have to give personal information, this may make your potential client uncomfortable and it detracts from your professionalism. Be straightforward and confident when you ask to reschedule. Simply say, "I can't make it today, I have a personal situation I must attend to and I want to reschedule our interview."

Have an additional day or time in mind and suggest it to the client immediately. "Tell me, would tomorrow morning work for you?"

Interview Etiquette

For any interview, here are some standard behaviours:

- Arrive five to ten minutes before the interview is scheduled to start—never be late!
- Shake hands with your interviewer the way you meet and greet normally. Don't try to crush their hand or turn it the way some sales courses suggest.
- Maintain frequent eye contact when in discussion, it shows you are confident and not distracted.
- When discussing potentially negative topics, focus on the facts and the lessons you learned from previous jobs and emphasize the new challenges and opportunities you want to pursue.

For example, if you left a former position because your career path was blocked by senior personnel who relegated you to stifling tasks, focus on the project management jobs you are seeking.

- Be honest about your skills and professional experience. Don't exaggerate. If you don't know, say, "I don't know." You can even turn this to your advantage, showing your interest and concern, by saying, "I don't know, tell me how important is that to this project?"
- Never disparage previous co-workers, supervisors, or employers.

- Speak clearly. If there is a pause in the conversation, don't rush in to fill the gaps. Wait and let the other person think about what you have said and where they want to take the conversation next.
- Answer questions concisely—answer first, then elaborate.
- Don't drink, eat, or chew gum while you talk.
- Speak positively, show your optimism. Most projects have surprises along the way and an optimistic and positive attitude is an asset to any team.
- Take notes. This shows the interviewer you are interested in what they are saying, it helps you remember key points for later, and it helps you listen better by writing key points down as they are mentioned.
- Listen carefully to what the interviewer is saying and don't interrupt. If you really have something to say and the interviewer is still talking, write a quick note to mention it later.

Asking the Right Questions

See this web site
www.marshell.com

The interview isn't a one-way conversation: you are expected to ask questions. The following questions are from the 1998 edition of the *Computing, High-Tech & Telecommunications Careers Handbook* published by the Marskell Group (Publishing), Inc. Toronto. They are good general questions to ask during an interview.

- Why is this position available? If it's a result of termination, ask why a person was terminated.
- What are the two or three most important characteristics you are looking for in a candidate to satisfy this position?
- What exactly will I be doing? Would you break the position into specific functions? Would you indicate the relative importance of each function by priority?

- What are some of the common characteristics of employees that excel in this environment?
- Would you please comment on your style of management and the reporting structure?

Also, ask what the company values are and get the interviewer to give you a specific example of how its values are demonstrated. If the company's key value is honesty, a specific example in which they exercised it might be "meticulously tracking all software installed to ensure each application is licensed."

You should ask specific questions about the project and work expectations:

- What's the overall project objective?
- How large is the project team and what roles does it include?
- What kind of environment will I be working in? For example, are there tight deadlines or is some of the work completed offsite?
- What is the project timeline including milestones and deadlines?
- What is the term of the contract and what are the jobs for renewal?

Use the interview process as an information exchange session. When you ask the potential client what traits a successful candidate has, note this information for your own personal development so that even if you do not get this job, you understand the personal qualities desired by this client for future interviews.

Every person that you meet knows something that you don't; learn from them.

Practice Answering Key Interview Questions

As well as asking the right questions, you should be prepared to answer all questions put forward. Answer questions clearly, and completely.

Well before the interview, you should prepare and practice your answers. Ask at your agency for information about the client—find out about the personal and professional qualities they value. Then, get a friend to ask you the questions below and, after you've answered all of them, to tell you which answers were convincing and which need more thought and focus.

Character

- What are your short- and long-range goals and how are you preparing to achieve them?
- What are the most important rewards you expect in and from your career?
- How do you work under pressure? Give an example of a recent high-pressure event and how you handled it.

Work History

- What would your previous client say you did well on your last contract?
- What would your previous client say you did not do well on your last contract?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What recent professional accomplishments gave you the most satisfaction and why?

Skills

- What do you consider your greatest strengths and weaknesses, technically or otherwise?
- What qualifications do you have that make you stand out from your peers?

Work Expectations

- What are the key criteria you will use to evaluate your next contracting assignment?
- How would you describe the ideal position for you on a team?
- In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our team? (Do some research on the company and ask the agency to provide information about the client).

Posing your Answers

It's not only important what you say but also how you say it. Remember to answer questions with:

- **Honesty:** don't exaggerate or lie about your skills and experiences, be genuine and trustworthy.
- **Confidence:** don't make excuses for anything, even your mistakes. You are responsible for all of your past actions, keep to the facts.
- **Enthusiasm:** speak clearly and positively about your experiences.
- **Brevity:** don't ramble on—you'll lose the point you're trying to make.
- **Awareness:** if you did answer a question with a long, complex answer, ask the interviewer "Did I answer your question for you?"

*Maintain frequent, casual eye-contact with the interviewer—
don't stare, this will make you both uncomfortable.*

Exiting

Disengage from the interview as cleanly and professionally as possible. When all questions are asked, answered, and there is silence, you can tell the interview is over. Instead of straining to fill empty spaces, simply ask your client, “Is there anything else you need to know?”, then thank them for the opportunity to meet with them.

Don't fill the silences with idle chit-chat.

Before you leave, clarify what the rest of the process is and try to gauge the client's level of commitment. A good closing line is “Thank you for your time today, when can I expect to hear back from you regarding this project?”. Don't try to get chummy with the interviewer—trying to connect on a personal level after a long work-related interview is inappropriate.

Following Up

Don't expect a call back right after the interview. Every company has a process and it's likely the interviewer must confer with other people in the organization. It may take three days to one week for the client to discuss your resumé with other people and determine whether you are the right candidate. However, if you haven't heard from them after three days, call to check on your status and ask what additional actions you should take to pursue this particular project.

If you have another project offer in the wings, tell the client, and see if they want you to wait, or suggest to you to go ahead with the other offer. Say to the client, "I have another job but you're still my first choice. I need to know what the timing and commitment level looks like from your end on this project."

Don't say that you have another offer unless you really do. If you were proposed by an agency, don't call the client directly; the agency will call on your behalf. You can call the agency representing you as often as you wish—that is what they are there for.

If the client has not determined whether you are the successful candidate after one week, it's fair for you to ask them or your agency when you can expect a decision as you have to move forward with your career.

If they feel you are not the right person for the job, be professional and thank them for their consideration. Don't take it as an affront and start arguing with the client or the agency about the rightness or wrongness of their decision—ask why you were not selected, or what you could consider doing differently. Finding out what the client decision criteria were and what the chosen candidate had to offer can help in your future endeavours.

You can also use this opportunity to ask if they know someone who might require your services, if yes, ask for a referral—make your experience positive and learn from it.

If you're represented by an agency, they will find out all of the facts on your behalf, and they will also tell you what other jobs they can propose you for now that this one is no longer open.

Whenever possible, it is to your advantage to be proposed on two or three jobs at the same time.

You've learned great tips for successful interviewing, now read about what you can expect when you're offered a contract in *Signing the Contract* on page 83.

Frequently Asked Questions

- Q** Should I ask about pay? When is this appropriate?
- A** Always ask about pay rates near the end of the interview if you represent yourself directly for a project. If you work through an agency, it is unprofessional to discuss rates directly with the client, your agency should know and communicate your rates before you go to the interview.
- Q** What should I do if I can't get to the interview because I have to take my son to the doctor or have some other personal emergency?
- A** Simply phone and reschedule the interview. You don't need to disclose the reasons why.
- Q** Should I try to connect with the interviewer on a friendly/personal level?
- A** Trying to connect with the interviewer on a personal level is unprofessional.
- Q** When should I follow up after the interview? Should I wait until they call me?
- A** Follow up with the interviewer three days after the interview. If an agency proposed you, call the agency as often as you wish.
- Q** I had a personal confrontation with my previous employer, how should I discuss that?
- A** Never speak ill of previous employers or co-workers and always minimize negative experiences, focusing only the facts. For example, you might say, "We didn't agree on some key points and both thought it best if I finish my tasks and move on to a different project. We handled it in a very professional manner."

Interviewing Checklist

Before the interview, check off completed items:

- Book time for the interview
- Research the company
- Prepare interview questions
- Prepare details for each resumé entry
- Prepare and practice interview answers
- Prepare clothes to wear to the interview

After the interview, check off completed items:

- Record key points discussed in the interview
- Follow up with the client or the agency after three days

Notes