**TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWING**

***Edison Community College - Career Services Department***

Congratulations! You have been invited to a job interview. Based on your resume, your qualifications match what the employer is seeking in a candidate.

 A job interview is a two-way street. It is an opportunity for both parties to determine “fit” with the company. The interview will allow you to gain some insight about the job and the company, and enables the employer the opportunity to determine if you have the knowledge and skills (technical and soft skills) required for the job.

During an interview, an employer wants to learn more about you. Research indicates employers want to know the following:

* Can you do the job?
* Do you have a good work attitude?
* How interested are you in this kind of work?
* Will you fit into the organization?
* Why do you want to work for this organization?

When invited to a job interview, be prepared to answer these questions. How you answer these questions may determine if you get the job.

During the course of the interview, the employer will be assessing all aspects of the interview. Listed below are some negative factors frequently identified by the employer during the interview that most often lead to rejection of a candidate:

* Poor personal appearance
* A know-it-all attitude
* A lack of enthusiasm
* A lack of courtesy
* Condemnation of previous employers or co-workers
* An over emphasis on money
* Late to the interview
* Lack of preparation

A successful interview will be an indispensable step toward the fulfillment of your professional ambition. You only have one chance to establish a positive first impression with the employer. There may be several qualified applicants applying for the same job, so getting it right the first time will be critical for your success. Here are some tips to ensure a successful interview:

* Answer every question fully and honestly
* Analyze your strengths and weaknesses, know exactly what you want to say, and do not want to say

**PREPARATION FOR THE INTERVIEW**

***Preparing for the interview is important and takes significant time!***

* Know the exact location of the office where you will interview. If you have a choice, choose the first interview so that you can set the standard.
* Make a practice run to the interview site, learn where to park.
* Know the name of the person you will be interviewing with and the name of the receptionist, if possible. If you do not know the name, be sure to ask the receptionist or secretary before you go in for the interview.
* Have a list of questions neatly written or typed and ask at least two questions.
* Rehearse responses to commonly asked questions. Do not sound like a recording.
* Know your qualifications, experiences, and training for the job opening. The employer does not know them, you do.
* RESEARCH THE COMPANY. Know the products, services, policies, philosophies, competition, problems and career paths. You can find information on companies at your local library, the Chamber of Commerce, the business itself, the Internet, employees, informational interviews, job description, the organization’s mission, vision, goals, and annual report.
* Take at least two quality black pens and extra copies of your resume, references and information you may need to fill out an application. Also, take along a small notebook for note taking. Have all material by the door and ready to go.
* Gather any “show and tell” documents, manuals, projects, and articles you have written.
* DO NOT drink alcohol or smoke the day of the interview.
* DO NOT use perfume or cologne. If you must, use sparingly.
* Lay your clothes out at least one day ahead. Be sure your clothes have been freshly laundered. Men should wear a suit rather than a sports outfit, pants with a sharp crease and shoes freshly polished. Women should wear a suit or professional-looking dress, polished shoes, not sandals and not flashy shoes. Wear a bra. DRESS PROFESSIONALLY.
* Bathe, shave, have freshly trimmed hair and beard, clean fingernails, use deodorant, brush and floss your teeth and use mouthwash.

**RESEARCHING THE COMPANY**

***Sample Interview Question: Why do you want to work for our company?***

Candidate A: *“Well, ummm, (long pause)……….Well, I heard you were expanding your company and that you had good salaries and benefits. I know you are located right here in town and I do not want to travel very far because my car is an old junker. And besides, if my kids get sick, I will be close to their school.”*

You may be smiling after reading this, but this statement is not always far from the truth! Individuals who do not prepare or research before their interview may lose a position by the time they answer the first interview question. Let’s look at Candidate B.

Candidate B: *“First of all, I would like to thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. As you know, I am finishing my associate degree in Industrial Maintenance. My instructor at Edison Community College has mentioned your company several times in class telling us about your new operation in Troy and your need for several quality maintenance professionals. With my seven years of manufacturing experience in an ISO 2000 environment and my recent degree, I believe I would make an excellent addition to your maintenance team.”*

If Candidate A did his or her homework, he or she may not have lost the position after answering the first question. Before a first interview, you should attempt to collect the information listed below. Once you have conducted research, you should think about how you can incorporate the information into responses that show you are committed to supporting an organization’s mission and direction.

* Size of the organization
* Potential growth
* Annual development/growth for the last five years
* Product line or services provided
* Potential new markets, products or services
* Competition
* Organizational structure
* Geographic locations
* Number of plants, or facilities
* Recent items in the news
* People you know in the organization
* The organization’s values. Look for their mission statement

**RESEARCHING THE COMPANY (CON’T)**

Your research impresses the interviewer and lets him know that you are interested enough in the position that you did your homework ahead of time. In addition, this research will help you to decide if you want to work for this employer and in this organization. This type of information can be found by accessing the following resources:

* The Company’s website
* Company literature, the library (periodicals, magazines),
* Contact the company itself (it is quite appropriate to contact a Human Resources Office to request brochures, annual reports, recruitment or public relations literature.
* Networking with those who work at the company or within the industry
* A Google search for recent news releases

If you are interviewing with a privately held small company or organization, you will need to be more creative in your research approach. If you cannot find information using the methods recommended, try identifying employees or volunteers (for nonprofit agencies) to gather information; the Chamber of Commerce or public library may also be able to provide limited information. You may also consider talking with employees of similar organizations to gain a general perspective.

**DRESS FOR THE ORGANIZATION AND JOB**

**JOB INTERVIEW** – As a general guide, during a job interview never under dress (such as jeans and T-shirts) and possibly, overdress. The best predictor for dress success on the interview and in the job is to dress and groom like the people in the organization and the specific job that you want. If you are unsure of the dress code or style, visit the organization before the job interview, ask the Career Center for advice or when in doubt, plan to overdress.

Each career field and each organization has unique expectations about dress. For some interviews it would be perfectly acceptable to dress in khakis and a collared short sleeve shirt with coordination shoes and belt. In other fields or in other companies, a professional suit is the only option. Knowing the expectations of your field and your targeted organization is a key piece in successful job searching. Once you are on the job, you may dress like your peers. However, if you are serious about landing that job or climbing the corporate ladder, you should consider dressing like the managers.

**CLOTHING** – Quality clothes project a quality image. Start with a quality suit for job interviews and important days at work, such as your first day, to develop a good first impression. Look for sales when buying apparel, but do not buy a suit, or anything else you will wear to work, unless you really like it. If you feel good about the way you look, you will generally project a more positive self-image of confidence, which will help your career. So never buy anything you do not really like, even if it is on sale, because it is not a good deal if you do not feel good about yourself when you wear it. The Career Center can suggest how you can find quality clothes at discount prices.

**DRESS AND GROOM CONSERVATIVELY** – The latest dress fad is inappropriate in the professional business setting. You may not be taken seriously if you exhibit faddish or flashy apparel and grooming. Body piercing and tattoos are considered faddish and unprofessional. Too much jewelry is also undesirable for most environments. Keep in mind that your hair and make-up should be simple as well.

**CASUAL DRESS** – What is considered casual business dress varies. In most situations, even if the organization has a business casual dress code, you will still be expected to dress up for the interview. When in doubt, err on the side of professionalism and dress up for the interview.

If you are thinking that it is unfair to be judged by your appearance rather than for who you really are and what you can do, you are correct. However, in most organizations, your appearance will affect your career success. Taking control of your dress style will help you throughout your career.

**THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW**

* Get a good night’s rest and eat healthy prior to the interview.
* Arrive 10-15 minutes early; 30 minutes if your travel distance is long. Never enter the interview area more than 10 minutes ahead of time. If you cannot make the interview on time, call ahead, if possible.
* Never take a friend, relative, or child with you!
* Stop by the restroom to give yourself a final check in the mirror.
* DO NOT CHEW GUM!
* Approach the interview with the right positive mental attitude, no matter what has happened before the interview. Be enthusiastic and have a good ATTITUDE, but be yourself.
* Be patient while waiting. The receptionist may be taking notes.
* Greet the interviewer by their full name. DO NOT use first name unless invited to do so.
* **Smile** and be positive. It shows you have energy. It shows you are friendly.
* Introduce yourself by using your first name rather than Mr., Mrs., etc.
* Offer a firm handshake. Let the interviewer offer his/her hand first.
* Be seated only when invited.
* Relax, and keep your hands out of your pockets and in your lap. Do not put your hands or anything on the interviewer’s desk. Do not handle anything on the interviewer’s desk.
* Use eye contact. Look the interviewer in the eye in a direct, sincere fashion. It shows interest and confidence.
* Do not use slang. Use correct grammar and speak slowly.
* Avoid being critical, BE POSITIVE, especially about previous supervisors and co-workers.

**THE DAY OF THE INTERVIEW (CON’T)**

* Always be polite, to anyone you encounter.
* Speak only between 20 seconds and two minutes when answering questions. Remember, the interview is a conversation.
* Practice some interview questions with someone you can trust. Ask them to observe and provide feedback on your clarity, mannerisms, communication, eye contact, posture, etc. Take note of their feedback and practice again; you will always improve after practice!
* Stress your accomplishments.
* Answer every question fully and honestly, not just a yes or no.
* Ask questions to show interest.
* Leave a copy of your resume with the interviewer, even if you are not specifically requested to do so.
* Find out when the decision will be made and call the employer on that date.
* End the interview by saying, “Thank you for considering me. If you have further questions, I would be glad to come again. I can be reached at……” Do not overstay.
* Thank the interviewer and the receptionist. Leave the property promptly. When you are out of the building and out of view of others, you can collapse.
* Mail a thank you letter within 24 hours – always! A handwritten note is also acceptable but not as professional. An email thank you is the least-preferred method. It takes the least amount of time and may get “lost in the shuffle.”

**INTERVIEWING TIPS** – Claim It: “*I am good at….”*; Validate It: *“For example…”* ; Link It: *“To the* *company/organization.”* For example, when the interviewer asks: “Tell me about your customer service skills,” you could say something like, “I have strong customer service skills. At my current job, I am responsible for ensuring customer satisfaction and I do this by responding to and satisfying customers’ concerns. I believe that ‘XYZ’ Corporation would find these skills extremely helpful in the ‘ABC’ Department.”

**SKILLS ASSESSMENT**

Your resume won’t include ALL the skills you possess. Skills can be ***technical*** (example, Microsoft Word, Excel), or ***soft*** (example, excellent organization, interpersonal skills, etc.

It is highly recommended that you develop a list of ***ALL*** your skills. Then, you can review that list and determine the ***MOST IMPORTANT*** skills needed for the job you are interviewing for. The following will help get you started. Be sure to include all your skills!

Take a folder or portfolio and make note of these important skills and be sure you talk about them during the interview. Give specific examples (stories) about how you used the skill. Use the following guideline to help get you started on your list!

 ***HOW CAN I USE THIS***

***JOB SKILLS DESCRIBE WHAT I DID SKILL IN THE NEW JOB***

1.

2.

3.

4.

***SOFT SKILLS***  (examples: communication skills, time management, excellent attendance record, detail-oriented, learn quickly, etc.)

1.

2.

3.

4.

***OTHER TRANSFERABLE SKILLS*** (think outside the box! What have you done on other jobs that could be applied to the job you are interviewing for? As an example, if you were a server, you demonstrated customer service, communication skills, problem solving, attention to detail, multi-tasking, etc. These are all GREAT transferable skills!

1.

2.

3.

4.

**JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

**These are some of the most common questions asked at a job interview**

**Practice these with someone who you trust and respect and ask for feedback!**

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Why did you decide to apply for this position:
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. List three of your most important/proudest accomplishments.
5. What type of work environment do you prefer?
6. How are you qualified for this job?
7. How would you characterize your work style?
8. What do you know about the organization? (Shows you know something about the company – products, services, competition.)
9. Tell me about a problem you had in your last job. (Shows your analytical communication or teamwork skills.
10. How would you rate your communication skills? Describe a time when your communication skills helped a situation.
11. What else, besides your school and job experience qualifies you for this job?
12. What are the personal characteristics and qualities that you would bring to the position that would be particularly helpful in fulfilling the responsibilities of this position?
13. Do you prefer to work independently or as part of a team?
14. What appeals to you about this position and/or this company?
15. What are some aspects of your present (or most recent) position that you like?
16. What are some aspects of your present (or most recent) position that you dislike?
17. What do you see yourself doing five or ten years from now?
18. Starting with your last job, would you tell me about some of your achievements that were recognized by your superiors?
19. What are some things you would like to avoid in a job? Why?
20. What are some of the things, on your jobs, that you feel you have done particularly well?
21. What traits or qualities do you feel could be strengthened or improved?
22. What kinds of things do you feel most confident in doing? Less confident in doing?
23. What are some of the things you are either doing now or have thought about doing which are self-development activities?
24. Tell me about a time when you had work problems or stresses that were difficult for you.
25. Customers frequently create a great deal of pressure. What has been your experience in this area?
26. What types of pressures do you experience on your current job? How do you cope with these pressures?
27. Describe a time when you were under pressure to make a decision. Did you react immediately or take time in deciding what to do?

**JOB INTERVIEW QUESTIONS, (CON’T)**

1. Do you prefer to have a job in which you have well laid-out tasks and responsibilities, or one in which your work changes on a frequent basis?
2. In your current position, what types of decisions do you make without consulting your immediate supervisor?
3. What types of experiences have you had in dealing with difficult customers?
4. Describe a problem person you have had to deal with. What did you say or do?
5. What have been your experiences in dealing with general public? When have people really tried your patience?
6. What important goals have you set in the past, and how successful have you been in working toward their accomplishment?
7. How would you describe yourself?
8. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our department?
9. What do you know about our company?
10. Why do you think we should hire you?
11. What will your last supervisor tell me are your weakest areas?
12. If you were hiring someone for this job, what qualities would you look for?
13. What does the term two-way communication mean to you? When have you successfully used two-way communication?
14. Describe how you determined your priorities on your last job.
15. Describe how you schedule your time on an unusually hectic day. Give a specific example.
16. Are you a person who likes to “try new things,” or “stay with regular routines?” Give an example.
17. If we had to contact your staff from your previous position, what do you think they would say about you?
18. What would you do if your staff came to work late regularly?
19. What was your greatest working achievement?
20. Why do you want to leave your current position?

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| **LEGAL AND ILLEGAL JOB****INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**Here is a rundown of what can and what cannot be asked, based upon current laws. Interviewers in small companies may not always be aware of these laws. |
|  | These questions are legal…. | You are not required to answer these…. |
| Birthplace/Citizenship | “If hired, can you show evidence of being legally allowed to work in the U.S.” | “Where were you born?” “What is your mother’s native tongue?” |
| Sex/Family Status | May ask for name and address of parent, if candidate is a minor. | “With whom do you live?” or any questions which indicate whether the candidate is male or female. |
| Race | Almost nothing is legal, until after the candidate is hired. | “What is your racial/ethnic group?” or anything dealing with color. |
| Age | May verify that candidate meets minimum requirement such as “Are you 18 or older?” | “How old are you?” or “When did you finish high school?” |
| Military Service | May ask job-related skills acquired during military service. | Questions dealing with dates of military service and type of discharge. |
| Names | “To help check prior employment, list any other names you used.” | “What is your maiden name?” |
| National Origin | “These positions require language skills. What languages do you speak?” | “How did you acquire your language skills?” “What language did your family speak?” |
| Physical Characteristics | May require a photo only after hiring | “Please submit a recent photo with your application.” |
| Religion | May tell the candidates the hours when they would be required to work. | “Do you belong to a church?” “What is your religion?” |
| Criminal Record | “Have you ever been convicted of a felony?” | “Have you ever been arrested?” or “Have you ever been in trouble with the law?” |
| Physical Condition | “If hired you will have to pass a physical based on actual job requirements. | “What is your physical condition?” “Do you have any disabilities?” |
| Memberships | “Please list all job-related organizations to which you belong, do not need to list any which indicate your race, religion, sex, or other personal characteristics.” | “Please list all organizations to which you belong.” |

**HAVE A FEW (2 or 3) QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER**

**Generally you will be asked at the end of the interview whether you have any questions. Some of your questions may have been answered during the interview. So, be prepared!**

**Here are some suggestions:**

* What do you look for in an employee?
* Is there a training program for this position?
* What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this position?
* To whom would I report?
* What are your expectations of the person filling this position?
* Is this a new position?
* Can you tell me anything about future plans for the company that I may not have seen on your website or through my research?
* What are the specific objectives for this department this year?
* May I see a job description?
* Could I have a tour of your facility?

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