

General Interviewing Suggestions

- Be prepared to give a good feature/benefit presentation about yourself. “I have done this, this and this, and I believe this would benefit your company because I could hit the ground running with very little training, saving time and money for the company from day one.” This will set you apart from other candidates -- be sure they know what you can do for them and how it will impact their organization. Sell yourself to the interviewer, but without exaggeration or telling lies. However, be careful not to come across as arrogant.
- Some interviewers like to ask the question, "Tell me about yourself." They want to hear how you communicate, whether you're articulate, or whether you ramble. **DO NOT RAMBLE.** The employer wants to hear about your professional qualifications. What in your background will benefit their company? Pre-plan a 1-2 minute script outlining your education, career progression, current position, and where you want to go in your career. Have a short list of your high points to bring up concerning your experience, your background, and why you believe you are a great fit for this opportunity.
- Be able to speak in detail to past performance and major accomplishments which you are most proud of. Be prepared to tell the story of how those accomplishments impacted your company's bottom line (i.e. increased sales by x \$ or %, decreased expenses by x \$ or %, increased margin by x \$ or %, etc.).
- Find out as much as possible about the company: Size, scope, location of branches and offices, financial/share performance, range of products and services, etc. Have you visited their locations? The company Web site and annual report are two good sources.
- Be prepared to speak passionately about the reasons for your interest in this opportunity, and why it's different than your current job/situation. You will need to convey your reasons for wanting to *run to* their opportunity, not why you can't wait to *get out of* your current company.
- Statistics show that companies don't always hire the most qualified candidate. They hire based on fit in their company culture, chemistry and personality. Enthusiasm, passion and excitement are the biggest selling points a candidate can bring to an interview, especially if your first interview is a telephone interview. Companies feel these traits translate directly over to an individual's performance and work ethic.
- Never speak poorly about current/past employers or bosses. “If you speak poorly about them, you'll do the same to me.” Also, be prepared to speak to every job change you've made -- why you made it, how it furthered your career, etc.
- Sound upbeat, and on phone interviews, speak directly into the phone. If you've had a lousy day, put it out of your mind. Be a conversationalist, but don't interrupt. Let the interviewer finish the question before answering. **DO NOT TRY TO “TALK OVER” THE INTERVIEWER!** The interviewer should do most of the talking -- remember the 60% - 40% rule. Be descriptive; don't just answer "yes" or "no" to questions, but also avoid "over-answering." Make your answers colorful but not lengthy.
- Be sure to collect business cards so you can send a follow-up thank you note via email. If the interview is conducted via the phone, please send a thank you via email to me at b.stuesser@grnmadison.com a.s.a.p. and I will forward it to the hiring manager.

For Face-to-Face Interviews

- Arrive 10-15 minutes early -- no more (desperate), no less (disrespectful or not prepared). Get the logistics right -- make sure you've got the time, location, interviewer's name and title, and position title. Do you have emergency home and work numbers of your recruiter and company contact?
- Be clean shaven and/or well groomed, with very light cologne or perfume, and never smoke or drink coffee before an interview! Never chew gum during an interview, either.
- Wear a dark business suit -- dress one level above the part, and have your shoes shined!
- Create a positive first impression by shaking hands firmly. Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting. Maintain good eye contact with the interviewer. Remember to turn your cell phone off. Smile a lot -- people hire those whom they are comfortable being around, not necessarily those that are most qualified!
- Have several clean copies of resume for multiple interviewers

Prepare for Situational Questions

- Goal Setting: How do you set goals? How do you achieve your goals? Give a specific example of a goal you set, and the results of that goal.
- Competition: Give an example of a competitive situation that you were in, and how you handled it.
- Persuasion: How do you persuade individuals to do things the way you feel they should be done? Give specific reasoning and use facts.
- Challenges: How do you handle challenges? Give a specific challenge that you have faced in your life.
- Frustration: If you work with a co-worker that wasn't doing their job and you were frustrated by it, how would you handle the situation? Give a specific example of a time when you were frustrated.
- Team Work: Have you ever worked in an environment where teamwork really existed, and why do you think it worked? Do you prefer working with others or alone? "I'm happy working alone, when necessary. I don't need constant reassurance, but I prefer to work in a group. So much more gets accomplished as a team."
- Negative Feedback: How do you handle negative feedback?
- College Grad: What was your GPA? Could you have done better, and how would you have achieved it?

Prepare for Qualification Questions

- How do your managers, peers and subordinates perceive you collectively and separately?
- Take me through a time when you took a product or project from inception to fruition.
- Take me through a project where you had to be creative to meet the customer's need.
- Describe how you work under tight deadlines. How is that different from other times?
- How have you overcome a manager's or supervisor's resistance to an idea of yours?
- How do you motivate different personalities within your group?
- What are the most important characteristics in a job you're looking for and why?
- Why would you consider leaving your current company?
- What makes you interested in joining our company?
- How have you handled a team member who wasn't pulling their weight on a project and you were the team leader?
- If you were a new person on a team, what things would you do to gain the respect and positioning within the group?

Prepare for Politically Charged Questions

- Never say anything negative about company, boss or peers!
- What did you think of your last boss?
- How do you compare with your peers?
- Tell me about your company.
- Which qualifications do you feel make you a better candidate for this job than anyone else?

Questions Candidates Could Ask

Remember that an interview is a two-way conversation. For you, the interview has two purposes: One, to sell yourself, and two, to evaluate the position. After asking questions, the interviewer usually invites you to ask questions. By asking informed questions, you gain knowledge about the potential employer AND you also make a good impression. Select the questions that are appropriate to the situation and your comfort level. Pick 5-10 questions from this list, or come up with your own, and have them written out prior to the interview, whether a phone interview or a face-to-face interview. Asking questions shows you have a high level of interest! Also, please be sure to **take notes during the interview** -- it also shows your interest and that you possess a high degree of professionalism!

- *What immediate objectives and expectations will I face in this position?*
- *What ongoing day-to-day challenges will I encounter in this position?*
- *Who will I report to on a daily basis, and what is their background?*
- *What were the greatest strengths, abilities and/or achievements that the last person in this position possessed that led to their success, and what is the #1 strength you'd like to see in the next person?*
- *How will my accountabilities directly affect the company's short and long term goals?*
- *How has your career been enhanced by the company?*
- *What is the career growth I can expect if I excel at this position?*
- *What type of experience, education and personal characteristics do you feel are needed to excel in this position?*
- *What challenges do you see within the industry, company and/or department, and how has the company positioned itself to meet these challenges?*
- *If you were president of your company, what three things would you fight to keep the same, and what one thing would you change as soon as possible?*
- *Are any acquisitions, divestitures, or significant changes on the horizon?*
- *In your opinion, what are some of the greatest benefits that the company has to offer?*
- *What are your greatest hopes for whoever becomes a member of your team in this capacity/position?*
- *What are you most excited about with respect to your affiliation with the company?*
- *What has been your greatest surprise since joining the company?*
- *How would you describe the long term goals of the company, and how will this position affect that vision?*
- *From what you've learned about me so far, what do you feel are the most important attributes I could potentially bring to this position, and what are the areas of growth you would estimate that I would experience in my first 90 days with your company?*
- *If you decide that I could bring value to your team, what would the rest of the interviewing process consist of?*

How to Handle the Salary Question

“Your company obviously has a compensation range for this position, which is most likely based on experience and whether or not I could come in and hit the ground running. I’m sure Brian wouldn’t have brought us together if our compensation expectations weren’t in the same ballpark, and if given the opportunity to come in and impact your company the same way I’m affecting my current company, I’m sure the exchange will be fair. Of course I’d expect, as most anyone would, a salary commensurate with my experience and the position’s demands, but if my skill set and passion are what you need for this position, I’m confident salary’s not going to be an issue. I’d also love to hear more about your company culture because, quite frankly, chemistry among co-workers is really important to me, as well. Would you mind sharing a little more about company culture, at least in your experience?”

Close the Interview Strong!

Be sure to close every interview by stating your interest and asking to be considered for the next step in the process. Practice the following, or a variation thereof, several times prior to each interview, in your own words, of course! Don’t shortcut this process; employers give more consideration than you may think to potential employees that are excited about joining their team! Think about it; wouldn’t you do the same if you were in their shoes? If they are going to invest significant time and resources in interviewing you, they will need to know **at each step** that you have a high level of interest in the opportunity and their company.

“Mr./Ms. Hiring Manager, first of all, I want to thank you for your consideration and for connecting with me today -- I greatly appreciate the opportunity to explore this position with you. Second, based on everything I’ve learned about you, your company and this opportunity, I want you to know that I’m highly interested, and I’d like to be considered for the next phase in your interviewing process. Do you have any questions or concerns about me or my background that I could answer for you now that might be standing in the way of my moving to the next step? As I said, my level of interest in your company and this position is very high; when will the next interview be?”

Another Potential Close

When you sense the conversation is ending, be proactive and ask “your version” of the following question: *“I know you are busy, and there is only so much we can cover on the phone. Based on our discussion today, I wanted to let you know that I would love the opportunity to meet with you in person. I have my schedule for next week in front of me; would it be possible to discuss next steps now?”* Always end the conversation knowing what the next step will be.

The Final Step!

After you have closed for the next step in the process, if you haven’t already done so, please remember to get the interviewer’s email address or business card and email a “Thank You” letter as soon as possible. Getting your name back in front of the interviewer is crucial. Also, call your recruiter with feedback from the interview immediately after you are done. They will most likely be speaking with the hiring manager shortly after completion of your interview to get their feedback, and one of the first topics that will be discussed is your level of interest and ability to follow-up, especially if you will potentially be dealing with their clients. This is for your benefit, not necessarily for your convenience.