

# Interviewing

## Interviewing Savvy

- **Meeting of two (or more) face-to-face to discuss employment**
- **No set recipe for a successful interview, but the objectives are:**
  - To elaborate resume information
  - To supply info NOT on resume (personality, communication skills, general “fit”)
  - To enable you to gain additional info on the employer

## Types of Interviews

### Screening

- general
- on-campus
- phone interview
- eliminates unqualified candidates

### Selection

- longer, more thorough
- day-long, see about 3-5 people
- identify more qualified

## Getting Ready...

- **Who gets the job?**
  - most qualified-*no*
  - best dressed-*no*
  - best interviewee-*YES*

## Know Yourself

- **Clearly define your goals *before* the interview**
- **What can't you live without in a position?**
  - location (city, suburb, region of country)
  - distance drive from family
  - salary vs. cost-of-living
  - small/large staff
  - culture of organization
  - travel required

## Know The Organization

**Most company information can be found using the internet. If you cannot find the company on the World Wide Web, see if the Career Services office has any information or you can call the company directly and request some company literature be sent to you.**

- The function and size of the organization in terms of sales and employees
- Key people in the organization
- Organizational structure of the company

- The potential for expansion or growth
- The products or services provided
- Typical salary ranges for your desired position
- Geographical locations
- Research or practical emphasis
- Career advancement possibilities
- Opportunities for training or further education
- Stability of the financial condition or backing
- Latest news reports on the company or on local or national news that affects the company

### **What To Wear**

- SUIT, SUIT, SUIT
- Employer can assume this is the best you'll ever look
- Conservative
- Smell good, clean. Your scent should leave the room when you do

### **Upon Your Arrival**

- Get there early-read company materials while you wait
- Treat receptionist with respect
- Introductions
  - smile :-)
  - firm handshake
  - eye contact
  - use names

### **What To Bring**

- Extra copies of resume
- Transcript
- List of references
- Pen and paper to use *FOLLOWING* the interview for notes
- A list of well thought out questions you have for the interviewer so you are prepared when they ask you if you have any questions for them.

### **Responding To Questions**

- Answer as directly as possible
- Honestly
- Listen to what is being asked
- Be yourself, focus on positive qualities
- Never apologize for your lack of anything
- Back up everything you say with examples
- If you talk quickly, count to 3 before answering questions right away.
- Take a couple seconds to think about what you are going to say so your response is accurate and appropriate.
- Use body language to show interest. Smile, nod, give nonverbal feedback

## **Practice**

- Articulate and natural; no canned answers
- Know your general strengths; Three things you do well

Back up EVERYTHING with examples

Mock Interview (Set up an appointment for a mock interview with Career Development)

## **Two Minute Commercial**

- **Advertisement of yourself**  
Take about 3 minutes to come up with one  
Practice commercial on friends and family  
Practice answering questions

## **What Employers Seek...**

- Ability to assume responsibility
- Initiative, drive, resourcefulness
- Nice personal appearance
- Interpersonal Skills
- Oral Communication
- Confidence, self-reliance
- Interest in job
- Leadership
- Written Communication
- Entrepreneurial spirit
- Need for advancement
- Computer Literacy
- Willingness to work hard
- Motivation
- Ability to handle stress
- Flexibility
- Self-discipline
- Personality
- Organizational skills
- Creativity
- Job-related experience
- Defined career goals
- Good GPA
- Planning skills

## **Questioning The Interviewer**

- You will be evaluated on the questions you ask
- Never ask about salary or benefits until they bring it up or a job offer exists
- Avoid asking questions available in company literature
- End with this: "What is your time-line for filling the position?"
- You may also want to come to the interview prepared with a list of questions you would like to ask.
- See samples

## **After The Interview**

- **Always send a thank you letter (see samples)**  
Reiterate your skills  
Mention something you may have forgotten or hadn't had the chance to speak about  
Handwritten on nice note cards  
Typewritten on letterhead
- **Send to all those with whom you met**

## **Evaluating Your Interview**

- **If you're feeling down about the interview**

Think of how you could have answered the questions differently

Remember, practice makes perfect

Focus on something else

## **Tips**

- Don't talk too much
- Follow-up in a reasonable manner
- Watch nervous mannerisms
- Be on time
- Wear a suit!!
- Be friendly and enthusiastic

## **Seven Deadly Interview Sins**

A lack of enthusiasm

Unprofessional behavior

Poor research prior to interviews

Lying to employers

A lack of direction

Weak communication skills

Failure to sell yourself

## **Handling Insensitive Questions**

### **There are 5 categories of questions that you'll be asked in an interview:**

Tell me about yourself.

Why do you want to work here?

What's wrong with you, anyway? (Sensitive questions)

What are your salary requirements? (Salary negotiations)

Don't call us, we'll call you-or how should I follow up this interview?

Knowing which category of question you're being asked will tell you the right way to answer it. There is a specific strategy for answering each of the 5 types of questions.

### **How to answer sensitive (and sometimes illegal) questions:**

1. Listen carefully to the question, understand it; ask for clarification if needed.
2. Take time to think about an answer.
3. Answer the question in a brief, POSITIVE manner.
4. REFOCUS the interview on skills/job-match.

The fourth step is the one that is most important. You need to get off the topic you don't want, and get on the ones you do.

## **EXAMPLES:**

Are you gay?

Are you married?

Have you ever been arrested?

What are your family plans?

How old are you (or when did you graduate from high school)?

Where do you go to church?

## **In terms of the Are you Gay? Question and how to answer it:**

### **1. Listen, Clarify.**

“That’s a very unusual question, what makes you ask?”

“I’m sure you don’t plan to discriminate in hiring for this position; is that question related to do this job or is it personal curiosity?”

“People often ask me that-I think it is the timbre in my voice, or something-may I ask you if this has any bearing on whether I can handle this job for you?”

“Y’know, sometimes people want to know that gay-stuff because they’re worried about health (like AIDS) or work relationships (Like sexual harassment, or bashing). Are any of these concerns for you? Or do you have any other concerns about someone’s personal lifestyle?”

### **2. Take time to think**

A. You probably wouldn’t have to “think about” the response here except to come up with an appropriate Step-1 clarification response as about. But on other sensitive questions, like, “Tell me about a disappointment and how you handled it,” you may wish to say, “ That’s a great questions, I’m going to take a moment to think about it.”

### **3. Answer POSITIVELY**

“That question seems like it is in the personal category, and I can tell you that I am very satisfied in my personal life-including my sexual lifestyle, my religious beliefs, my interests, goals and values. However, I wouldn’t want to be excluded from a job because I wasn’t gay; and I wouldn’t want to be excluded because I was gay.” GO TO PART FOUR-notice the segue.

### **4. Refocus the interview. This usually means ask a question; often the question can arise naturally out of the response to the sensitive questions**

(following the “I’m satisfied” response) “ Tell me, what is the work environment here like-I mean people who are generally satisfied with their lives are easy to work with; complainers and whiners aren’t. How would you describe the environment here?”

(following the “yes-no concerns”) “I once worked in sales where I sold services to all sorts of people. What are the most important human relations skills you want in someone for this job?”

The strategy in the 1-2-3-4 step process is to uncover, identify, and allay the fear (sensitive questions arise out of a fear that the interviewer has), then refocus the interview on the job, the requirements, your background, your skills, the environment, the fit, etc. by asking a question that redirects the interview.

The place most people fail on the continuum is step 4. They forget to refocus the interview and so they keep discussing the topic they don't want to talk about. This isn't likely in the "are you gay" questions, but it is in "Why were you let go from your last job," and "Were you ever fired?" and "Isn't this a career change?" and "You seem a bit young to do this work." etc.

### **Mastering the Phone Interview**

- Have a copy of the job description in front of you.
- Keep a log of companies and job titles you applied for handy in case you are called unexpectedly.
- Dress as if you were going there for the interview in person. This will affect your attitude and you will come across more professional.
- Answer the phone professionally. Also be sure your answering machine greeting is professional sounding.
- To conclude the phone interview state, "Thank you for taking the time to speak with me about this opportunity. I'm sure I would be a good fit for the position."
- Don't eat, drink, or chew gum during the interview.
- Don't ever put a recruiter on hold or call waiting.
- Don't have music on in the background or other distractions such as typing.
- If a recruiter calls unexpectedly and you are not prepared, generally they will ask if 'now is a good time.' To stall say, "I'm actually on my way out the door to class. I'm very interested in talking with you about this position. Can I arrange a time to call you back this afternoon?"
- Stand up while you are talking. You will breathe more deeply and your voice will sound fuller.
- Smile- an interviewer can "hear" your smile in your voice.
- Listen extra carefully- It is okay to ask them to repeat the question or to restate it by saying "I understand that you are asking me \_\_\_\_\_. Is that correct?"
- Keep your answers less than 90 seconds long.
- Vary the pitch or tone of your voice more than you normally would. Higher pitches communicate excitement, agreement, or enthusiasm. Lower pitches show you are about to make an important point.
- Do not discuss salary over the phone.

## **Twenty-five Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions**

### **1. Tell me about yourself.**

Do not get rattled by this question and do not go into your life story. Think of the qualities that employers look for: Do you have an example of how you demonstrated some of these qualities? If you do, then state that. If that doesn't work for you, then qualify the question. Ask "What area of my background would be most relevant to you?" and take it from there.

### **2. Can you work under pressure?**

Don't just give a yes or no answer; elaborate. Explain why.

### **3. Describe the relationship that should exist between a supervisor and those reporting to that supervisor?**

Since this is not a behavioral question meaning it isn't asking about what you have experienced before, answer it thinking of what you envision as being the relationship between supervisor/supervisee. Don't just make it up. Think about why you would want a supervisor to be supportive or hands-off or a mentor or give autonomy, etc. Be realistic in thinking about whether or not your potential supervisor is asking the question and what his or her style seems to be now. This is a good question to ask of him or her, too.

### **4. What are three of your strengths?**

Isolate high points in your background. Always back your answers with specific examples. You do have at least three strengths. Your biggest mistake here is to sell yourself short!

### **5. What aren't you good at?**

This is a direct invitation to put your head in a noose. Decline the invitation. There are three ways to approach this question. If there is a minor part of the job about which you lack knowledge but will gain it quickly, use that. Be careful using this one. Put the weakness in the past. You had it once, but now you are over it. Design the answer so that your weakness is ultimately a positive. This one is your best move.

### **6. Why and how did you choose the career for which you are preparing?**

This question tries to examine your reasoning processes. The way to tackle this question is to focus on the practical. Also, an employer may be able to tell whether or not you enjoy your field. Enthusiasm is important.

### **7. What do you know about our company?**

You can not answer this without researching the company. Find out as much as you can, including products, size, income, reputation, image, management talent, people,

skills, history and philosophy. If you did your research, just tell them what you read. Career Services has a separate handout with information on how to research a company.

**8. Will you relocate? Are you willing to travel?**

Be honest here. You may need to ask questions about what type, how much, and to where you would be relocating or traveling. Be as flexible as you can. Remember, though, if you aren't willing to do this, don't accept the position if offered. A bad "fit" is the number one reason for leaving a position.

**9. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?**

Be honest here, too. But also be professional and career-oriented. Talk in terms of values such as: helping others, interacting with many different people, making tough decisions, having a variety of responsibilities, having the opportunity for advancement, being recognized for your contributions, an opportunity to use your skills, making a difference in peoples' lives, etc. Stay away from those more egocentric reasons such as pays well, great vacation and benefits package, fun social atmosphere, easy commute, cool uniform.

**10. In which past positions have you been most interested? Why?**

Talk about the most career-related position you can. If you really loved organizing the last homecoming as a student leader, talk about that experience and the skills you used, relating it to your current field. If you loved planting flowers for your grandmother and you're seeking an accounting position, the employer may wonder why you're not pursuing a career as a green thumb.

**11. Where do you see yourself in five years?**

Employers want to see that you are thinking about the future. A good way to answer is to identify yourself with the profession you want to get into.

**12. How are you preparing yourself to achieve your goals (getting you to where you see yourself in five years)?**

This question focuses on your reality of having attainable goals and the motivation to achieve them. Give examples of what you're doing to get you closer to those goals.

**13. Tell me about a difficult situation and how you dealt with it.**

Talk about a work-related situation, if possible. Avoid any personal stories of past relationship breakups. However, some stories of personal struggle, when relayed carefully without too much detail, may be helpful in showing your determination and ability to "pull yourself up by your bootstraps".

**14. Would you handle that same situation differently now? If so, how?**

Honestly talk about how, through this experience, you've gained some new tools or skills with which you might react differently in the same situation again. Sometimes this may even be a change in how you reacted to the difficulty of the situation.

**15. Tell me about a time when you gave excellent customer service.**

This should be a story of going above-and-beyond to assist someone.

**16. Tell me about a time when you were most proud.**

Again, try to keep it career-related. Make sure you are proud because of something you accomplished rather than being proud of someone or something else of which you had no contribution.

**17. How have your college experiences prepared you for a career?**

Talk about a couple of concrete skills you have learned which will be of benefit to you in your position.

**18. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?**

Again, be honest here. Think about any compliments you have gotten on projects or activities. Don't just tell characteristics, but include examples of why friends or professors would describe you that way.

**19. How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?**

Of course, be honest. Think about any compliments you have gotten on projects or activities. Don't just tell characteristics, but include examples of why friends or professors would describe you that way.

**20. Why should I hire you?**

This is where you should really sell yourself. Highlight areas from your background that relate to the company's needs. Recap the interviewer's description of the job, matching it with your skills.

**21. What unique experience or qualifications separate you from other candidates?**

**22. What are the best and worst aspects of your previous job?**

**23. What motivates you? How do you motivate others?**

**24. What are your salary requirements?**

**25. Describe your ideal job and /or boss.**

### **Additional Questions:**

- 1. Why do you want this job?**
- 2. What are your qualifications?**
- 3. Social agencies are often called inefficient. Why? What are the factors?**
- 4. How do you prioritize your duties?**
- 5. Tell us about a situation in which you confronted your supervisor.**
- 6. How about a situation in which you were in conflict with a co-worker?**
- 7. A situation in which you went above and beyond the call of duty?**
- 8. Give two examples of projects you worked on.**
- 9. How do you acclimate yourself to a new job?**
- 10. What makes you stand out from the other candidates?**
- 11. Tell us about yourself.**
- 12. What are your strengths and weaknesses?**
- 13. What attracted you to X?**
- 14. Tell us about your experience at X agency/company.**
- 15. Are you comfortable working in a team? What role do you usually take? How do you lead when you are leader of a team?**
- 16. A Legislator (etc...) calls and wants to know the cost per student at the UW. You look and find two separate figures in your files. What do you do?**
- 17. Give us an example of an issue you analyzed and the steps you went through to analyze it.**
- 18. What factors do you look at when examining the impact of pending legislation?**
- 19. Do you prefer quantitative or qualitative analysis?**
- 20. What are some of the arguments you could use to convince X of Y?**
- 21. Where do you see yourself in 5 years?**
- 22. How are your communication skills?**
- 23. Tell me about a project you started from scratch.**
- 24. A Legislative staff member/Legislator/Agency Secretary wants X and you don't have it. What do you do?**
- 25. What assumptions do you make when completing a fiscal estimate?**
- 26. How do you organize your day?**
- 27. How would you go about getting information from a department head?  
Follow Up Question: What if they are not cooperating?**
- 30. What is the most difficult decision you have made?**
- 31. What do you think are the four most important policy issues in (Wisconsin)?**

### **Candidates must ask questions, too**

If you are serious about the job you are interviewing for, there are many questions to which you need to know the answers before you accept an offer. Your interviewer will surely cover some of your questions, but by asking pertinent questions you will show your interviewer that you do understand fundamental issues relating to the business. You should have several questions in mind before you arrive for your interview. The following 20 questions should give you a good start.

## **Questions to Ask Employers**

1. Does your company provide any financial assistance for further education?
2. How often are performance reviews given?
3. Are salary adjustments geared to the cost of living or job performance?
4. What does a typical day look like in this position and/or department?
5. What kinds of assignments might I expect the first six months on the job?
6. What products (or services) are in the development stage now?
7. What are the organization's short term and long term goals?
8. What are your growth projections for the next year?
9. Is this a new position or am I replacing someone?
10. To whom would I be reporting?
11. What type of training is available for new employees? For long-standing employees?
12. What skills are especially important for someone in this position?
13. Is there a lot of team/project work?
14. What are some issues that this department is facing?
15. Aside from the position description, what are some of the "other" expectations of this position?
16. How active is the supervisor in regional or national associations?
17. How does the supervisor support and promote professional growth and development?
18. In what areas would I experience a high level of autonomy? strict supervision?
19. Describe some ways in which the supervisor provides both positive and negative feedback?
20. How does the staff interact on an informal level? staff retreats? socials?