Career Central™ Advice

Interviews: To-Do Tips

"You hit home runs not by chance but by preparation." — Roger Maris

The right attitude, the right action

Congratulations! You made it past the cover letter and résumé gauntlet and have landed an interview with the company of your choice. What could go wrong? Answer: Plenty.

Relax. You've done everything right up till now. Plus, you know the basics: What to wear; how to greet; saying thank you. Now focus on these interview tips to stand out from the competition.

Pre-interview to-do's

Practice and preparation. Making the cut leaves some job seekers so excited that they overlook the importance of practicing and reviewing answers to potential interview questions. Big mistake. Preparation is key: Practice, practice, practice out loud, even video yourself to see how you move, until you feel confident and it feels natural.

Do your homework. Research the company, job position, and interviewer so you know what you're talking about and asking for. Empower yourself: Read annual reports, news releases, Google the firm. Inquire if it will be a one-on-one or panel interview. Don't be caught off guard.

Proper contact. Create a dedicated email address for career/job search-related contacts. End phone out-going messages with a "Thank you."

Know your worth. Research the average salary range so you can respond intelligently when the interviewer raises the topic of salary and benefits. Expect a 5% margin for negotiating.

The night before. Lay out your interview clothes and make sure everything is pressed and polished; ladies, bring an extra pair of panty hose. Pack only relevant items in your portfolio or briefcase: extra copies of your résumé in a stiff blue folder; pad and pen; references, if requested; business cards, if available. A sheet with previous employer contact info is helpful if you're filling out an application. Get plenty of rest.

Be on time! Have directions. Do a dry run, if necessary, to familiarize yourself with travel time and road conditions; scout out parking to avoid additional stress. Arrive 15-30 minutes early to give yourself time to gather your thoughts. DON'T BE LATE -- it's a killer.

The Big Day

Eat something. You should be doing the talking, not your stomach.

Watch your wait. Magazines you select while waiting can reveal your personal preferences, information that may affect the hiring decision. Instead, quietly gather your thoughts, review your answers, or read your own material.

Cell block. Turn off your cell phone.

Two-way traffic. The exchange should be a conversation. However, the interviewer is not your friend, so keep the interchange professional and watch what you divulge; answer when asked.

Communicate. Be clear about what you expect to gain if hired so that you can clearly articulate your goals and contributions to the company.

Give attention, get attention. Focus on the interviewers needs, not your own; get attention by giving it; emphasize what you can do for the company.

Back it up. Be quantitative: Give dates, examples, figures to support your points.

Manners matter. Be polite with everyone, including the receptionist. Be honest, positive, and enthusiastic even when discussing your weaknesses.

Bow out. Regardless of how things go, conclude with a sincere thank you, a firm handshake, and a gracious smile. Maintain a professional attitude even after you've left the premises; you never know who may be watching. And be sure to send the recruiter a written thank you on quality matching stationery within two days.

© 2012 College Central Network, Inc. All rights reserved.

CAREER ADVICE CAREER CENTRAL ™

in a nutshell:

Be positive! A successful interview is within your power. Follow these tips:

- **Practice, practice, practice**
- **Do your research, know your material**
- **Be rested, well groomed, and on time**
- **Focus on the company's needs**
- **Be polite and respectful**
- **Stay brief, relevant, and concise**
- **Listen and communicate**
- **Be gracious. Say and send a thank you**

You've made it this far. Focus on the details and you'll ace that interview.