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Do your homework

The one thing employers can't stand is someone who turns up for interview without researching their company on their website and in any published documents such as annual reports and accounts. If you can't give good answers to the following questions, you might as well not bother turning up: "What do you know about us?" or "What research have you done?"

Read the job description

If there is one! Admittedly, some employers are guilty of not producing job descriptions, but if there is one, read it carefully. Most companies put job descriptions and adverts together carefully. Think about the tasks and responsibilities listed and then make a list of examples of achievements in your past (work and non-work) that prove your ability to do those tasks, even if you haven't done them before yourself.

Know who you're meeting

Make sure you know who you will be meeting (it may be more than one person), their job titles and their relevance to the role you have applied for.

Dress code

Like it or not, books are judged by their cover! Dress smartly for the interview. Be conservative. Dark tailored suits, smart shirts/blouses and smart shoes are advisable. If wearing a tie, again keep it conservative - novelty ties and socks should be avoided! We remember well one person who turned up in a black suit, black shirt and black tie and another in a big old jumper with holes in. They were both wasting their time.

Read your own cv

Don't just read the job description. Your CV is a great source of information and questions for interviewers. So, give careful thought to the questions which you may be asked. You will be expected to explain:

- why your experience is relevant
- why you are interested in the role
- why you are looking to leave your current job
- why you left previous jobs
- what your ambitions are; and
- what you are like as a person (your strengths and weaknesses, how other colleagues or friends would describe you, how you like to be managed and, if appropriate, what your management style is...etc)

Show that you're interested

Be ready to ask the interviewer questions about the company / the role / the working culture / career opportunities etc. Also, this is your chance to get the employer to sell the opportunity to you. It's a good idea to have questions written down in advance and to take notes with you to ensure you don't forget anything.

Listen carefully

Listen to the questions carefully. They are being asked for a reason. Interviewers get very frustrated if people don't understand why they are being asked a particular question and if they waffle on about all sorts of irrelevant stuff.

Close the sale

Don't forget, you are selling yourself. At the end of the interview, don't be afraid to express your enthusiasm for the position or ask what the next stage in the recruitment process will be / when you can expect to hear more.

Competency based interviews

Competency based interviewing is extremely common nowadays. These interviews focus on 'core-skills' - the specifics skills, knowledge or behaviours needed to succeed in the job.

The best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. The interviewer is looking for specific, solid evidence that you have the competencies required. In other words, you need to be ready with examples to prove yourself.

Some general tips:

- DON'T give general examples
- DO give for specific examples
- Examples from personal life, as well as work, are perfectly acceptable.

Typical competencies

- Drive for results
- Planning and organisation
- Teamwork
- Sales ability / Persuasiveness
- Customer service

Others include:

- Self development / ability to learn
- Change orientation / flexibility / stress tolerance
- Problem solving / initiative
- Business acumen
- Presentation skills

How should you prepare?

Spend some time reflecting on previous experience, whether it be employment, academic or from another source such as running a club or charity work. Think about your achievements and examples where you performed well or that have provided you with important learning opportunities. If you can, give relevant numbers such as money saved, profits made, people managed, meeting budgets, targets achieved, timeframes met, etc. If you are using examples from outside work, make sure they are relevant to your workplace skills and abilities.

When talking about these experiences it may prove helpful to both yourself and you assessors if you adopt the STAR format - a simple, effective way of organising your thoughts:

S - Situation or

T - Task

A - Action you took

R - Result

Focus on "you"

Try to resist the temptation to talk in terms of 'we' and 'us'. What did you achieve?

And finally...

Competency based interviews are designed to show the interviewer(s) how you can fulfill the job in question. The prime concern is to find out as much as possible about your qualities. You can bring notes with you to your interview and will be encouraged to take time to consider your answers before giving them. Don't be afraid to go back to previous questions if you remember a point you feel is relevant.

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