

# HOW **2** guide: *Effective Interviewing*

The selection process for any job culminates in the interview process. This is typically where the hiring decision is made, and is, therefore, the best opportunity for candidates to sell themselves. Unfortunately, and paradoxically, interviewing appears to be the least understood and least developed skill for most job seekers. One of the most important parts of the interview preparation process is to be ready to answer a multitude of questions about yourself and your qualifications. Before we get to the questions though, here are some other helpful tips to get you ready:

Thoroughly research the employer. Go to the company website and learn as much as you can about the company, its history, culture, and performance. Become knowledgeable about the industry in which this company operates.

Always wear a suit to an interview, even if the people who work at the organization are not wearing suits and the job for which you are interviewing doesn't require it. Remember, the people there already have the job...you don't.

Arrive 5 to 10 minutes early so you can relax and compose yourself prior to the interview. Make sure you know EXACTLY how get to your interview location. Get directions from MapQuest and plan extra time for unexpected traffic. If possible, drive the route a few days before your interview. If you want to, arrive a half hour early and wait in your car, reviewing your notes.

Carry your materials in a professional looking portfolio, folder, or briefcase.

Send a thank you note (or email if time is limited) to all you interview with. You may choose to do both.

OK, now on to the questions. There are hundreds of questions that interviewers can ask, but here are some basic ones you need to know cold. Write down your answers and practice saying them! Rehearse your answers by yourself, have a friend ask you interview questions, or schedule a mock interview with the Career Center. When it comes time for the interview, you want to sound natural and confident.

## **Personal**

Tell me about yourself.

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths?

Describe one of your accomplishments.

What is a weakness or area you need to improve in?

How do you determine or evaluate success?

Where do you see yourself in five years? Ten years?

## **Job/Company**

Tell us what you know about our company and why do you want to work for us?

How does this job fit into your career goals?

Why are you the best candidate for this position?

## **Education**

Why did you choose your major?

In what campus activities did you participate? Were you in a leadership role?

Give me an example of a school project you have completed and take me through the steps you used to complete it.

What were your favorite classes? Which were the most challenging for you?

### Experience/Knowledge of the field

*These will be some of the most important questions to answer effectively as they will be trying to learn more about your work-related skills and abilities to determine whether you are a good fit for the position. Many of the questions will be specific to the job function or field you are pursuing, whether it is nursing, social work, accounting, education, etc.. However, here are some general questions to prepare for.*

Describe your job-related skills and experience and how they relate to this position.

What have you learned most from some of the jobs you have held?

What did you enjoy most/least about your last job?

How do you think a former supervisor would describe your work?

Tell me about a work situation that really challenged you. How did you meet the challenge? \*

Describe a time you had to deal with conflict in a group situation? \*

Give me an example of your ability to manage or supervise others. \*

Describe a situation in which you had to deal with a very upset customer or co-worker. \*

Give me an example of a time you showed initiative. \*

### Behavior Based Interview Questions

Some employers believe that the best predictor of future behavior is past behavior. In behavior based interviews, you will be asked to give examples or stories to provide evidence that you have the qualifications required for the position. The questions above noted with an \* are behavior based questions. Success in behavior based interviews requires preparation and practice. You must be able to recall many experiences quickly, select the most appropriate one, and then describe it effectively. Create a list of 15-20 specific experiences that demonstrate a variety of your skills and abilities. Draw upon your college experiences, academic and extracurricular; volunteer and works experiences, and when appropriate, personal experiences.

When answering behavior based questions, be very specific and make certain to answer the question completely. One way to do this is to follow the **STAR** acronym in planning and presenting your answers.

#### **Situation or Task**

Describe the situation that you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. Take about 15 – 20 seconds for this part.

#### **Action**

Keep the focus on you and the actions YOU took. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did - not the efforts of the team. Don't explain what you *might* do, describe what you actually did. This is the most important part of your answer, so spend at least 45 - 60 seconds on this part.

#### **Results**

How did the situation end? What happened? What did you accomplish? It should obviously be a "happy" ending. Wrap it up in 10 – 15 seconds.

### Questions to Ask Employers

Interviewers will expect that you will have some questions. Typically, your questions should not deal with salary, compensation, benefits, vacation time, etc. You are trying to sell yourself. If you are offered the position, there will be ample time to discuss and negotiate these items. You are in no position to negotiate until you are offered the job!

What are the expectations for the person in this position for the first 3 months, 6 months, or year?

What major challenges and opportunities are facing the company?

What are the company's short and long term goals?

What is the advancement potential within the company?

Who does this position report to and how is the department structured?

What is the next step in the interview process and what is your timeline?