



# THE COMPLETE JOB INTERVIEW GUIDE

*"how to blitz the interview and the competition. How to prepare, plan and practice for a job interview – respond to those commonly asked interview questions – and create a lasting impression on the interview panel."*

## PREPARE for the interview

**Well done! You have secured an interview for a position that you would dearly love to get, that is brilliant!** But before you go thinking you have the job in the bag, or, like most people are nervous about the prospect of undertaking an interview and/or talking about yourself – let us consider a few things first:

- **On paper you look good**, and your referees have validated that you would be a good hire, otherwise you would not have been shortlisted for the interview;
- **You have been selected along with a number of other short-listed candidates** and you do not know whether this is 4 others or 12 others – if it is the latter, that's a fair number of other candidates you have to get past, but generally around 4 – 8 candidates are interviewed in the first round and it's more often the lower numbers; and importantly;
- **All of these candidates will have the same skill-set as you and probably similar qualifications and similar experience** – the interview panel knows that, and you should too. So, essentially, because of this, what the interview panel will be looking for is how well you would fit in with the team you would be working with and the organisation overall.

Considering all of the above, to stand out from the other candidates, you need to prepare for the interview well in advance of the scheduled date if possible. If you do not have the luxury of a fair amount of advance notice, you should have already prepared your strategy as soon as you started sending out job applications (or before).

**Preparing for an interview involves a number of key activities before you start submitting job applications including:**

- **Contacting your referees** and advising them that you are currently seeking new career opportunities and that they may be contacted by prospective hiring organisations;
- **Making sure that your online presence is not going to haunt you when you are applying for positions** – that means going through your social media sites such as Facebook and deleting any posts and/or images that may make a hiring organisation re-consider calling you in for an interview; and
- **Maintaining good relationships with your current Boss and co-workers.** This is very important as many people, having made up their mind to change jobs simply drop the ball at their current workplace and take the foot off the accelerator – if you do so, this will be remembered come the time your current or former boss is asked for a referee testimonial on not only your skills and abilities, but also how you contributed to a positive workplace environment.

## **PLAN for the interview**

**When planning for a specific interview (and every interview), do your research on the organisation.** This includes viewing every page of the interviewing organisation's website for starters to identify what their products/services are; what market sectors they service/provide products to; what their history is; what locations they operate from (national and/or

international); their core values and their mission statement; their key personnel (such of which may be participating on the interview panel); and visiting their other online presence – this could include social media sites such as Facebook, product and/or service reviews, and even information on key personnel of the organisation such as is available via LinkedIn profiles as well as information on recently awarded or forthcoming projects.

**You will need the above information to answer two common interview questions which are often asked:**

***‘what do you know about our organisation?’*** – and – ***‘why should we hire you?’***

Both of these questions involve having knowledge of the organisation. The first question is obvious – they want to know that you have taken the time to research their organisation which evidences you are enthusiastic about joining the organisation and not merely seeking a ‘job’.

The second question can also be answered more readily if you have information about the organisation, i.e. *‘I’m sure that I would be a good fit for the organisational culture as I note from your website that the company is very customer-focused and so am I – in my current job for example, I always take the time to ensure every customer has received the best service experience possible and that I have provided them with the full information they required’*. This is just one example, but you get the picture.

If you cannot answer these questions appropriately, it is highly likely the interview panel will make up their mind there and then that you would not be a good organisational fit and that you appear to be looking for a ‘job’ rather than a career with their organisation. It is important

to remember that it costs hiring organisations a lot of time and money to onboard and upskill new hires and they therefore have to be convinced that it is worth putting you in the advertised position.

## Common Interview Questions

The questions you will be asked during a job interview will vary depending upon the role. But generally, as the panel have already read the resume and application you originally submitted, the purpose of these questions will be to establish **how well you will fit in with the organisational environment**. So therefore, you can expect to be asked questions such as these and should work on your responses before the interview:

- *'Tell me about yourself?'*
- *'What do you like best about your current job?'*
- *'What do you like least about your current job?'*
- *'What motivated you to apply for this position and work with our organisation?'*
- *'Tell me about a time when you had a particularly difficult or challenging customer'*
- *'Tell me about a time you had difficulties with a team member or colleague'*
- *'Do you have any questions?'*

### 'Tell me about yourself'

This is often asked at the start of an interview– why? Well, first of all, it is an ice-breaker and not only starts the conversation, but it also allows the interviewing panel to check out your verbal/conversation skills and how you clearly/succinctly convey information. Note that the

interview panel are not seeking information on your marital status or what sports you follow – they are seeking information on your career progress to date.

You should prepare for this by preparing a brief summary of your career progression before the interview – for example, it may be that you initially started out in a totally unrelated profession/industry sector, i.e. you are now an IT Senior Systems Analyst but commenced as a telemarketer or in customer service or in aged care services or as a Crew Member at MacDonald’s – whatever – it is all about conveying how you got to this point in your career and what the motivation was behind it – but remember, keep it brief and also remember that even if you worked as a Crew Member for MacDonald’s when you were at school every position has transferable skills.

In summarising your current or most recent position, you should include: What the core purpose of your role was in each of these position – in other words, why you were hired and make a point of any core activities that relate to the position you are now being interviewed for and any (meaningful) career achievements. Don’t skip overseas experience – experience is experience.

### **‘Why do you want to leave your current employer?’**

If you asked this question, never be derogative about your current employer and/or your immediate boss. If you do so, it will not impress the panel and will probably cost you the opportunity to achieve the job. Some appropriate responses you could consider are:

- *'I am looking for new career challenges and there aren't any upcoming opportunities with Company ABC'*
- *'I feel that there are very limited opportunities for me to advance my career – I've been in the same role for 6-years now and there really aren't any higher duty positions available for me at this time or in the foreseeable future'*
- *'I've just completed this (name of training or qualification) and really want to advance my career in that direction now'*
- *'To be totally honest, the one and a half hour commute each way was having an effect on my personal life, I want to spend more time with my family'*
- *'To tell you the truth, I wasn't really looking for a new position, I just saw your advertisement and thought it would be a great opportunity to really develop my career with a progressive organisation'.*

## **Not currently employed**

You may not be currently employed, and this is unfortunately the situation with many individuals today following the impact of both COVID-19 and the transition to both online shopping and online services rather than bricks and mortar establishments. Furthermore, COVID-19 has seen a transition from conventional office-bound positions to work-from-home situations from which many organisations have identified significant benefits such as reductions in office space requirements, reduced utility costs, and importantly, higher productivity from their employees. Bear this in mind if you are asked ***'why did you leave your***

*last employer?’* as the interview panel would be strongly aware that many applicants may not in the workforce at that time for very valid reasons.

## Questions to ask at a job interview

### ‘Do you have any questions?’

This question is generally asked at the end of every interview. Why? Well, first of all, it is where the interview panel identify (if they have not already done so) how interested you are in the position and how much you know about their organisation. If you do not have any pre-prepared questions – or ask the wrong questions – it is probably going to cost you the job. So, therefore, always respond ‘YES’ and these are the questions you should consider asking to make a good impression on the interview panel (and they don’t have to be all of these – usually 3 – 5 questions are appropriate).

- ***‘Can you tell me about the team I would be working with?’*** – this is a great question as it really shows the interview panel you have made up your mind you want to work for the organisation – they want, and need, to know this to make up their mind whether you are worth hiring.
- ***‘Is this a newly created position or has someone been working in the role?’*** – another great question as it provides you with the information on whether you have big foot-prints to fill, or whether you will have an opportunity to develop the role further from the job description that has been prepared. If it is a newly created position it will also give you an opportunity

to 'shine' as the expectations are to fulfill the position description – go above and beyond that and you will really stand-out in the organisation.

- ***'What made the former person in the role successful?'*** – this is assuming you are filling a position that is not newly created and will give you the information that you need to really stand-out in the position. The interview panels response could be *'they always worked extra hours when we had big orders to fulfill'* or *'they would help out in other departments when we were short-staffed'* or *'the quality of their work was always outstanding'* – whatever the interview panels responses are, it gives you an opportunity to state your enthusiasm for the role by confirming you would be prepared to do all of the above and in fact, have done so with your current employer.
- ***'Will there be a handover for the position?'*** – again, this question reinforces your enthusiasm for working with the organisation and that you already see yourself in the advertised position. It is a question that the interview panel would expect to be asked and their response will provide you with the information on how long you are going to be supported during the early days of your appointment, if in fact at all.
- ***'Apart from my experience and skills, what other things would you be hoping to see from me in this position?'*** – this is a yet another great question as it again, really shows the interview panel that you have made up your mind you want to work the organisation and their response will provide you with the information you would need to be successful in the position.

- ***'What are the prospects for advancement with the company?'*** – this question shows you are looking for a long-term career with the organisation and are not just seeking a job – which is really important for the panel as onboarding (training and/or upskilling) of a new employee costs both time and money.
- ***'If I were successful, when would you like me to start – how much notice would I need to give at my current job?'*** – this question shows you are not only serious about working for this organisation but also that you are a pragmatic individual and considerate of your existing employer.
- ***'How does the organisation maintain a positive culture and why do employees like to work here?'*** – this is an important question for two reasons: firstly, the focus is off you selling yourself to the organisation, the interview panel now has to sell the organisation to you; and secondly, the panels responses could really influence your decision on whether this would be a great career move – or it may reveal that in fact, it's an organisation you would rather not work for.
- ***'What are the next steps in the interview process?'*** – you really need to ask this question – as again, it reinforces your enthusiasm for the position – and secondly, you are not going to leave the interview and hang by the phone for the next few weeks. The interview panel may advise that they have several more candidates to interview or they may not. They may advise that they expect to make a decision at the end of the week or by the end of the month. They may advise that there will be a second round of interviews of the shortlisted

candidates. With this information, you will be aware of what time-frames will be involved in the selection of the successful candidate and when you can expect to be contacted.

## What questions not to ask at a job interview

- ***'What is the salary?'*** – if the salary for the position has not been posted – do not ask what it is – this information may or may not be conveyed at the interview – or it could be revealed at a second interview or by a phone or written offer for the position. By doing research on similar advertised jobs, you should have a fair idea of what the salary for the advertised position will be. If you do ask this question, the interview panel will assume you are just seeking a job and not a long-term career with their organisation.
- ***'So when will you let me know if I have the job?'*** – believe it or not, many applicants do ask this question and shoot themselves in the foot in doing so. You do not know what sequence you are in the interview process; first or last interviewee, and the interview panel will not make a decision on the successful applicant until all shortlisted candidates have been interviewed. Despite how well you may have participated in the interview up to this point, this question would probably cost you the job. You should already have this information when you asked *'what's the next step in the interview process?'* during the **'Do you have any questions?'** phase of the interview.

## **PRACTICE for the interview**

Prior to the interview (and not the night before) write down the information you have gathered about the hiring organisation so that you can review and remember this to questions such as 'what do you know about our organisation?'

Write down your responses to the commonly asked interview questions as indicated above – these should each take around 3 – 5 minutes to verbally communicate to the interview panel.

Practice your responses – either by reading them aloud in front of a mirror, or better still, with a live audience such as your partner or a friend. Get used to saying your responses, not necessarily in parrot fashion, but enough to be confident that you have positive responses for the interview.

## **INTERVIEW DAY**

### **Presentation**

Dress for success – that does not mean wearing a suit and tie/suit and blouse and heels for every job interview, but if the position is office-based that would be recommended. If it is a production, manufacturing or warehousing role, dress smartly but less formally. Remember, scuffed or unpolished footwear is generally noticed before clothes and does not create a favourable impression. Do not overload on heavy perfumes or after-shaves either as interviews are generally conducted in small rooms. Importantly, do not come in reeking of cigarette

smoke as most companies now have a 'No Smoking' policy and the interview could be over just based on that.

### **Be there early**

You should have already planned your route and travel method to the interview and factored in the time to arrive a little earlier than the scheduled time, i.e. if your appointment is scheduled for 10.30 am, arrive around 10.20 am – this gives you 10-minutes to collect yourself, take note of your surroundings, smile at the Receptionist, and complete any internal forms that may be required before the interview. If the interview is taking place near a café, you could arrive there about half an hour before the scheduled interview which gives you the time to have a relaxing coffee and a last-minute review of your interview question responses (remember you cannot place these on the interview table).

### **Relax**

As mentioned previously, on paper you look good! You obviously have the skill-set and experience that is required for the advertised position – keep this in mind before and during the interview – the interview panel is seeking to identify your 'fit' with the team that you would be working with and the overall organisation.

### **Greeting the panel**

Generally, each member of the interview panel will introduce themselves and shake your hand (not always). It can be difficult to remember each panel member's first name, and particularly if they are not wearing name identifier tags or badges – but do make an effort as it creates a

great impression. Do not take a seat until one is offered to you – even if the panel members are already seated on one side of the table and there is a single chair facing them.

## Body Language

Do not slouch in your chair or rest your arms on the table for extended periods. By all means, use your hands when responding to questions as this evidences you are passionate about what you are talking about, but in doing so, be careful you are not swatting or impairing the vision of anyone sitting beside you. What to do with your hands when a member of the interview panel is talking to you? Generally keep them in your lap.

## Eye Contact

It is important that you consistently maintain eye contact with the interview panel rather than look at a point above their heads or out the window. Maintaining eye contact evidences that you are focused on the interview, you are paying attention, and you are very keen to secure this position. It is hard to maintain constant eye contact with say four interviewers at the same time, so ideally, you should focus on the member of the interview panel who is asking questions at the time or conveying information about the organisation – and generally, all interview panel members will take turns at this.

## Communicating with the interview panel

**Don't fill in silences** – the interview panel sets the pace and tone of the interview and there will be a scheduled time-frame – all of these people will have busy jobs and can't afford for a scheduled interview to exceed allocated times. Also, note:

- Speak at a tone that all the interview panel can hear and address them – not the table – if your head is bowed when you are talking, the table is going to hear what you are saying – not them.
- If English is not your first language, speak at a slightly slower pace than you normally would in your own first language.

## Interview Closure

Despite how well you thought the interview went or did not go, always thank the interview panel for the opportunity to participate in the interview and repeat your enthusiasm for joining the organisation.

If each of the interview panel members have handed you their business card, also send a quick email the same day if possible, along the lines *'Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the interview and after hearing more first-hand information about (company ABC), I would be thrilled to work for/develop my career with the organisation'*.

Do not, under any circumstances 'hound' the panel, i.e. phone or email communications along the lines 'have you made a decision yet?'

Unfortunately, it is a fact of life that many hiring organisations may not contact unsuccessful interviewees, but it is always a good move if you have not been contacted a couple of weeks after the interview to send an email(s) to members of the panel (if you have their contact information) and seek their feedback on why you were not selected in this instance. This not only provides you with valuable information for future interview situations, but also reinforces

to the hiring organisation that you were very keen on working for their organisation – and quite often, a placed candidate may not be successful in the appointed role which may create an opportunity for you.

## The final words

1. **Prepare – Plan – Practice** – remember, if you fail to plan – you plan to fail.
  2. **Be confident** – on paper you look good – you are a skills match for the position.
  3. **Be patient** – don't hound the interview panel – it will not be well received.
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