

Facing up to the Face to Face

You're a whisker away from landing your dream job, you got your CV spot on, aced the rest of the assessment centre and now it's time for the interview. Are you giving yourself the best possible chance or are you tripping yourself up at the final hurdle?



Very few people actually look forward to a job interview. You're on the spot, you're having to think fast and you can almost smell the career move you have been pursuing for months. In short, the pressure is on to perform. Under these circumstances there are those who fold and those who fly. But with a little forethought there is no reason to fear the interview process and you can start looking upon it as your chance to prove just how good you are. Firstly, it is important to bear in mind that the interviewer wants you to succeed. You have just got to be in command of how you show yourself in the best possible light.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Find out as much as you can about the job, the company and its products or services. Information such as this can be found in the company's annual

report or product literature. In addition, most businesses will include a lot of corporate information on their websites. Find out about its performance in comparison to that of its competitors.

Try to get hold of recent industry press to see if the company has been in the news for any major developments. You risk looking pretty silly if you were unaware of any relevant highly publicised events.

Go back over the advert to which you responded if there was one, look at your application and your CV. Make sure you are clear on what it is you have to offer.

PRESENTATION

There are a number of straightforward points you should consider:

- Arrive at your interview around ten minutes early, but no more. An overly early arrival might inconvenience the person due to interview. Also, having to wait around will inevitably make you more nervous.
- Try to dress appropriately for the job for which you are applying. If you are unsure then err on the side of conventional business attire.
- Avoid wearing heavy perfume or aftershave.
- Make sure you have had something to eat before the interview (nothing heavy, smelly or fizzy!).
- Make sure you are professional and

courteous to anyone you meet once at the interview venue. These people work day in, day out with your interviewer and your behaviour will almost inevitably get back to them.

- Ask if you can use the cloakroom – check your appearance.
- Whilst you are waiting to be called into your interview take a look around the reception/waiting area. See if there is any further information you can learn about the company from, say, internal magazines, press releases, wall charts, etc.

THE CRUCIAL FIRST MOMENTS

It is a cliché but first impressions really do count. As such, the opening few minutes can be crucial to how the whole interview goes.

- It might sound silly but the handshake is important - make sure your palm is dry, take the other person's hand firmly and look them in the eye.
- When invited, sit down. Try to look confident and ready to take part in a business negotiation.
- Don't fidget in your seat or fiddle with your hands, pen or watch etc.
- Maintain eye contact with your interviewer (but don't stare!).
- Try to be as sincere and natural as possible. Enthusiasm, humour and use of hands to emphasise points can all convey a positive message. But be careful. Don't get carried away and start rambling - keep answers and explanations relevant at all times.

Similarly, don't overdo the charm and wit. A sense of humour is great, but take your lead from the interviewer and only let any humour in at appropriate junctures.

YOU'RE OFF!

The interview is underway, keep in mind the person interviewing you is not looking to catch you out, far from it.

- Listen carefully to what is being said. If you need to get a better understanding, ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase their question.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself – strengths, weakness, success and failures. Many people find such questions difficult to answer so it is vital you've considered potential answers. Make sure you've got answers to all those questions you would least like to be asked.
- Be prepared to answer questions aimed at ascertaining your knowledge of your industry. An example of such a question might be "Who do you think will be our major competitors in 5–10 years?" Having done your preparation and read industry journals, you should be able to make an informed opinion.
- It is likely that you will also be asked questions on what you have done in the past, since this is a good indicator of how you may perform in the future. The interviewer is looking for you to have handled situations in a positive way and for you to have learned from experience. Describe the outcome in positive terms.
- You should also prepare yourself for questions the interviewer knows you will find difficult to answer, such as those on controversial subjects. These are designed to see how you react under pressure. Do not blurt out an answer - a short pause conveys thoughtfulness.

WHAT EVER YOU DO, DON'T...

The interview environment requires a great deal of self-control and self-awareness. Choose your words and manner carefully. Here are some classic interview behaviours to avoid:

- Don't interrupt the interviewer. It is easy to do but you mustn't let your

enthusiasm lead to coming across as rude. As much as anything else you may miss the main point of the interviewer's question.

- Don't spend too much time talking about your early career. The interviewer is more interested in your recent achievements.
- Whatever you do, don't state that you've got a better offer - whether you have or not. Forcing the interviewer to a decision may bring them to the wrong one! Do, however, let them know if you are being interviewed by other people.
- Don't name-drop - it won't impress and could lead to major embarrassments.

NEARLY THERE, NOW

When the interview is winding up it will often be signalled by a comment such as, "Well, I think we've covered all aspects of this job. Have you any further questions you would like to ask?"

Your answer to this question is always yes unless you have asked questions all the way through. In this instance you can legitimately say something like, "No, I think you have explained things very clearly." If you haven't asked questions, make use of this opportunity to find out more about the position and company. Again, think before you speak. Don't ask questions which have already come up during the interview. You must have one or two well-chosen points to raise already in mind before you go into the interview. Ask about, for example, how the position arose and the potential for training and development. It's also fine to ask about future prospects but don't overdo it - land this job first. And, even if you have been completely terrified throughout the entire meeting it wouldn't hurt to add, "I've enjoyed our meeting and would very much like to do the job for you. I am confident I could do it well."

Lastly, before you go, make sure you find out what the next stage will be then leave quickly and politely. Smile. Handshake. Exit.

WHAT'S NEXT?

Write to the interviewer to show your interest in doing the job and in going on to the next stage. But don't write an essay.

- Refer to the positivity of the interview.
- Let the interviewer know that you understood the task and duties to be undertaken. Confirm that you wish to proceed with your application and your excitement at the prospect of contributing to the organisation. Once the letter is written, reflect on the interview. Try to assess your own performance.

Were you happy with the way in which you conducted yourself? Did you get across the points you intended? Did you find out what you needed to know? Regardless of the outcome of the interview, learn by your experiences whether positive or negative.

If you have been put forward by a recruitment consultancy, call them as soon as you can to let them know how you got on and to confirm your interest in the job. This will almost certainly be fed back to the interviewer and it will be viewed positively.

Don't worry if you don't hear for a while. Recruitment can sometimes take many weeks or even months. If, however, they have promised to let you know by a certain date and that day comes and goes, there is no harm in telephoning to see how soon their decision is expected.

When it comes to interviews, keep in mind this principle: you want to succeed, they want you to succeed and there is no reason you won't, with the proper preparation.

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