

Job Link

Bringing You News You Can Use

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MAKE THE MOST OF THE FIRST 20 SECONDS OF AN INTERVIEW

By Marky Stein, author of [Fearless Interviewing: What to Do Before, During and After an Interview](#) Published August 2001 by Writers Club Press, an imprint of iuniverse.com

When you go into an interview, you have 20 seconds to give an employer a reason to *consider* hiring you. First impressions count for a lot; learn how to use them to your advantage. The parts of a successful first impression are an almost choreographed ritual of getting down to the serious business of interviewing. You can make an interviewer think, "This is a good candidate" by following several seemingly simple rules:

Look Confident:

No matter how you may feel that day, smile. A smile is not just another facial expression. It's a signal to that primitive part of the interviewer's brain that you are friendly and not a threat. It also sends a message to your own brain of being happy and at ease. Linguists and psychologists have said that anywhere from 93 to 97 percent of communication is nonverbal, and the smile is a very important part of that communication.

Introductions:

Properly Introduce Yourself

Address interviewers as Ms. or Mr. until you're invited to call them by their first name. Then introduce yourself by your first and last names. It will sound something like, "Hello, Mr. Isaacs. I'm Susan Sallinger. Thank you for seeing me today."

Give a Good Handshake

It might seem like a trifling point, but your handshake tells the interviewer that you are about to do business. There is almost nothing worse than a noncommittal "dead fish" handshake. On the other hand,

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NOTABLE QUOTABLE

"Unless you try to do
beyond what you have
already mastered, you
will never grow."

—Ronald E. Osborn

INTERVIEW FRIGHT

What is "Interview Fright"? You interviewing for a position is much like an actor getting in front of an audience and performing. Some actors get Stage Fright, some job candidates get...you guessed it! The only difference is that an actor gets to hide behind a character and you don't. You are presenting yourself and it can be difficult for some people to speak of themselves honestly and objectively and yet achieve that balance of confidence and humility. And sometimes plain, old nerves take over.

How do you avoid the pratfalls that can make a job offer flutter away as you are interviewing? The answer is simple Practice and Preparation -- just like an actor. The more knowledge you have about the interviewing company--their objectives and philosophy--the more comfortable you can feel in their environment. The more you rehearse for an interview the more confidence you will have in your own skills.

This month's issue is full of helpful suggestions and practice interview questions. NRI also has available to you a wonderful pamphlet entitled, *Interviewing skills...The Bridge Between a New Job and You!* It has timeless and appropriate suggestions to help you navigate your way through the interview process -- from preparation to follow-up.

Then, of course, is the availability of NRI's Staffing Specialists. We have the ability and experience to help prepare you for an interview. We can give you helpful suggestions targeted to you and your personal interviewing style. After all, who interviewed you first?

10 GENERAL PRACTICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

From ivillage.com

1. Tell me about yourself.

- Keep your answer to one or two minutes, don't ramble.
- Use a "positioning statement" as a place to start. Your positioning statement is the boiled-down story of your resume – general goal, skills and background.

2. What do you know about or company?

- Know products, size, income, reputation, image, goals, problems, management talent, management style, people, skills, history and philosophy.
- Project an informed interest. Ask several open-ended questions about the company's course and the department's goals so the interviewer can tell you about the company. Let her define the business in her terms.

3. Why do you want to work for us?

- Don't talk about what you want; first talk about their needs.
- You wish to be part of a company project.
- You would like to solve a company problem.
- You can make a definite contribution to specific company goals: identify this.

4. What would you do for us? What can you do that someone else can't?

- Relate past successes in solving previous employer problems, which may be similar to those of the prospective employer.

5. What about our position do you find most attractive? Least attractive?

- List three or more attractive factors and one minor unattractive factor.

6. Why should we hire you?

- Because of your knowledge, experience, abilities and skills. Tell what these are.

7. What do you look for in a job?

- An opportunity to use skills, perform and be recognized.

8. Please give me your definition of the job for which you're being interviewed.

- Keep it brief and action-and-results oriented.

9. How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?

- Very quickly after a little orientation and a brief period of adjustment on the learning curve.

10. How long would you stay with us?

- As long as we both feel that I am contributing, achieving, growing and so on.

MORE PRACTICE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

From ivillage.com

Four questions if you are leaving a job:

1. Why are you leaving your present job?

- * Refine your answer based on your comfort level and honesty.
- * Give a "group" answer if possible; for instance, "Our department was consolidated or eliminated."

2. How do you feel about leaving all of your benefits?

- * Concerned but not panicked.

3. Describe what you feel to be an ideal working environment.

- * Where people are treated as fairly as possible.

4. How would you evaluate your present firm?

- * An excellent company that afforded me many fine experiences.

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the rearrange-your-finger-bones approach is not appealing either. If your grip feels halfway committed or overly competitive, you will damage the impression you're giving.

Use the whole hand, with a solid grip. Shake a woman's hand the same as you would a man's. Firm and businesslike is the rule to remember. Many people have no idea how their handshake feels to other people, so I strongly suggest that you practice it with friends or family members and ask for their feedback. Test different strengths and positions until you and they feel comfortable.

Dress for Success:

Look Polished

You don't have to buy an expensive outfit to be dressed appropriately. Instead of focusing on being "dressed for success," think about looking neat, clean, polished and pressed. Keep it simple. Maybe all you need to invest is five dollars in getting those dress slacks pressed or having that blazer dry cleaned.

It's almost impossible to overdress for an interview unless you are wearing a ball gown. Dressing "up" is one of the many signals of respect you send to the interviewer during the first 20 seconds. It says, "I respect your time enough to think about my wardrobe."

The best rule is to be more formal and more conservative than you would normally, no matter how the CEO or vice president dresses. That means:

- Don't forget to wear hose, and bring an extra pair in your purse or briefcase in case of a run.
- Make sure nails and hair are neat, clean and not overly fussy.
- Keep makeup light.
- Avoid perfumes or colognes.
- Except for an engagement ring and wedding band, wear only one ring to a hand, one bracelet to a wrist and stick with conservative earrings. Avoid jewelry, like dangly earrings, that might detract from the interviewer's ability to look at your face and hear what you have to say.
- Wear solid colors that complement your skin tones and make you feel good. Avoid complicated patterned fabrics that may distract the interviewer.

Stay Professional:

Maintain your professionalism in the interviewer's office with a few simple rules.

- Do not sit down until the interviewer suggests that you do. If she doesn't, ask politely if you may sit down.
- Do not at any time during the interview put anything on the interviewer's desk. Keep your briefcase, notepad, date book, purse and anything else by your side or in your lap.
- Make your behavior in the waiting room impeccably polite. Interviewers often ask their receptionists what they think about candidates.
- Don't take any beverages into the interviewer's office. Spills or choking can be embarrassing and inconvenient.
- Turn your pager and cell phone off. If you forget and it happens to ring, do not glance to see who called. Simply apologize for the interruption and turn off the device.

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