INTERVIEWING BASICS
101

Office of Career Services
Suite 103 – Trinity Library
www.trinitydc.edu
202-884-9636

TRINITY UNIVERSITY
EDUCATION FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP
Top 10 Interview Tips

Great interviews arise from careful groundwork. You can ace your next interview if you:

1. **Enter into a state of relaxed concentration.** This is the state from which great basketball players or Olympic skaters operate. You'll need to quiet the negative self chatter in your head through meditation or visualization prior to sitting down in the meeting. You'll focus on the present moment and will be less apt to experience lapses in concentration, nervousness, self-doubt and self-condemnation.

2. **Act spontaneous, but be well prepared.** Be your authentic self, professional yet real. Engage in true conversation with your interviewer, resting on the preparation you did prior to coming to the meeting. Conduct several trial runs with another person simulating the interview before it actually occurs. It's the same as anticipating the questions you'll be asked on a final exam.

3. **Set goals for the interview.** It is your job to leave the meeting feeling secure that the interviewer knows as much as he or she possibly can about your skills, abilities, experience and achievements. If you sense there are misconceptions, clear them up before leaving. If the interviewer doesn't get around to asking you important questions, pose them yourself (diplomatically) and answer them. Don't leave the meeting without getting your own questions answered so that you have a clear idea of what you would be getting yourself into. If possible, try to get further interviews, especially with other key players.

4. **Know the question behind the question.** Ultimately, every question boils down to, "Why should we hire you?" Be sure you answer that completely. If there is a question about your meeting deadlines, consider whether the interviewer is probing delicately about your personal life, careful not to ask you whether your family responsibilities will interfere with your work. Find away to address fears if you sense they are present.

5. **Follow up with an effective "thank you" letter.** Don't write this letter lightly. It is another opportunity to market yourself. Find some areas discussed in the meeting and expand upon them in your letter. Writing a letter after a meeting is a very minimum. Standing out among the other candidates will occur if you thoughtfully consider this follow up letter as an additional interview in which you get to do all the talking. Propose useful ideas that demonstrate your added value to the team.

6. **Consider the interviewer's agenda.** Much is on the shoulders of the interviewer. He or she has the responsibility of hiring the right candidate. Your ability to do
the job will need to be justified. "Are there additional pluses here?" "Will this person fit the culture of this organization?" These as well as other questions will be heavily on the interviewer’s mind. Find ways to demonstrate your qualities above and beyond just doing the job.

7. **Expect to answer the question, "Tell me about yourself."** This is a pet question of prepared and even unprepared interviewers. Everything you include should answer the question, "Why should we hire you?" Carefully prepare your answer to include examples of achievements from your work life that closely match the elements of the job before you. Obviously, you’ll want to know as much about the job description as you can before you respond to the question.

8. **Watch those nonverbal clues.** Experts estimate that words express only 30% to 35% of what people actually communicate; facial expressions and body movements and actions convey the rest. Make and keep eye contact. Walk and sit with a confident air. Lean toward an interviewer to show interest and enthusiasm. Speak with a well-modulated voice that supports appropriate excitement for the opportunity before you.

9. **Be smart about money questions.** Don’t fall into the trap of telling the interviewer your financial expectations. You may be asking for too little or too much money and in each case ruin your chances of being offered the job. Instead, ask what salary range the job falls in. Attempt to postpone a money discussion until you have a better understanding of the scope of responsibilities of the job.

10. **Don’t hang out your dirty laundry.** Be careful not to bare your soul and tell tales that are inappropriate or beyond the scope of the interview. State your previous experience in the most positive terms. Even if you disagreed with a former employer, express your enthusiasm for earlier situations as much as you can. Whenever you speak negatively about another person or situation in which you were directly involved, you run the risk (early in the relationship) of appearing like a troubled person who may have difficulty working with others.

**Questions You Can Ask at the Job Interview**

Job-seekers need to ask questions in job interviews; here’s a list of some questions you can ask your prospective employer.

*Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You must ask at least one question; to do otherwise often signals the interviewer that you don’t really have any interest in the job or the company. On the other hand, do not ask questions where the answer is obvious or readily available -- or when the topic has already been*
thoroughly discussed in the interview. And never ask about salary and benefit issues until those subjects are raised by the employer.

Questions you might ask at a job interview:

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?
- Can you describe the company’s management style?
- Can you discuss your take on the company’s corporate culture?
- What are the company’s values?
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?
- What is the organization’s policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?
- How is this department perceived within the organization?
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?

Closing the Interview

"When do I start?"
That’s about as aggressive as you can get at the close of the interview. It may knock the interviewer for a loop, and might appear to be overly aggressive, but some people think of it as "closing the sale." And for some people it has worked. For others, this approach may not be comfortable or have a negative same effect.

Whether you are aggressive, passive and polite, or somewhere in between, will depend on your personality, the interview situation, and the job for which you are applying.

Closing Points
Regardless of your style or how you choose to close the interview, here are some key points to keep in mind:

1. **Leave your interviewer with the right picture of you.** Think of at least five skills or traits you want remembered after the interview. Choose something "concrete."
When you answer with, "I have great communication skills, and I am a hard worker," you will not stand out.

Example: "I have two skills that are distinctly different but that define my personality. I am a very good pianist and an excellent 'computer guy.' I'm known for my love of keyboards."

2. **Ask if there is anything else you can provide.** Examples include references, transcripts, background information, and samples.

   Example: "Is there any other information that I can provide that would convince you that I am the right person for this job?"

3. **State your interest in the position.** Sound interested and tell what added value you can bring to the job.

   Example: "From what you have been telling me about this position, and from what I know about your company, I know that I have the right mix of experience and education to bring value to this position. Based on past experiences I can 'ramp up' quickly and be on board with projects within the first few weeks."

4. **Ask about the next step in the process.** It's important for you to know the next step for follow up. Ask for the decision date, if possible.

   Example: "I'm interested in knowing what the next step in the process is and when you will be making a decision so I can follow up."

5. **Find out how to contact the interviewer.** If you don't hear back, you will need to know whom to contact and whether the employer will accept calls to check the status.

   Example: "I'd like to stay in touch and follow up with you in a week or two to see how the process is going and where I stand. How do you prefer that I communicate with you -- email or phone?"

Closing the sale is important, but your closing should be tailored to the position; your personality and interviewing style, and the interviewer. Keeping these things in mind will help you determine which closing is appropriate for you and the situation.

**References:**