

FREE ADVICE ON INTERVIEWING

Over the years we've had many highly qualified candidates interview with our clients, and have often been surprised when a candidate is not selected. We've actually had clients tell us that "he really didn't interview well". What a sad thing to hear when we know the individual has the skills and experience necessary to do the work. The tips we are going to give you now are based on over 30 years of client feed-back. We hope that they assist you in presenting yourself in the best manner possible when you are asked to interview.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

In many instances, the first interview is conducted by a non-technical person. The telephone interview is often a screening interview, to get a feel for your personality, double-check your expertise, and determine whether or not you are really interested before the manager's time is scheduled. The following "dos" and "don'ts" concern the telephone interview:

1. **Be ready for the phone call.** Make sure you are waiting by the phone. A "no show" on a telephone interview is as serious as not showing up in person.
2. If your mobile phone experiences bad reception, **try to schedule the interview on a land line** to avoid a dropped call or static on the line. **Turn off call waiting.**
3. **Find a place that is quiet** where you can respond to questions without the distraction of dogs barking and children in the background. Turn off music and TV. Close the door.
4. **Keep your resume in clear view**, on the top of your desk, or taped to the wall above your phone, so that it's available when you need to answer questions.
5. **Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review!**
6. **Have a pen or pencil available** to take notes.
7. The **number one complaint about Engineers and technical personnel is arrogance. Beware of showing an "attitude"** if it appears the person doesn't understand your explanation of formulas, or some other technical solution you're proud of.
8. **Don't discuss compensation** unless the interviewer brings it up. If asked, give a salary range. Client's have a strong aversion to individuals who sound like all they're interested in is money. They think, "He/she will leave us as soon as they get a better offer."
9. Technical people function in a data world and tend to require more information, more detail – always more data. Be aware that the person who interviews you on this first telephone screening may not be a technical person and simply **may not have the information you're seeking. Be patient.**

10. The **goal of the telephone interview is, in most cases, to get to the second interview.**

FACE TO FACE INTERVIEWS

Regardless what position you are seeking, there are some general rules to follow in preparing for a face-to-face interview:

1. **What she said - appearance.** Your mother probably told you to clean up and put on something nice. What she said still applies. It is interesting to us, that so many candidates still just don't get that. We've had feed-back from clients who tell us a candidate showed up in a short sleeved polo shirt and jeans, or a too-short a skirt and sandals for an interview. The interviewer was immediately "turned off" by what he or she interpreted as a lack of respect. In the 90's it was common to see casual wear every day of the week in Engineering and technical offices, but it appears to us that this trend changed soon after the turn of 2000. Many of our most casual clients returned to dress codes again. So . . . "what she said". **Get a haircut, take a shower, wash your hair, and show up in a white shirt and trousers, or in a business length skirt, jacket and stockings for your interview.** Your first impression is truly a lasting impression. Sloppy-looking equals sloppy-working in the mind of the interviewer. And, as your Mother would say . . . "for goodness sake, **BE ON TIME!**"
2. **Do your homework on the company.** Homework was never more important than before a job interview. If you're working with a competent recruiter (like the Talley Group) you will be told as much information as was given to them by the client – probably more than you could possibly find out on your own. However, you should **look up the company on the internet** and be aware of their product line and/or services. Check for news articles about newest projects they've won. This will be invaluable information to you in understanding their questions and answering them to your benefit. On the other hand, don't act like you know everything. There is no way you can.
3. **Be prepared with answers.** There are many different interviewing styles that companies utilize. We have listed some below so that you may be aware and be properly prepared for any eventuality. Regardless of the interview style, it is important that you are prepared with **five success stories from your employment history** that include **concrete quantifiable accomplishments.** Be ready to **tell your interviewer of times when there were problems in a former job and how you overcame them.** These might involve a problem with a co-worker or something involving time constraint or a budget issue – any number of subjects. The idea is to relate your problem-solving skills by your demonstrated work history. **Practice talking about your resume** items so you can discuss them with the interviewer. Engineers who can communicate fluently and professionally are often a hot commodity, and your ability to talk comfortably about yourself can give you an edge on the competition. Find a friend to do a

mock-interview with you. Have them ask you questions about your engineering experience. Then, plan your responses so that you can tailor them on the fly. Focus on the experience you have had, in your education, and in past professional engineering positions that will make you an asset to the company.

4. **Chin up.** No, we're not back to mom's advice again . . . exactly. In our experience, persons who don't interview well often don't do so because of their **attitude**, rather than their job skills, experience or personality. When walking into an interview you need to be thinking, "I am interviewing them as much as they are interviewing me." This is not arrogance, or conceit. It is a fact. The interview process is a two-way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match. **Make eye contact** during the interview (practice in front of a mirror at home if this is hard for you). **Smile! Show your enthusiasm.** Although Eyore was an adorable sad sack in the Pooh books – no one wants to work with an Eyore. **If you're a good, reliable technical worker, they will be lucky to get you. I'll bet mom told you that, too!**
5. **Short answers.** In our experience, many honest, hard-working candidates **talk themselves out of a job** that they might have had if not for **giving too much information.**
6. **Ask appropriate questions.** Not having questions for the interviewer indicates a lack of interest or enthusiasm for the position. The types of questions you ask, and the way you ask them, can make a tremendous impression on the interviewer. **Good questions require advance preparation.** Just as you plan how you would *answer* an interviewer's questions, write out specific questions you want to *ask* them. Again, **avoid benefits and salary.** We think it is always appropriate to **ask the interviewer how long they've worked for the company and what they like best about working there.** His/her response is often very telling about whether you yourself would want to work there or not. Do not be afraid to ask at the close of the interview whether **he/she sees any reason why you wouldn't be a fit for the position.** This is a perfect opportunity to overcome a misconception or objection that might not be justified.
7. **What to take with you. 1).** Take a **couple of copies of your resume** with you. One for the interviewer, on the best paper you can find, and the second for yourself to refer to during the interview. **2). Carry a pen and notebook with a "cheat sheet"** in it, putting suggestions for all of the above on it. (by the way, **this is NOT cheating**...it will simply help you remember and stay on point). Suggestions for your cheat sheet include: a. Write down a word or two to remind you about your five success stories and accomplishments. b. If you're not a natural smiler, write "SMILE" in big letters. c. Write down, "ask the interviewer how long they've worked here". d. Write down a couple of questions to ask. e. Take notes during the interview which will lead you to further questions. f. Write down a reminder to ask if there is any reason why you wouldn't be one of the top candidates for the job.

8. **Write a thank you note.** Be sure you have a card when you leave, and always write a thank you note for the interview. It is much better to hand write it on some quality note paper than to email it. Even if an offer is not made to you, you are **leaving the company with a good impression** of you that may help you in some way later.
9. **After the interview there will be plenty of time to ask yourself, “Is this a place I would like to work?”** Are they doing the kind of work that would be interesting and challenging to me?” The object of the interview is to get the job offer. You can always say “no” later.

FIVE COMMON FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEW STYLES and how to prepare for them

1. **Behavioral Interview:** Behavioral based interviewing is based on discovering how the interviewee (you) acted in specific employment-related situations. The logic is that how you behaved in the past will predict how you will behave in the future (i.e. past performance predicts future performance). Behavioral interview questions will be more pointed, more probing and more specific than traditional interview questions, and your interviewer will have been taught to wait, no matter how long, for you to respond. Typical behavioral interview questions are:
 - Give an example of an occasion when you used logic to solve a problem.
 - Give an example of a goal you reached and tell me how you achieved it.
 - Describe a decision you made that was unpopular and how you handled implementing it.
 - Have you gone above and beyond the call of duty? If so, how?
 - What do you do when your schedule is interrupted? Give an example of how you handle it.
 - Have you had to convince a team to work on a project they weren't thrilled about? How did you do it?
 - Have you handled a difficult situation with a co-worker? How?
 - Tell me about how you worked effectively under pressure.

To Prepare: Think through your job history – your proudest moments and achievements, your awards, if any, and your most difficult situations with co-workers, supervisors and reports. Try to **determine from the job description or posting what transferrable skills** and personal qualities might be needed for the job. For example, if the job description includes supervisory experience, you'll want to be ready with a short story about a time you had a difficult situation supervising someone, and how you successfully handled that. If it appears from the job description that the bulk of the work will be done on a team, be ready with a short story about how when you worked on a team, solved personality

problems, and succeeded. If asked to relate a negative situation, don't be afraid to tell the interviewee what you learned from that.

2. **Directive or Structural Interview:** A directive or structured interview is a standardized method of comparing the exact skills and experience of job candidates. There may even be a point system associated with the answers you give. This interview format enables the employer to compare candidates impartially.

To Prepare: Don't be intimidated by a style that may include a clear agenda that the interviewer follows unflinchingly. If the interviewer does not ask you for information that you think is important to proving your superiority as a candidate, politely interject it.

3. **Unstructured Interview:** An unstructured or meandering interview style is a job interview in which questions may be changed based on the interviewee's responses. It might begin with a question like, "tell me about yourself", which you can use to your advantage. This may be followed with another broad, open-ended question. This interview style allows you to tactfully guide the discussion.

To Prepare: Come to the interview prepared, as with any other interview, with highlights and anecdotes of your skills, qualities and experiences. As there may be fewer specific questions, you might want to keep your resume in front of you, with notes to spark your memory. Ask questions. It never hurts to ask questions about their employment with the company – how long have they been there and what do they like best about working there?

4. **Panel Interview:** A panel or group interview takes place when an applicant is interviewed by a panel or group of interviewers. There may be one candidate and multiple interviewers, multiple candidates and one interviewer, or several candidates and several interviewers. In our opinion this is not a technique used often in engineering companies, as it is so difficult to schedule a number of persons at one time.

To Prepare: To successfully handle a group interview, take time in advance to prepare. Ask who you will be interviewing with and ask for their names. That way, you can bring a copy of your resume for each interviewer and it will be easier to remember who's who. **Check the LinkedIn Profiles of your interviewers** so you can get insight into their role at the company and their background. Be sure to research the company ahead of time. The more you know about the company, the easier it will be to respond to questions. Bring a notepad and pen and take notes. Again, it will be easier to keep track of the interview if you are able to jot down some notes. **Connect with the group as well as the individual interviewers.** When one panelist asks a question, respond directly to him or her, but also make eye contact with the rest of the group as you're answering. The more engaged you are - with everyone - the

better impression you'll make. Pay attention to the group dynamics. How does everyone get along? What type of interaction do they have? Is it positive? You're interviewing the company as much as they are interviewing you and it's important to see how you will fit in, if you're hired. If you're not comfortable with the synergy between the panelists, think about what it will be like to work with them when making a decision on accepting a job offer. **Collect business cards and send a thank you to each participant.** If you're unable to get all cards, send a thank you note to the person who arranged the interview.

5. **Tag-Team Interview:** Tag-team interviews usually schedule a longer block of your time, and involve your speaking to several individuals, one-on-one. For example, you might meet with the HR Manager first, then proceed to the Department Head or Project Manager and finally, your potential lead. This method of interviewing is often attractive for companies that rely heavily on team cooperation. Not only does the company want to know your skills and experience, they also want to know whether you will be able to get along with other workers.

To Prepare: Prepare as you would for any other face-to-face interview. Be prepared with knowledge of the company, and practice your stories and favorable points. Be sure that you treat each person as equally important to your cause. Be aware that the interview with the HR manager may focus on company information he/she wants you to know, and your employment history and ability to get along with others. The Project Manager will be more interested in knowing that you can get the job done in a timely manner, without error. The lead will usually go into the detail of the technical work. Learn everything you can about the company from each one of them. Be sure you get each person's business card and drop a thank you note to each after the interview.

*Whether you are asked to interview on the phone, in a company's conference room, an office, restaurant or by video – the above hints should apply. **We wish you the greatest success in your job search!**