



IN ADVANCE OF A SCHEDULED INTERVIEW

If you want to make a great impression in an interview, you should take time to prepare thoroughly so that you can be as comfortable as possible. By being prepared, you can focus on what is most important, which is being yourself and reacting appropriately to the flow of the interview.

The following physical and mental checklist is designed to help you move step-by-step through each phase of the interview and includes tips and strategies for success.



Do Your Research: There is nothing more important than being a knowledgeable candidate, and there is no excuse for not having enough information about the company where you might be spending the majority of your time. It is critical to do your homework and find out all you can about the organization including structure, finances, products, services, new developments, philosophy, vision, mission, culture and more. And most importantly, understand the needs and priorities of the position to which you are applying. The Internet can be a valuable resource for finding company information and there are many web sites dedicated to this cause. You may also want to pull up the company's own web site, which can give you pages of information. Other sources include your local library, newspapers, trade magazines, and networking with people who know the organization.

Prepare Your Agenda: Create a list of the topics you would like to cover in the interview and things you would like to accomplish. This list should include the strengths and qualifications you wish to present which in your mind demonstrate the value you can contribute to the organization and why you want this position. Though it is best to let your "host" set the initial agenda, it is always a good idea to be able to discuss your key issues and present them at the appropriate time.

Review and Practice Your Infomercial: Make sure you are completely prepared to quickly and smoothly give a summary of your career history. Practice makes perfect, so spend time getting ready for the moment when you will need to have this information on the tip of your tongue. Don't just practice your infomercial in your head...repeat it aloud and make sure it is clear, concise, and powerful. Additionally, be prepared to quickly provide how your expertise, experience, and motivation, are a great fit to solve the needs and priorities of the position you may be interviewing for. Sell the interviewer what he wants...nothing else.

Memorize Your Resume: By the time you reach your first interview, you may have been in the job search for a month or more, so prior to your interview, pull out your resume and review its contents; understand the strengths and skills you applied to your accomplishment statements.

You should be able to verbalize the entire document in a clear and interesting way, focusing and expanding on your accomplishments in a “story-like” format. Remember, facts tell...stories sell. Determine which of your stories might have the most impact for the position you are seeking. Be able to offer feedback on any gaps in employment, career changes, etc.

Assess Your Credentials Against the Qualifications: Review the description of the job requirements and desired qualifications. Make a list of how you meet each of the requirements. Develop a solid response to address desired credentials where you may be lacking.

Know the Specific Logistics of the Meeting: Be sure to ask as many questions as necessary to help you plan and visualize your entire meeting. Some things you will want to clarify include:

- Exact company name, contact person, date and time of interview. Keep in mind that, in the case of a phone call setting up an interview, you might be called at a busy time and not be prepared for a phone call of this nature, so be sure to get all of the critical information and ask the caller to repeat it if necessary.
- Complete directions - not only to the location, but also to the exact place within the building or complex.
- Names and titles of people you will be meeting and the name of the person you should ask to see first. Your preparation and presentation will vary greatly, depending on the people you will meet. Make sure you know as much as possible to eliminate any surprises. It is also a good idea to get a phone number to call, in case of emergency or if you are inadvertently stuck in traffic. Always allow more than enough time to get to your appointment to avoid these sorts of problems, and to give yourself time to compose yourself and review in the car.
- The approximate length of the meeting. Note: This is for your information only, not a license to try to squeeze in other appointments. Try not to schedule more than one interview per day.
- Type of interview to expect (i.e., one-on-one, group, panel, etc.)
- If possible, drive to the interview site before the day of the meeting, at the same time of day you will be going. This can provide you with a visual understanding of where you are going, and will let you see how long it will take you to get there. You will be amazed at how much more comfortable you will feel when you return for the interview, because everything will be more familiar to you.

Know What You Are Going to Wear: Appropriate attire is just as important as what you say and do in your interview. Given today’s business casual atmosphere, it is certainly acceptable to ask if an interview will be formal or business casual. An executive or management level interview will almost always be conducted in a formal business suit. Other positions may be better suited dressed in business casual. It is a good idea to research the company and their culture and inquire within your networking connections what might work best if you are unable to get information from a reliable inside source, you can’t go wrong with a formal suit. Be sure not to wait until you get the call for your first interview to have several options on hand. In today’s job market, you may find yourself in a series of back to back interviews over the course of days or weeks. You should have at least two or three interview outfits cleaned, pressed and ready to go at a moment’s notice.

THE MORNING OF A SCHEDULED INTERVIEW

Start Your Day Right and Make Final Preparations: Get up early and eat breakfast. Even if you are nervous, try to eat something before you go. Review your notes and prepare your presentation package, which includes:

- Five to ten copies of your resume. These will come in handy if the person you are interviewing with, cannot locate, or has never seen your credentials. They can also be useful if you unexpectedly meet other people during your visit.
- References (remember to offer these only if asked).
- Networking cards if you have them. These are designed like business cards with your name and contact information on them. You can have these made by any quick print shop or make your own, using your computer and business card blanks.
- Pen, pencil, writing pad, driver's license, Social Security card.
- Copy of your agenda and list of questions you would like to ask.
- Review your resume and your notes on how you meet the desired qualifications.

Leave for your interview well in advance of the meeting time. Try to get there at least ten to fifteen minutes early, giving you time for traffic problems. By arriving early, you will have a chance to regroup, visit the restroom, and relax before your meeting.

UPON ARRIVAL AT THE INTERVIEW SITE

Absorb Everything You See and Feel: Remember, just as the hiring company is trying to find the right candidate, you are trying to find the right opportunity for your skills and talents. This may become your home away from home. Some details you might want to watch for include the following:

- What is the parking situation? Will you have to pay a fee to park?
- How far do you have to walk to get from the parking lot to the main building?
- What is your feeling when you walk through the door?
- How do the other people you see, react to one another and to you?
- What is the decor? Is it clean, comfortable and tasteful?
- Is the office machinery and equipment up-to-date?
- What do the restrooms and breakrooms look like?
- Are there employee information boards? What types of information do they include? Is it all company related quality and service oriented? All employee morale related? Combination?

Be Conscious of Your Presentation to Anyone You See: Smile and be courteous to any people you pass or meet. Receptionists are key people to be friendly to, as they are the eyes and ears of their entire departments or companies. Sometimes a manager will intentionally walk you down a long hall just to see how you treat others, so stay conscious of those you meet along the way.

Exchange Business/Networking Cards: Collect a business card from each person you meet. You will need this information for your thank you letters and any follow up correspondence.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

The Silent Interview – Body Language: The first two minutes of any meeting are the most critical time in assessing new people. It is during this time that those you meet begin to determine your fit for their organizations and their impression of you. First impressions can be difficult to reverse. How you present yourself verbally during the introduction and throughout the interview is important, but the subliminal messages that you send with your body language are even more critical.



You use body language to evaluate people every day...you probably just don't give it much thought because it is so natural. However, you can strengthen your communication skills by heightening your awareness of the impact these signals have on others. Not only can you be certain that you are sending the right messages, you can also use the body language of others as clues to how well you are faring in an interview. Once one person comes into physical and visual contact with another, it is human nature that they begin making judgments of the other person's character and personality based on verbal and non-verbal clues called body language.

Imagine yourself walking through a room full of people. How quickly do you start determining which individuals you feel most comfortable with? Is it how they look, what they are doing, or what they are saying? Actually, it is a combination of all three, however, the strongest influence comes from their non-verbal clues, and these include the entire impact that a person's physical appearance and body language has on our judgment of them overall. We normally make these assessments within seconds of meeting a new person, and our initial reactions may be difficult to reverse.

In the job search, you will be meeting many new people and you will want to make the best possible first impression. This does not mean that you need to alter your personality or take a class on human behavior to be successful, but it is important that you are aware of your own natural tendencies and the effects they can have on other people's opinions of your character and style. Also, understanding the meanings behind simple human gestures, can give you a clue as to how well you are being received by others. On the following pages, we will look at some of the individual elements that make up body language and the subliminal messages they send to others.

BODY LANGUAGE FROM HEAD TO TOE

The Head:

- Head cocked to the side and tilted forward demonstrates interest, agreement, or curiosity.
- Slow deliberate nods demonstrate interest and agreement.
- Fast up and down nods demonstrate impatience.
- Head facing down demonstrates lack of confidence.

The Eyes and Eyebrows:

- Good eye contact (not staring) demonstrates sincerity and interest.

- Shifting eyes demonstrate insincerity or dishonesty.
- Minimal eye contact demonstrates lack of confidence, insincerity, or dishonesty.
- Winking eyes demonstrate flirtation, which is not appropriate in a business meeting.
- Raised eyebrows demonstrate interest or questions.
- Furrowed eyebrows demonstrate confusion, anger, or disagreement.

The Mouth:

- Wide smile (showing the pearly whites) demonstrates confidence, interest, and enthusiasm.
- Tight smile demonstrates insincerity, condescending attitude, or lack of confidence.
- No smile demonstrates lack of interest and warmth.

The Arms:

- Open arms demonstrate openness to the conversation and agreement.
- Crossed arms demonstrate disinterest or boredom; (watch out for this in an interview).
- Flinging your arm over the back of a chair demonstrates a casual, nonchalant, or overly confident attitude, so keep your arms at your sides.

The Hands:

- Fidgeting with your hands or playing with your thumbs demonstrates nervousness.
- Talking with your hands can be a powerful way to emphasize or validate your statement, just keep it to a controlled minimum or it can be very distracting.
- Limp, weak, handshake demonstrates lack of confidence.
- Bone crusher handshake demonstrates over confidence or dominant attitude.
- A handshake with the palms facing up demonstrates subordination or weakness.
- A handshake with palms facing down demonstrates power or authority.

The Legs:

- Crossed legs, like crossed arms, can demonstrate disinterest or boredom. One recommendation is to sit with both feet on the floor tilted to the side or crossed at the ankles, which can keep you from having to constantly shift your weight and change legs.

The Feet:

- Tapping or fidgeting with your feet demonstrates nervousness. Watch out, because feet often take on a life of their own like the hands. There is one account of a candidate in an interview, who was actually kicking the desk in front of him and didn't even know it! Try to keep your feet flat on the floor to keep this from happening to you.

The Overall You:

- Be aware of your proximity to others by recognizing that we each have an invisible personal zone that surround us. Upon meeting someone for the first time a good rule of thumb is to stand approximately two to three feet from the other person, or the length of two arms bent at the elbow by your side.
- Walk and sit with your back straight, don't slouch.

- Watch out for nervous habits – pen clicking, hair twirling, eye winking, mustache stroking, ear tugging, cracking knuckles, bouncing knees, etc.
- Don't have gum, mints, or a toothpick in your mouth, as they can be very distracting.
- If you must sneeze or cough, cover your mouth appropriately and don't expect someone to shake your hand after doing so. Take a tissue with you on meetings just in case!

ENGAGING IN INTERVIEW DIALOG

Many job seekers think that they must sell themselves in an interview. While this is true, it is equally important to understand what the company needs in order to place the right emphasis in the areas of expertise that you possess that represent value to the organization. The only way to effectively do this is to listen carefully to the context of the questions that are asked and make sure you are responding to the questions appropriately. You should also be asking probing and clarifying questions to learn more about the specifics of what the company and hiring manager desires in a candidate. So, don't be afraid to ask questions.

A good interview is not a tennis match of question and response, but rather a balanced exchange of information and a healthy conversation.