

## Employment and Career Matters - Neelam Thapar

In this article, we will look at how to deal with interviews for potential jobs. Most people start to feel very nervous before approaching any interview. However, remember that an interview is a two way process and the interviewer may also be just as nervous as you!!

### INTERVIEWS

Depending on the company to which you are applying, you can expect at least one interview, maybe more. You may even be invited to attend an assessment centre.

Being interviewed for a job need not be fraught with difficulty. There are some basic skills you can learn. Remember though, to have got as far as the interview, you will have submitted a sufficiently impressive application (form or CV) to make the employer want to more about you.

As with every stage of job applications, **preparation** is the key.

- Make sure you have **researched the company as thoroughly as possible**, using the internet, financial press, company reports and recruitment literature.
- Remind yourself why you applied. What makes you want to do this particular job for this particular company?
- Look at the copy of the application form or CV and cover letter that you completed to see what you have told them.
- Think of the skills, knowledge and interests you can bring to the organisation. Look at the person specification that the firm may have provided and think of additional examples from your own experience to demonstrate each competency (skill) that the employer is looking for.
- Prepare **appropriate** questions to ask.

Always dress neatly and smartly, and avoid excessive jewellery and make-up. First impressions count, so make an effort.

First impressions are very important. An interview may well continue for 30 minutes or more, but studies have shown that someone forms judgements about you within four minutes of your meeting and that these judgements inform their subsequent impressions. Research shows that the first impression is made up as follows:

- \* 55% visual impact i.e. dress, facial expressions and other body language;
- \* 38% tone of voice;
- \* 7% from what you say

(www.prospects.ac.uk)

Ensure that you know where the interview is, and work out your route in advance. Always give yourself plenty of time, to allow for mishaps and to give yourself time to collect your thoughts.

When you arrive, be polite and courteous to everyone you meet, from reception staff to the interview panel. Smile! Look friendly and try to appear relaxed. Body language is important and can have quite a big influence on how the interview progresses.

### **Golden Rules for Answering Questions.**

- Always be positive. Even when things have gone badly for you, try to think positively about what you have learnt from the experience.
- Never offer negative information about yourself or anyone else.
- While replying to questions, make eye contact with the interview panel. Do not just talk to the person who asks the questions or who appears most sympathetic.
- Don't pretend to know something if you don't, or to answer a question you haven't understood. If you are not sure what the interviewer means, ask for clarification.
- Speak clearly and distinctly. Try to slow down, and don't rush your answers.
- Try to avoid excessive hand gestures and other physical mannerisms.
- Do not make vague statements, as the interviewer will pin you down. Be prepared to elaborate on your replies.
- Anticipate questions and have answers prepared. Run through a mock interview with someone you trust.

There are some typical questions that are likely to come up. These may include:

**Knowledge of the vacancy.** For example: what do you know about.....? What do you understand by.....? What qualities or skills do you have which make you a suitable candidate? Why do you think you would make a good.....? What experience do you have that is relevant to this position? What can you bring to the organisation?

**Knowledge of the organisation.** What do you know about our business? Why did you decide to apply to us? Who do you see as our major competitors? What do you consider to be the main difficulties facing our management?

**Career motivation and direction.** Why have you applied for this kind of work? What do you see yourself doing in 5 years time? How mobile are you? What do you want out of a career?

You may be asked about difficult areas such as if your exam results were disappointing, what contributed to this? Why are there gaps in your CV? Why did you retake your second year of your degree? Have positive answers ready, and always focus on what you have learnt from negative experiences.

An interview is a two way process. It should be conversational rather than an interrogation, and the interviewer should not be in the position of dragging information

out of you. Try to give coherent and concise answers, and avoid simply saying 'yes' or 'no'. This is your chance to convince the interviewer that you have the right qualifications, skills, experience, motivation and personality for the job, so believe in yourself.

Remember that the interviewer does want to appoint someone for the position as it costs the company time and money to keep interviewing - this is your chance to impress. Also remember that the interviewer may be testing you against the competencies mentioned in the person specification - remember even if you being interviewed by someone you know to give full descriptive answers - do not assume that the interviewer will know what you have being doing.

You will be asked if you have any questions. It is useful to have questions prepared before hand. However, if you feel everything has been covered in the interview, it is perfectly acceptable to say that your questions have been answered during the course of the conversation.

If you do have questions, make sure they relate to the job, the firm, its' training, career structure and market. Do not ask about information that is freely available in the company literature and preferably do not ask about holiday and benefits.

If you have disclosed about Thalassaemia in your application form (you may not have done so), do not assume that the interviewer or interview panel will have all the details. Quite often, the medical part of the form is kept by the Personnel Department and the interview panel is only informed that the candidate has ticked the disability or health condition section. Be prepared to be positive and not to give a medical explanation full of complicated terminology. If you need to give any information, show how having Thalassaemia has helped you to have excellent time management skills or how you have been able to combine having your treatment and studying or working.

Once you have left the interview, you could make notes for yourself. Was there anything you were not expecting? Was there anything you should have covered in your research but didn't? What questions were you asked? Which questions did you find difficult, and why?

Your interviewer will usually indicate when you will learn the result of the interview. Many organisations operate a 2-stage selection process with second interviews and an assessment centre. However for some jobs there will only be one interview before a final decision is made.

If you are successful, you will need to know about salary, start date, and leave entitlement etc before you sign any contract. If you are not successful, you can try and get some feedback on your performance from the Chair of the interview panel.

You may have been to several interviews and have a choice which position you wish to accept. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of each job and company. Discuss this with someone who can help facilitate your decision.

**Be positive and believe in yourself**

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