

# **A Brief Guide to Interviews**

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## Introduction

Research shows that interviewers make a decision as to whether or not they want to employ candidates within 30 - 60 seconds of meeting them.

That may not seem fair but, just like when you meet someone for the first time, it's based on:

- *How you're dressed*
- *How you carry yourself*
- *How you talk*

There are other factors but these are the killers in the first 30 seconds.

The over-riding thing to remember is that in order to turn a job down, you first need to be offered it.

You may be going to an interview where you're not certain that the job is for you and all too easily you can slip into the mindset that **"let them sell it to me"**.

**If that's the case – don't go.** Employers are only interested in candidates that are interested in them and are enthusiastic about working for them.

If an interviewer thinks that a candidate is better qualified or better paid than the job entails they will often make the job bigger or better paid!

In the following pages you will find some specific advice on how to plan and prepare for an interview and how to conduct yourself at the actual interview.

***Good luck!***

## Prior to the Interview – 5 things to do!

### 1. Research the company.

Not too much; nobody likes a know it all but enough to show them that you are interested in the business.

### 2. Reread your CV.

Why did you make your career moves? Is a question that every interviewer asks, or expects you to volunteer, whilst going through your CV. Be prepared to explain any gaps in your CV and when discussing moves NEVER say that you had a disagreement with your boss.

### 3. Have an answer for the following because they always get asked!:-

- Your biggest strength
- Your biggest weakness
- Why do you want the job?

There are lots of other questions that can and will be asked but these are almost certainties.

### 4. Prepare a list of questions

Interviewers always ask you at the end of an interview "is there anything you'd like to ask us?" Most people will say "No, I think you've covered everything". Rubbish, you just want to get out of there!

Write down on a piece of paper everything your wife/husband/girlfriend/boyfriend will ask you afterwards, take it out in the interview and make sure you get an answer. Not only will this help you but it will seriously impress the interviewer.

### 5. Plan

Make sure you know precisely where you are going and allow plenty of time to get there. It's fine to be early but deadly to be late.

## Dress Codes

You need to dress appropriately for an interview, particularly those for Management, Sales or Customer Facing positions.

Do not be naive enough to believe that it does not matter, but do not overdo it. Like many things in recruitment it is its negative effect that is important.

Overdress and people will immediately take the opinion that you are too fussy, too picky or too precious. Too scruffy and it will simply say that you could not be bothered to make the effort.

A sober, sensible and smart appearance will never be penalised. No candidate will ever have problems dressing in a well tailored, middle of the road suit or outfit, clean shoes and a genuinely professional and businesslike appearance.

**Finally; if you are a smoker – don't smoke for at least 30 minutes prior to the interview.**

### Some Basic Rules:-

#### Men

- Wear a dark coloured plain suit.
- Long sleeved shirt - never wear short sleeves.
- Conservative tie.
- Black (polished) shoes & dark plain socks.
- Try and get your hair cut a few days beforehand.
- Do not wear any earrings or any other jewellery, apart from a watch and wedding/signet ring.

#### Women

- Wear conservative plain shoes.
- Use a briefcase or large bag for any papers
- Not too much make up or perfume.
- Do not wear a lot of jewellery.
- One set of earrings only.

## Interview Body Language – 10 Top Tips

### 1. Eye Contact.

When you first meet somebody eye contact is one of the most important aspects of dealing with them, so in an interview it's essential that you get it right.

There are cultural differences in eye contact but here in the UK any less than 60% of the time makes you look shifty or bored, and any more than about 70% makes you look a bit psychotic and intense.

### 2. Posture

This is something you must get right if you are to feel confident and comfortable and to project those feelings to the interviewer. It's a bit like the army – back straight, head up and shoulders back. Try it and you'll feel the difference immediately.

### 3. Head Position.

If someone is interested in what you are saying then their head will be tilted slightly to one side and slightly towards you. This works the other way. If the interviewer is talking to you, then adopt this posture.

### 4. Arms.

Arms are a big give away as to how we are feeling. Keep your arms out to the side of your body or behind your back. Folding your arms is a very defensive posture and is a complete no-no in an interview. Don't wave your arms around too much as this can appear aggressive and uncontrolled, but too little shows a lack of passion or interest.

### 5. Hand Gestures

There are so many hand gestures that it's hard to give a concise guide, but broadly speaking your palms should be slightly up and outward which is seen as open and friendly. Holding your hands with the palm down, points to a dominant, emphasising and maybe even aggressive attitude. When you shake hands you should always offer your hand in an upright vertical position; if you hold your hand out with the palm down this is seen as overtly trying to be dominant.

## **6. Distance**

The distance that you stand from others is crucial if you want to give off the right signals. Stand too close to another person and you'll be marked as "Pushy" or "In your face". Conversely if you stand or sit too far away then you're "Keeping your distance" or "Stand offish". Generally speaking the closest you want to get someone in a business situation is an arms length. This is your (and their) personal space. If the other person steps away from you then you are too close for comfort! Back off!

## **7. Angles**

Body angles are an important issue. We will naturally angle ourselves toward people we find attractive, friendly and/or interesting and angle ourselves away from those we don't. It's as simple as that! This includes not just turning your body but also leaning. If you lean toward someone it gives positive signals of interest and attraction. Leaning away – the opposite applies (see point 3).

## **8. Legs are a tricky one.**

When people are nervous, bored or lying then leg movement increases markedly. Think of jiggling your leg when you're in a boring meeting! The best thing you can do is to keep your legs as still as possible in interviews. If you cross your legs make sure it's not with one ankle up on the other knee as this is both defensive and sends out a signal of disbelief.

## **9. The hand Over Mouth.**

This identifies a lie. It's very simple; if your hand even slightly obscures your mouth when you're talking then it implies a lie. This is most common in children who will actually put their hands right over their mouth when they're lying, but adults do this too – if a little more subtly.

## **10. Mirroring.**

If someone you are talking to (or even if you're just in their company) starts to copy your gestures or movements then this signifies their interest in you. Likewise if you start to do this then you are sending out a signal of interest to them. Be careful of overdoing it though!

## Key Qualities and Personal Attributes

### 10 Key Attributes that every employer is looking for – even if they don't know it!

Listed below are the main areas that interviewers will be focusing on – to a lesser or greater extent.

**Communication** – Can you communicate clearly? Engage brain before mouth! It may sound strange, but how you say something is as important as what you actually say. Vary the tone of your voice and don't speak too softly. Speak clearly and talk in whole sentences. If a company is to see you representing them in the marketplace then you must be able to use language.

**Interest** – You must be able to demonstrate an interest in their business. Ask some pointed questions and listen carefully to the answers. Not only will you show interest but you'll also find something out!

**Enthusiasm** – People employ enthusiasm. You must stay positive and enthusiastic about the job for the entire interview – even when it seems to be over. Remember that in order to turn a job down you first need to be offered it.

**Positive Attitude** - Smile at the interviewer and keep negatives out of the interview. Never slate your previous employer, boss or colleagues. You must at all costs avoid sounding bitter about anything; for example redundancy.

**Professionalism** – This is very much about personal appearance and grooming. This is the best dressed and turned out that you should ever be. Dirty fingernails could cost you a job offer.

**Self-confidence** - Your body language will give an employer a powerful insight into your confidence and general attitude. See the section on Body Language for more information on this.

**Leadership** - Leaders are always sought after by employers. Give examples of times when you have shown leadership in business, military service or in community activities such as Round Table, Rotary, Scouts etc

**Sensitivity** – This is not as odd as it sounds. No employer wants an employee who is going to upset their current staff by being rude and insensitive. Don't make the mistake of associating sensitivity with weakness.

**Salesmanship** – it might not be immediately obvious but every employee in a company is a sales person, both in and out of work. Credit controllers and Purchase Ledger Clerks are sales people when they deal with customers and suppliers, Receptionists are sales people when they are on the phone or greeting visiting clients, Car Mechanics are sales people when they use a seat protector; EVERYBODY IS A SALESPERSON. Find some examples of how you have sold your company.

**Flexibility** – how flexible are you to change? Are you positive about it or are you one of those who say "we tried that before and it didn't work" or "that's not the way we do things here". Those are the people who put obstacles in a company's path – and they don't get hired.

Think about each of these when preparing for your interview and have examples ready – you may not need them but you must prepare if you are to succeed.



## **Ten questions that you should ask your prospective employer:**

1. Why is this position available right now? Why did the previous person leave?
2. How long had the previous person been in the role?
3. What are you looking for the new person to do that is different from the last person that had this position?
4. What would you most like to see done in the next 6-12 months?
5. What are the most difficult issues that this job entails?
6. What level of authority will I have in being able to make decisions?
7. Will there be any prospects for promotion in the future?
8. What has made the company successful?
9. What changes are planned for the company?
10. How will my performance be assessed?