



# Interview Skills Hints And Tips

## Be Prepared

The amount of preparation you do will determine how well you deal with difficult questions.

One of the best ways to prepare is to prepare answers to some common questions that might relate to the qualities the employer is seeking, as stated in the selection criteria or job ad.

Get a sense of how you might start to answer the question, of the important examples you would bring up that demonstrate your ability in a certain area, and how you might finish off your answer. **Don't** learn an answer parrot fashion, but **do** practice your responses at home with a friend or family member. It's only when you actually verbalise the answer that you hear how good or bad your answer sounds. (UOW, Careers Service *The Edge*)

## Structuring your response to interview questions

Often an interviewer asks you to respond to questions about your experience in relation to the selection criteria. The following structure may help and works with about 80% of questions:

**Introduction:** rephrasing the question in relation to why it is important

**Body:** provide examples following the STAR model:

Situation

Task

Action

Response – how did others respond ie peer, clients, supervisors

**Conclusion:** concluding remark

(*Martin Smith, UOW, Careers Service*)

## Example:

*Question:* Customer service is very important in this role – tell us a situation where you have been proud of your customer service skills?

*Response:* I believe delivering exceptional customer service skills provides an organisation with a leading edge. Two important skills besides your attitude and manner are providing customers with alternatives and displaying empathy. Recently I served a client who was very frustrated at not being able to access information because of a technology problem. I offered to take the customer's name and details and telephone him when the problem was rectified. After I had followed through with this he was very appreciative and wrote a formal compliment to the organisation, thanking me for the service I provided. This example illustrates my attitude of providing friendly, value added customer service.

## Hints and Tips:

- Give yourself time to compose an answer. When responding to questions don't feel that you have to immediately jump in with your answer.

- If you know you have gone off-track, you might say – “I seem to have taken the wrong approach – a better approach would be .....”. This way you get to the point, rather than taking three minutes to waffle your way to your final answer.
- If you have a mental block it may be hard for the interviewer to know if you have finished your response. You could say - “Yes, I think I have covered everything” – to indicate you have finished.
- It is important in an interview to show how **you** can make a difference.
- If you need more time to respond to a difficult question you could say – “Do you mind if I have a moment to compose my thoughts”.
- The interviewer wants to know about you and your suitability for the position, so it is important to emphasize your achievements. Relate specific examples of where you have demonstrated your proficiency in certain areas. Make sure you refer to **your** actual role. Even if it was a group task, talk about your individual role, what contribution you actually made, and also how you interacted with the group.– use “I” rather than “we”.
- Make sure you do not criticize your current or former employer.

(Adapted from: UOW, Careers Service, *The Edge*)

### **The Final Summary**

Many interviewers end with a request to the applicant as to whether they have anything they wish to add or whether there is anything the panel may have missed. This is an opportunity for you to end on a positive note. You may think that everything has been covered. Even if this is so, it is worth making a succinct statement about why you are the best person for the position.

If the job description refers to matters which you think have not been covered by the selection criteria, this is a chance to mention relevant experience.

The final summary is an opportunity to have the last word and to leave a favourable impression about your claims to the position as well as the quality of your communication skills, but keep it short. (Villiers, 2000)

### **Sample interview questions**

- Customer service is very important in this role – tell us some situations where you have been proud of your customer service skills?
- Tell us about your skills in using technology to present information in a professional manner?
- Describe some circumstances where you have administered or coordinated complex projects?
- What is the basis of your team skills?
- How do you cope under competing demands and tight deadlines?
- Can you give some examples of where you have had to think laterally to solve problems?
- Tell us about your suitability to work with people from different cultures?
- Why did you apply for this position?
- Why do you believe you are the most suitable candidate for this position?

### **10 Rules of Interviewing**

Before stepping into an interview, be sure to practice, practice, practice. A job seeker going to a job without preparing is like an actor performing on opening night without rehearsing.

To help with the interview process, keep the following ten rules in mind:

**1. Keep your answers brief and concise**

Unless asked to give more detail, limit your answers to two to three minutes per question. Tape yourself and see how long it takes you to answer a question.

**2. Include concrete, quantifiable data**

Interviewees tend to talk in generalities. Unfortunately generalities often fail to convince interviewers that the applicant has assets. Include measurable information and provide details about specific accomplishments when discussing strengths.

**3. Repeat your key strengths**

It's essential that you comfortably and confidently articulate your strengths. Explain how the strengths relate to the company's or department's goals and how they might benefit from your strengths. This will make them memorable – if supported with quantifiable accomplishments – they will more likely be believed.

**4. Prepare five or more success stories**

In preparing for interviews, make a list of your skills and key assets. Then reflect on past jobs and pick out one or two instances when you used your skills successfully.

**5. Put yourself on their team**

Ally yourself with the prospective employer by using the employer's name and products or services. For example: "As a member of \_\_\_\_ I would carefully analyse the \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_." Show that you are thinking like a member of a team and will fit in with the existing environment. Be careful though not to say anything that would offend or be taken negatively. Your research will help you in this area.

**6. Image is often as important as content**

What you look like and how you say something are just as important as what you say. Studies have shown that 65% of the conveyed message is non-verbal: gesture, physical appearance and attire are highly influential during job interviews.

**7. Ask Questions**

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. Then look for opportunities to ask them during the interview. Don't ask about benefits or salary. The interview process is a two way street whereby you and the interviewer assess each other to determine if there is an appropriate match.

**8. Maintain a conversational flow**

By consciously maintaining a conversational flow – a dialogue instead of monologue – you will be perceived more positively. Use feedback questions at the end of your answers and use body language and voice intonation to create a conversational interchange between you and the interviewer.

**9. Research the company, product lines and competitors**

Research will provide information to help you decide whether you're interested in the company and important data to refer to during the interview.

### **10. Keep an interview journal**

As soon as possible, write a brief summary of what happened. Note any follow-up action you should take and put it in your diary. Review your presentation. Keep a journal of your attitude and the way you answered the questions. Did you ask questions to get the information you needed? Prepare and send a brief, concise thank you letter. Restate your skills and what you can do for the company.

*Written by Roseanne Lidle. From Workscope (2001), Issue 9, July.*

For further support and advice on career development contact the Career Development Unit.

David Reynolds, Learning and Development Consultant

Phone: x3067, Email: [mailto:david\\_reynolds@uow.edu.au](mailto:david_reynolds@uow.edu.au)

Lorraine Denny, Learning and Development Consultant

Phone: x5941, Email: [mailto:lorraine\\_denny@uow.edu.au](mailto:lorraine_denny@uow.edu.au)