

INTERVIEWING

An interview is your opportunity to show a potential employer that you are the right person for the position. The employer is attempting to gauge whether you will fit into the organization's culture. They want to know how interested you are in doing the work and if you can be counted on to get the job done. If you are being called into an interview, then it means at least two things: you have the minimum qualifications and someone thinks you can do the job. The key to successful interviewing is convincing the interviewer(s) that you're the "right fit" for the job.

The best interviews are ones that evolve into a conversation about you. If you get to this point, hopefully your conversation will begin to center around your passions and interests. If your interview is just question, then answer, question, then answer, it might not be going so well. Having this conversation about you is important because interviews are all about how your personality is going to "fit" into an organization's culture, a team's group dynamics, and a supervisor's working style. The interviewer really is trying to dig at or probe into what type of personality you have so it is best to act as natural as possible to allow your true personality to come out.

PRIOR TO THE INTERVIEW

Research the Organization

You should prepare carefully for the interview by researching information about the organization, its projects and its mission or philosophy. Your research should help you generate questions that you can ask during the interview.

Your research should focus on (but not be limited to) the organization's:

- Location(s)
- Facilities
- Size
- Products and services
- Financial data
- History
- Executive biography
- Management and employee data
- Mission, vision, strategies and goals
- Recent news and announcements

Research Yourself

You should be prepared to have a quick summary of your qualifications, tailored to the position, which you can use to introduce yourself and answer the "tell me about yourself" question. This should be based on the information in the profile on your resume and not a historical recount of your resume (first I got my degree in...then I went to work for...)

Arriving at the Interview

You should arrive 15 minutes prior to your interview time and know the interviewers' names ahead of time. This will save you from embarrassment and will show the employer that you are a professional individual. When you arrive at the interview, you should be prepared and have the following items with you:

- Extra resumes, reference sheets, and letters of recommendation (if applicable)
- A note pad and two pens
- Educational transcripts
- Work samples (if applicable)
- For a dinner/lunch interview- small travel toothbrush
- Special note for women - extra hosiery

THE INTERVIEW

During the interview be sure to speak clearly and concisely. Make sure that you are speaking with confidence and that you are maintaining good eye contact with all interviewers. In addition, pay close attention to your posture and non-verbal communications. Do not fidget or use your hands excessively while speaking. These things distract interviewers and take away from your presentation.

TOP 10 INTERVIEWING TIPS

1. Research the company and industry beforehand.
2. Read the job description thoroughly.
3. Look the part – dress for the position and the company.
4. Be enthusiastic!
5. Listen carefully to the question and answer the question asked.
6. Tell memorable stories to illustrate strengths.
7. Match your strengths to the position.
8. Highlight your experience as a team player.
9. If asked for examples, be as specific as possible.
10. Leave something to remember you by – articles, portfolio, etc.

Questions and Answers

Employers ask questions in many ways to explore and probe your background and skills. In addition to your stated answer to the questions, interviewers are also seeking answers to questions they will not ever directly ask. These are the “behind-the-scenes” questions. Let’s examine some of the types of questions you might expect in an interview as well as examine what the questions really mean.

Straight Forward Questions

1. **Tell me a little about yourself.**

This question is a common opener, but what the interviewer wants to know is “how will you sell yourself?” You should focus on your skills, education, and experiences related to the position. Be careful not to include personal information. Usually, a short summary is good to use here, starting with the most current information about yourself (i.e., “Master of Public Health candidate...”)

i.e. Currently, I’m a Master of Public Health candidate with a wide range of experience in epidemiology including a short consultancy with the World Bank where I assisted in exploring an epidemic surveillance system for rural areas in South America. I also have spent much of my time while studying for my MPH degree exploring the causes of and solutions for water borne diseases. I enjoy working in a team atmosphere and possess good analytical and writing skills. For example, I was a member of a team that wrote the standards for water sanitation in South East Asia.

2. **What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?**

This question is one that can include either professional accomplishments, personal accomplishments, or both. What the interviewer really wants to know is “What do you value?” Typically, our proudest accomplishments align with values you hold the strongest and these same values will most likely continue as a future employee.

i.e. One accomplishment that has given me the most satisfaction is completing and defending my thesis. The countless hours of research and revisions produced a writing sample I am proud of. In particular, I’ll never forget the contributions of the many colleagues, friends, classmates that help me to finish my thesis. Another accomplishment that has given the most satisfaction is being the first member of my family to complete college and also go onto graduate school. Many extended family members in my native country are proud for what I’ve been able to accomplish and look to me as an inspiration to follow through on their lifetime goals.

3. **Tell me about your weaknesses.**

Do not focus on weaknesses that are directly related to the position, but describe a weakness that you are either working to overcome or have overcome.

i.e. I used to be uncomfortable speaking to large groups of people, but I have improved upon my presentation skills by participation in class presentations and I even took the opportunity to present my research at the recent WHO conference. I received very positive feedback from the attendees at the conference and am planning to present at the upcoming Global Health Conference.

Problem Solving Questions

These questions require you to solve a ‘real world’ problem. Often the organization is not looking for the ‘right’ answer, but they would like to see the process that you use to solve the problem. Therefore, when you answer a problem-solving question, you should:

- Listen carefully to what is being asked.
- Ask clarifying questions (if applicable).
- Respond by first explaining how you would gather the data needed to make a decision.
- Discuss how you would use that data to generate options.
- Explain your recommendation/solution based on the data, the available options, and your understanding of the position that you are interviewing for currently.

Unrelated Questions

These questions are asked to probe your thought process and how you make decisions. They generally have nothing to do with the qualifications for the position. **Example: Who would you want with you if you were stranded on a deserted island?** - A carpenter, to ensure that we would be able to build shelter and eventually a vessel to sail from the island (thus showing your resourcefulness)

Illegal Questions

Most employers are familiar with the laws regarding what questions they can and cannot ask.

If you feel a question is inappropriate, don't get upset and refuse to answer. Ask the question "Can you tell me how that pertains to the job?" in a polite and respectful way. In the United States, there are many things that potential employers cannot ask job candidates. Some examples are "Are you married?", "Do you have kids?", "How old are your children?", "How old are you?", "Do you have any health-related problems?" etc. Answering illegal questions can be a bit tricky. But we can offer some help. There are three basic strategies for handling an illegal question:

Option #1 - Refuse Completely

This method can be used if you would just rather not answer the question, or if you feel the interviewer is going to use the answer against you. It is dangerous though and may make you look like a troublemaker. The fear that you may sue them can work either for or against you. This depends completely on the interviewer. For this refusal you would say something like "That question is not really very proper so I think we should go on to the next question."

Option #2 - Mention that the question is illegal, but answer it anyway.

This is option is sometimes used when you don't really mind answering the question, but you don't like that it was asked in the context of a job interview. You are perfectly within your right to say "I don't think that question is completely proper, but I don't mind answering. No, I am not married."

Option #3 - Just answer it

This is the simplest approach. If your answer is probably what they want anyway, then sometimes the safest approach is to just answer the question. A job interview is no place to fix all of society's problems. If you really want to do something, if you don't get the job, then get a lawyer and sue for the illegal questions.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral interviewing is designed to minimize personal impressions that can affect the hiring decision. Because research shows that past behavior is the best predictor for your future performance, many organizations (especially the U.S. Federal Government and consulting firms) have started using behavioral questions during interviews. By focusing on the applicant's actions and behaviors, rather than subjective impressions that can sometimes be misleading, interviewers can make more accurate hiring decisions.

How to Prepare for a Behavioral Interview

- Recall recent situations that show favorable situations or actions, especially involving course work, work experience, leadership, teamwork, initiative, planning, and customer service.
- Prepare short descriptions of each situation. Be ready to give details if asked.
- Be sure the outcome or result reflects positively on you (even if the result itself was not favorable).
- Be honest. Don't embellish or omit any part of the story.
- Be specific. Don't generalize about several events. Give a detailed account of one event.

How the Behavioral Interview Works

- Instead of asking how you would behave, the interviewer will ask you to describe how you did behave.
- Expect the interviewer to question and probe (think of "peeling the layers from an onion").
- The interviewer will ask you to provide details, and will not allow you to theorize or generalize about several events.
- The interview will be a more structured process that will concentrate on areas that are important to the interviewer, rather than allowing you to concentrate on areas that you may feel are important.
- You may not get a chance to deliver any prepared stories.
- Most interviewers will be taking notes throughout the interview.

Interviewing and Image

- 60% of an interview is the way you look (are dressed)
- 30% of an interview is the way you physically present yourself (body language)
- 10% of the interview is what you have to say

Thus, image plays a big role in the interview. Below is a checklist to help in creating a “Professional Image in Public Health”

Physical Appearance**Women’s Image Wardrobe**

- Wear a skirt and jacket (matched or unmatched) or a dress and jacket in plain style (pant suit is OK)
- Wear fashionable shoes, preferably heeled, and always tights or stockings
- Makeup should be discreet and carefully applied
- Avoid dangly earrings, clanking bracelets and floppy scarves that can be distracting
- If you have loops on your dress/skirt, wear a belt

Men’s Image Wardrobe

- It is generally wise to wear a dark suit and a lighter shirt and a dark tie (avoid garish patterns and bow ties)
- Wear black shoes and never suede, must be polished

Body Language

- Enter a room confidently. Hold your head up and shoulders back in a comfortable position. Enter with purpose and look pleased to be there. Shake hands firmly but not with a vice-like grip.
- Smile. A smile is one of the most underestimated business tools.
- Avoid fidgeting, scratching or fussing with objects & no matter how nervous, do not clench your fists.
- Always make and retain eye contact with anyone you are talking to.
- Body spacing - Do not stand too close to anyone – about three feet away is acceptable.
- Sit back in your seat and place your feet firmly on the floor. This will make you feel more confident.
- Sit upright and lean forward slightly giving the impression of being alert and interested.
- Indicate that you are listening. Respond to the interviewer with gestures such as nods.

Verbal

- Make sure that you can be heard.
- Always be courteous to anyone you meet – Gate guard, secretary, receptionist, etc.
- Be aware of the interviewer’s reaction to your voice.
- Do not mumble or drop your voice to a whisper towards the end of sentences.
- Avoid singsong or monotone recitations, which give the impression that you are over-rehearsed.
- Also avoid slang, grunts, “ums” and any other verbal tics.

TIPS FOR INTERVIEWING IN INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- **Take your time.** Get focused, organize your points, and recall what you said in your cover letter.
- **Showcase your second language.** If a second language is required, expect to conduct at least a part of the interview in that language.
- **Be clear about your motives.** Be prepared to explain in a compelling way why you want to work overseas.
- **Tell a good story.** Prepare an anecdote or two that is based on your past experience. The story should relate to the position requirements and show you in a favorable light.
- **Translate theory into practice.** Being able to relate a story about a relevant past experience is far more memorable than a “textbook” answer.
- **Stress your writing skills.** Offer copies of your writing, both in English and in any required second language.
- **Know your timeline.** Be ready to discuss possible departure and return dates, if going overseas.
- **Be curious.** Ask some questions of your interviewers.
- **Finally, get personal.** The best time to mention any special needs (disability, special education for children, major family problems) is toward the end of the first interview when you sense things are going well.