



SECRETS FROM A HEADHUNTER – INTERVIEW SURVIVAL TIPS

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In my experience, the biggest mistake candidates make with executive –level interviews is to think that they can ‘wing’ the interview process, over-estimating their interviewing skills. A large percentage of my executive candidates will tell me that they will be fine when it comes to the interview process, only to find out later that they have interviewed poorly and have not been invited back for a second round discussion.

For this reason, I insist that my executive candidates undergo a rigorous interview practice schedule prior to any important client facing interview process. Nothing can beat hard core interview practice because interviewing skills, thankfully, can be significantly improved and mastered with even a modest investment of time. I cannot stress enough that interview preparation is the key to securing the job of your dreams. In this current economic climate, when the stakes are high and the interview process has never been more competitive for the roles that are available, you cannot afford to leave that important job interview to chance. Get professional help and advice.

I have put together some basic pointers that I recommend for executives preparing for interviews. Some of this information might seem very basic and common sense, but you would be surprised how many candidates make simple mistakes which can mean the difference between a job offer and a rejection letter.

Interview Preparation

It is imperative prior to interview that you have completed your research about the company so that you can learn as much about the organization and the people you will be interviewing with as possible. This inevitably means doing more than just a quick whizz over the company website the morning of the interview! Always confirm the names and the business titles of who you will be interviewing with and get clear instructions in writing from the recruiter as to the location and time of the interview. The more you know about the people you will be interviewing with, the more comfortable you will be. It is relatively easy to find out background information about who you will be interviewing with via a Google search, a quick check on LinkedIn, or simply ask the recruiter for more information about who you will be meeting. The more information that you have, the better you will be able to prepare. I also recommend to candidates when applying for roles via other recruitment firms to ask for a job description to assist with their interview preparation. When this is not available, it can make preparation for the interview considerably harder.





Interviews are predominantly framed on 'competency-based' interview principles. This means that the interview questions are designed to assess whether the candidate can do the job, whether you would be able to hit the ground running once on the job, and whether you fit with the company's culture and management team, through assessment of your competencies, skills, capabilities and past experience. To prepare for your interview, you should anticipate what questions you may be asked and rehearse quality responses that address them. This is relatively easy as I can almost guarantee the questions that you will be asked as they will broadly cover 5 key areas that the employer will be looking to address during the interview process.

5 Key Areas The Employer Will Want To Address:

1. Why are you here, why do you want to work for us, why are you knocking on our door?
2. What can you do for us?
3. What kind of person are you? Can you fit in our organisation and do you have the same values as us?
4. What distinguishes you from other applicants? For example, will you go the extra mile; do you have better work habits?
5. Can we afford you? Where do you fit into our organisation chart...?



5 Key Pieces of Information the Candidate Should Try and Get Out of the Interview:

1. What does the job involve?
2. What are the skills that a top employee in this job would have?
3. Are these the kind of people YOU could and want to work with?
4. Can you show that there is something unique about you that will differentiate you from other candidates?
5. Can you persuade them to hire you on the sort of salary that you want?

What are your key values? Demonstrate these values and you are UNLIKELY to get the job!!

1. Arrogance
2. Aggression
3. Tardiness – late for appointment
4. Complaining or blaming especially about previous employer
5. Any sign of dishonesty or lying
6. Irresponsibility
7. Inappropriate humour
8. Not following instructions



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9. Lack of enthusiasm
 10. Any sign of instability

Appearance and Personal Habits, Before Interview Make Sure....

1. Wear a dark suit, conservative corporate style dress is usually recommended
2. You are freshly showered
3. Try to get an am interview vs. later in the day
4. Interviews mid to late week are usually more successful
5. Freshly laundered clothes
6. Pants with sharp creases
7. Shoes polished
8. Finger nails clean
9. Fresh Breathe! Absolutely essential for smokers!
10. Not too much cologne/aftershave
11. Avoid smoking prior to interview
12. Ladies – avoid clothes that are revealing – dress conservatively

Nervous Mannerisms – Things to Avoid

- Weak handshake
- Avoiding eye contact
- Too much eye contact – or staring
- Using the word “ok” or “yeah” throughout conversation
- It’s a good idea to keep your hands placed on lap
- Don’t speak too softly or too loudly

When you arrive for interview be polite and show consideration to the receptionist/secretary. If you move to a coffee shop, show courtesy to the waitress at the coffee shop. It’s the little things that count and you are on display the moment you arrive. Remember to thank the interviewer and if possible follow up with thank you note if appropriate.

Closing Interview Questions

1. If things go well during the job interview, don’t forget to ASK for the job!
2. Given my skills and experience is there an opportunity for me here.....?
3. Can you offer me this job?
4. When can I expect to hear from you?
5. Can I ask when is the latest that I can expect to hear from you, what is the process from here?



Interview Rules/Tips

- Research company prior to interview including checking the company website, press, leverage your contacts, check Google & LinkedIn
- 50/50 rule re how much you should speak
- Answer questions within 20sec - 2mins, practice this timing, to make sure that you do not under-answer your questions and do not ramble over-time and lose the interviewers attention
- You must prepare and plan what you are going to say!
- Think of yourself in terms of how you can solve company problems – you are the solution! Use language to reflect this...
- Illustrate the way you have conducted your job search – and why you want to work for the company, make them feel special.
- Evidence of your past success and relevant examples of your past experience should be weave into the conversation
- Don't bad mouth former employers
- Treat interview as a research opportunity, think peer to peer – versus I am begging for a job!
- Remember HR are trying to screen you out, every answer needs to be great/better than average
- Don't let your resume become the agenda for the meeting
- Must send thank you notes following interview....very important extra effort that will get you noticed
- Everything that you say, think in terms of how you can benefit the organisation

Salary Negotiation

Never discuss salary until the end of the interview process when they have definitely said that they want to hire you!



How to Avoid Salary Discussions....!

1. Until you have decided that I am the preferred candidate and I can demonstrate that I can help you, salary discussion is probably premature....
2. I'll gladly come to that but firstly could you help me to understand what the role involves?
3. I'm looking for a salary in the range of X to Y (if above two options fail), but remember at executive level many employers will expect you to be skilled at handling this part of the discussion and may even use this process to assess your negotiation skills and ability.

Your bargaining power increases gradually after...

1. They know who you are
2. They decide that they like you



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3. They decide that they love you
 4. They decide that they MUST have you

NOTE: At point 4 is the best time to negotiate your salary!

Other Points to Note....

- Purpose of negotiation is to work out the most that the employer is willing to pay
- During salary negotiations please try not to be the person who mentions a salary figure
- Know what you want and know what the industry trends are
- Research salaries in your field
- Remember as a general rule, big named companies will pay less than smaller, less well known organisations.

General Pointers for Interviews

- Arrive a few minutes early for the interview (10-15 minutes, if possible)
- Smile and greet the interviewer with a firm handshake
- Address the interviewer by his/her name
- Display a positive attitude, be enthusiastic and look alert and interested at all times
- Be able to articulate why you want this job, and express an interest in the position
- Maintain eye contact with the interviewer
- Use proper English and avoid using slang. Never, ever use profanity.
- Speak slowly and distinctly, and don't rush your answers
- Answer questions in a direct and concise manner, and don't stray off the subject at hand
- Do your homework ahead of time so you will be well-prepared
- Review company website information, management team, shareholder reports etc
- Ask pertinent questions to show interest in the position, the company and the industry
- Bring a briefcase and/or have paper and a pen with you so you can take notes
- Be ready to discuss specific examples of your major professional accomplishments
- Avoid speaking negatively about present or previous employers or co-workers
- Do not discuss salary, benefits, religion, politics, or spousal issues unless the topics are initiated by the interviewer
- Follow up the interview with a thank-you letter to the recruiter and the interviewer

EXAMPLES / SAMPLE Behavioral Interview Questions *Grouped By Skill*

ADAPTABILITY

- Tell me about a situation in which you have had to adjust to changes over which you had no control. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you had to adjust to a classmate's or colleague's working style in order to complete a project or achieve your objectives.
- How was your transition from high school to college? Did you face any particular problems?



How did you handle them?

ANALYTICAL SKILLS / PROBLEM SOLVING

- Describe the project or situation that best demonstrates your analytical abilities. What was your role?
- Tell me about a time when you had to analyze information and make a recommendation.
- To whom did you make the recommendation? What was your reasoning? What kind of thought process did you go through?
- Why? Was the recommendation accepted? If not, why?
- Tell me about a situation where you had to solve a difficult problem. What did you do?
- What was your thought process? What was the outcome? What do you wish you had done differently?
- What steps do you follow to study a problem before making a decision? Why?

COMMUNICATION

- Tell me about a recent successful experience in making a speech or presentation? How did you prepare? What obstacles did you face? How did you handle them?
- Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your classmates or co-workers? How did you do it?
- Did they accept your idea?
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation? What obstacles or difficulties did you face?
- How did you deal with them?
- Tell me about a time in which you had to use your written communication skills in order to get an important point across.

CREATIVITY

- When was the last time you thought "outside the box" and how did you do it? Why?
- Tell me about a problem that you've solved in a unique or unusual way. What was the outcome? Were you happy or satisfied with it?
- Give me an example of when someone brought you a new idea that was odd or unusual.
- What did you do?

DECISION MAKING

- Tell me about a time when you had to make a decision without all the information you needed. How did you handle it? Why? Were you happy with the outcome?
- Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision. What obstacles did you face? What did you do?
- What is the most difficult decision you've had to make? How did you arrive at your decision?
- What was the result?





GOAL SETTING

- Give me an example of an important goal which you have set and tell me how you reached it. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did you overcome the obstacles?
- Tell me about a goal that you set that you did not reach. What steps did you take? What obstacles did you encounter? How did it make you feel?

INITIATIVE

- Describe a project or idea (not necessarily your own) that was implemented primarily because of your efforts. What was your role? What was the outcome?
- Describe a situation in which you recognized a potential problem as an opportunity. What did you do? What was the result?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- Tell me about a project you initiated. What did you do? Why? What was the outcome?
- Were you happy with the result?
- Tell me about a time when your initiative caused a change to occur.
- What was the best idea you came up with during your professional or college career?
- How did you apply it?

INTEGRITY/HONESTY

- Discuss a time when your integrity was challenged. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you experienced a loss for doing what is right. How did you react?
- Tell me about a business situation when you felt honesty was inappropriate. Why? What did you do?
- Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree. Why?

INTERPERSONAL SKILLS

- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. How/why was this person difficult? How did you handle it? How did the relationship progress?
- Describe a situation where you found yourself dealing with someone who didn't like you. How did you handle it?
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made. How was it received? How did you handle it?
- What, in your opinion, are the key ingredients in guiding and maintaining successful business relationships? Give me examples of how you have made this work for you.
- Give me an example of a time when you were able to successfully communicate with another person even when that individual may not have personally liked you (or vice versa). How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team with someone you did not get along with. What happened?
- Describe a situation where you had a conflict with another individual, and how you dealt with it. What was the outcome? How did you feel about it?





LEADERSHIP

- Tell me about a team project when you had to take the lead or take charge of the project? What did you do? How did you do it? What was the result?
- Describe a leadership role of yours. Why did you commit your time to it? How did you feel about it?
- What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from? What were the obstacles? How did you handle the situation? What were the reactions of the group members? What was the end result?

PLANNING AND ORGANIZATION / TIME MANAGEMENT

- Describe a situation that required you to do a number of things at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- How do you prioritize projects and tasks when scheduling your time? Give me some examples.
- Tell me about a project that you planned. How did you organize and schedule the tasks?
- Tell me about your action plan.



TEAMWORK

- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?
- Tell me about a time when you worked with a classmate or colleague who was not doing their share of the work. How did you handle it?
- Describe a situation in which you had to arrive at a compromise or help others to compromise. What was your role? What steps did you take? What was the result?
- Tell me about a time when you had to work on a team that did not get along. What happened? What role did you take? What was the result?

FOLLOW UP QUESTIONS

- What steps did you take?
- What action did you take?
- How did he/she react? How did you handle that?
- What was your reaction?
- How did you feel about that?
- What was the outcome/result?
- Were you happy with that outcome/result?
- What do you wish you had done differently?
- What did you learn from that?
- How did you resolve that?
- What was the outcome of that?
- Why did you decide to do that?
- What was your logic?
- Tell me more about your interaction with that person.
- What was your role?



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- What obstacles did you face?
 - What were you thinking at that point?
 - Lead me through your decision process.
 - How did you prepare for that?
 - Why? How? When? Where?

On Interview Day

If you have done adequate preparation, you will find that you are not overly nervous or anxious about the meeting. Arrive at least 15 minutes ahead of time. I cannot stress this enough! Being late for an interview is rarely acceptable, and it creates a dreadful first impression that is almost impossible to recover from. I will not shortlist candidates who have turned up more than 20 minutes late for an appointment with me without a valid reason, as it is just plain bad manners and poor management to show up late. If the interview is in an unfamiliar location, I recommend that you do a test run prior to the meeting. I have sat in many office lobbies over the years for 20+ minutes, because I would much rather be early and relaxed than rushing to get to a venue and trying to find a parking spot for the car.

Another point I will make; if you have decided at the last minute to not proceed with the role / interview, do everyone the courtesy of attending the meeting. Last minute cancellations create a very poor impression with the recruiter who has set up the meeting for you, and also the employer who is looking forward to meeting you and has allocated the time for the interview. You would be best advised to attend the meeting rather than cancel 1-3 hours prior. I have had candidates call me up and cancel less than 20 minutes prior to a scheduled interview, or worse still, just not show up! This in my opinion is extremely bad form and indicates that you were never really serious about the opportunity in the first place, which is a waste of everyone's time and efforts. Naturally if you are seriously ill, or an emergency comes up, contact the relevant people involved as soon as possible and explain the situation.

Be positive going into your interview, and think of the discussion as a peer-to-peer meeting, versus begging for a job. Use the meeting to demonstrate to the interviewer that you are the solution the company needs and problems.

During the initial introductions and formalities, walk in with a smile on your face, your head up and your shoulders back. Shake the interviewer's hand firmly. Repeat his or her name with a smile when you're introduced. Repeat the interviewer's name at appropriate opportunities throughout the conversation. Everyone responds to hearing their own name. It makes the interviewer listen more intently.

I also stress the importance of appropriate corporate dress for most interviews and paying attention to all the details such as clean shoes, clean shirt, wearing a tie etc. First impressions can make a significant



impact on your overall success in the interview, so wear clothing that makes you feel comfortable, confident and at all times be well groomed.

Demonstrate good manners and don't sit until you're asked. Given a choice of seats, avoid the sofa! You'll sink into it like quicksand and it would be much better to choose a hardback chair. Sit upright with your hands on your knees. Don't cross your legs or your arms. Crossed limbs unconsciously signal defensiveness. Be responsive, while the interviewer speaks, show you're listening carefully by nodding your head and thoughtfully rephrasing sentences. You can also take a notepad and take some notes based on the discussion.

Answer the Questions Stupid!!

OK, I know this sounds very basic and common sense, but when you are under pressure during an interview, it is easy to dive in and answer a question without fully understanding what you have been asked and in a number of situations, candidates will not actually answer the question that they have been asked. During interview practice with my candidates I will pull them up straight away when they have not actually answered the question that I asked. This is a reasonably common mistake, and in some cases it can be a very bad habit that can result in the interviewer not being given the information that they are looking for, especially if you manage to stray away from the questions being asked on a consistent basis. I strongly recommend practicing with a colleague, or engage a professional interview coach to assess your answers and remember that practice makes perfect!

At the end of the interview, have a couple of prepared questions ready to end an interview, as you will most likely be asked if you have any questions to ask the interviewer. Please only ask questions that you otherwise could not research easily yourself and don't ask any questions about employment terms or conditions. These types of questions can be asked at a more appropriate time, and in some cases directed to the recruiter or HR department when an offer is issued. I recommend asking thoughtful questions that demonstrate that you are genuinely interested in the role and the opportunity such as: Why is this position vacant? How will you measure success in this role? What are you looking for in candidates for this position? What challenges would I have to tackle first?

Debrief Post Interview

Do a debrief with yourself post interview and take notes about the meeting as soon as it's over to gather your thoughts, impressions and assess how you performed in the interview. Make a note of who you talked to, how long the interview took, what questions were asked, and the quality of your answers. Jot down points about your thoughts about the company, people, culture post interview, your level of interest and fit to the position.

