

## Tips for a Successful Interview

**Dress Appropriately.** Pay attention to the details. The interviewer will. Are your shoes shined? Are your clothes pressed? Wrinkles and smudges can indicate you are careless. All shirts must have collars; a tie is always a good move for men, and certainly, a jacket over a collared shirt. Women should basically adhere to these rules as well. Pay attention to both the top and bottom half of your attire. You may be sitting across the room from the interviewer, who will have time to examine your clothing. Keep the attention on you and your accomplishments, not on the tear in your khakis. No sneakers, extraneous jewelry, cologne, or wet hair. You don't want to come across as too stiff, but you also don't want to appear as if you don't care.

**Make Eye Contact.** Look at your recruiter during the conversation. Interviewers state time and again that many applicants refuse to do this simple thing, and never make it any further in the process. Establish eye contact with the initial handshake and don't forget to focus on the recruiter during the interview. Avoid staring into space or at your feet. If you remember to raise your chin just a bit, you will automatically look at the person opposite you. Not looking at the interviewer can be interpreted as lack of interest or even lack of candor. And while you are remembering to make eye contact, don't forget to smile occasionally. It shows confidence.

**Be Prepared.** Research the company. With everything online, you have no excuse for not examining the company website and Googling articles on its plans and accomplishments, and exactly what goods and services it offers or manufactures, and its place in the community. Interviewers may ask if you are familiar with what the company does or is planning. You want to be able to discuss details and suggest some familiarity. If you have friends who work there, ask them about the work environment, and about company goals. Doing your homework can mean the recruiter will focus sooner on you. If you don't exhibit some knowledge of the company, it can be interpreted as lack of interest.

**Ask Good Questions.** Be prepared to ask smart, insightful questions. Ask about benefit plans and the company system for reviews, promotions, and career growth. You may ask to see the environment in which you will be working. Ask about community outreach and future plans. Although you shouldn't bring it with you, a written list of questions you have brainstormed before will help you. Don't just ask about Casual Fridays, personal parking space, or if you get every weekend off; don't come off as what's-in-it-for-me type.

**Bring It With You.** You should carry to the interview a slim portfolio or file folder containing such items as an extra copy of your resume, contact information for your references, copies of award certificates, and reference letters, if you have any. Anticipate the recruiter's needs, and include anything you think may be of interest or contribute to your profile, but don't make it a cumbersome stack.

**Leave It At Home.** Do not carry your cell phone, even if you have it turned off. iPods are also a no-no. Once again, you need to appear professional, and not concerned with missing a personal phone call. Recruiters have stated candidates are arriving in increasing numbers talking on the phone, answering it during an interview, or conversing with their ear buds still inserted in their ears. Some have even witnessed candidates continuing to listen to music during the interview itself. Don't set yourself up for immediate failure. Bring to the interview only what is necessary.

**Anticipate Questions.** Think like a recruiter. What would you ask? Prepare for the interview by writing down both potential questions and your answers. You may learn something. Typical questions are along the lines of, What type of salary are you looking for? Where do you see yourself in five years? What are your greatest strengths and weaknesses? What interests you about our company? Why have you chosen this field?

**Stay Positive.** Avoid apologies for any perceived weaknesses, and don't confide. Don't open any discussions with statements like, "I know you need someone with extensive network experience, but I've only worked in one internship where I was exposed to it." Try instead, "I was an intern at HP, and was exposed to some aspects of networking." Concentrate on what you bring to the table. In fact, try keeping the conversation positive by editing anything negative. Don't say "no" to anything without qualifying the statement. A good response might be, "While I don't know very much about SQL, I do have working knowledge of Perl, Verilog, and Bash scripting."

**Say More.** Don't stop at a simple "yes." Treat every question as if it were the opening of a discussion; always elaborate and explain. You want to volunteer your skills and how you have used them. And you also want to demonstrate your willingness to communicate. While you want to provide an alternative to saying no, as suggested above, you also want to avoid a one-word response of any type. Think of answering questions as if they were short essay answers you had to provide on a test. Don't make someone urge you to "be more specific." At the same time, don't ramble; Keep your answers substantive.

**Avoid Overconfidence.** Be confident, but don't overdo it. Interviewers are turned off by arrogance. Remember that candidates are expected to fit in, and play by the company's rules, not vice versa. You should come across as well-equipped, but also willing to learn. Just because you know Kerberos protocol does not mean you necessarily have the answer for world peace. Show your willingness to learn and to share by asking questions, responding with details, and listening with interest. It's all about the ability to work well with others.