

# Tapping the Hidden Job Market

**Many people find work in the "hidden" job market - the jobs which are not advertised (70 - 80%!) The two main methods are Networking and the Direct Approach.**

## NETWORKING

This is simply identifying the people and organisations that could be helpful to you in your job search and contacting them. Your aim in networking is to:

- obtain more information about your chosen industry and the labour market in general so that you can
- decide where best to concentrate your efforts and
- find a job.

When networking it is important to see yourself as embarking on a marketing exercise. The product you are marketing is yourself and your chances of success in this venture will depend on:

- identifying the appropriate market for your skills,
- understanding the specifications and preferences of the employer,
- presenting the positive qualities of your "product" - qualifications, skills, abilities, experience and how these will benefit the employer,
- being committed to convincing the employer and "closing the sale".

You are

- finding out about areas of interest, advising people of your range of skills, and letting people know that you are looking for work,
- asking to be part of their network of contacts, to use their knowledge and information,
- using the "multiplier" principle – the more people who know you are looking the greater chance of opportunities arising,
- asking the people in your network to help you in your work search, NOT asking them to hire you,
- always eliciting feedback and assistance so that you can continually modify your skills and techniques in your job search.

**It is important to use your drive and initiative, mobilise your energy and enthusiasm, and get talking to people!**

### Building your Job Information Database

The first step is to start building your contact list. You want names, contacts, details and possible openings or positions.

### Contact Book/Diary:

*Write down*

- every contact you find, how you heard of the person, what you could talk to the person about

and any other interesting information about the person,

- communications you have with that person, by phone, fax, email, in person, etc.,
- actions you will take as a result of your communication with the person, eg other people to ring, ring back in a month's time, send in CV, etc.,
- actions that the person is going to take on your behalf, eg going to pass your CV on to their superior.

Diary all the important dates and check your diary every day to see what has to happen.

**Sources:** Where are your contacts likely to come from?

*People*

- everyone is a potential contact eg friends, acquaintances, family, local business people, relatives, lecturers, tutors, your doctor, dentist, past work colleagues, neighbours, fellow students, your solicitor, minister, insurance agent etc..

*Information resources*

- Internet resources
- Print Media, industrial publications & newsletters
- Old advertisements
- Many different Business Directories and Yellow Pages

*Other sources*

- Gain work experience whenever you can, developing skills and contacts.
- Join relevant professional organisations and societies.
- Attend professional gatherings.

### Informational Interviewing

This is interviewing for information, not for employment. Often you will be talking to workers, not employers.

*Advantages*

- Increases your knowledge about your field of interest.
- Helps you clarify and redefine your career goals.
- Helps to establish a network of contacts which could lead to further employment.

*Preparation*

- Thoroughly research the industry or area of interest.
- Be clear about your skills, interests, goals.
- Contact the person. If you don't have a specific name, the receptionist may be a good person to speak to. Always ensure that you know the name of the person you are being put through to.
- Arrange a meeting. Introduce yourself, your situation (eg recent graduate with a BCom in Finance), who referred you, what you would like to discuss (eg an overview of the industry) and ask for a brief meeting.

- Be prepared to talk on the phone. Ask if this is a convenient time or for another time when you could ring back.

**Always think about the person you are talking to – what is most convenient for them ?**

**Prepare and rehearse your list of questions**

**Dress appropriately to make a good impression**

*At the Interview*

- Remember this is career research, not a job interview.
- You ask the questions.
- Always ask for further contacts and ask permission to use their name.
- Take along your CV.
- Keep to your time.

*Follow-Up*

- Immediately take notes of all the information you have gathered.
- Write a thank you note.
- Keep a comprehensive record of all contacts made.
- Follow up all referrals.
- Keep in contact with the person.
- When you get a job – let people know. They may become your client network.

**Questions you might ask in an Informational Interview**

What steps did you take to get into this work ?

What skills are required to be successful ?

What are the activities & responsibilities on the job ?

What is a typical day like ?

What do you like best/worst about the job ? Why ?

Does your work affect other areas of your life, like social life ? How ?

What would you change about the job if you could ?

What is the salary range for people in this work ?

What is a typical career path ?

What professional associations have you found helpful ?

What sort of demand is there for your skills ?

Who are the recognised market leaders/competitors ?

Do you have any specific advice for someone entering this field ?

Do you have any advice on how to improve my CV ?

What else could I be doing now to enhance my chances of being employed in this area of work ?

Can you suggest other people I could speak to ?

Would it be acceptable for me to use your name as a referral ?

Where are vacancies in this area advertised ?

(Newspaper, agency, publication etc)

## THE DIRECT APPROACH

Basically, this means approaching employers directly for work, whether in person, by telephone or by sending a cover letter with a CV.

Accurate targeting is crucial in this approach, so the amount of time you spend researching the company, and who to target within it, will be much greater than the amount of time you spend making the contact. As with Networking, clarity about what you have to offer and your goals, plus a businesslike approach are essential for making a good first impression.

**Creating Your Own Job**

It may be that in your research you find an employer who could use your skills even though they haven't realised this yet.

- You need to research the company, markets, outputs etc and be able to illustrate succinctly how your skills will complement what they do.
- Concentrate on the needs of the company and adopt a positive tone.
- Establish your communication as a serious dialogue between equals.

**The direct approach creates an image of an enterprising candidate who takes the initiative and perceives opportunities.**

If you are sending in your CV with a cover letter, ensure that you maintain control of the process by stating that you will ring to follow up the letter. Keep working the contacts. Don't assume that once you have submitted your CV, that is all you need to do. Aim to make contact once a month.

**Telephone Skills**

Have any papers you may need easily accessible.

*Capsule Description*

Quickly identify who you are and what you have to offer by developing a summary of your qualifications, skills, experience and achievements. Practice it until it sounds natural and fluent. It should be brief, 2 minutes being the maximum time.

*While on the Phone*

- Allow time for the other person to think and respond.
- Smile – it makes you sound friendlier.
- Keep your head up. This results in a more upright posture and more energy in your voice. It can be useful to tape a mirror to the wall at eye height and direct your conversation to it.
- Speak clearly and do not eat, drink or smoke during the call.
- Don't ramble and do take notes. The person is probably busy and will value your efficiency
- Treat the call as an interview. Be prepared to speak about your skills and how they match the employer's requirements.

*Receiving Calls*

- Be prepared for calls to come at any time and prepare others in your household. Ensure a good reception for the caller.
- Keep a copy of your CV, your list of questions and pen and paper by the telephone, along with the contacts you are expecting to hear from.

# WAYS TO FIND EMPLOYMENT

## BE AWARE

Employers tend to work the opposite way to job hunters when seeking employees

Preferred  
Methods of  
Employers

Preferred  
Methods of  
Job Hunters

Least

Most

Unsolicited  
CVs

Newspapers

Employment Agencies

Person whom employer  
has had contact through  
sports/interests or office visit

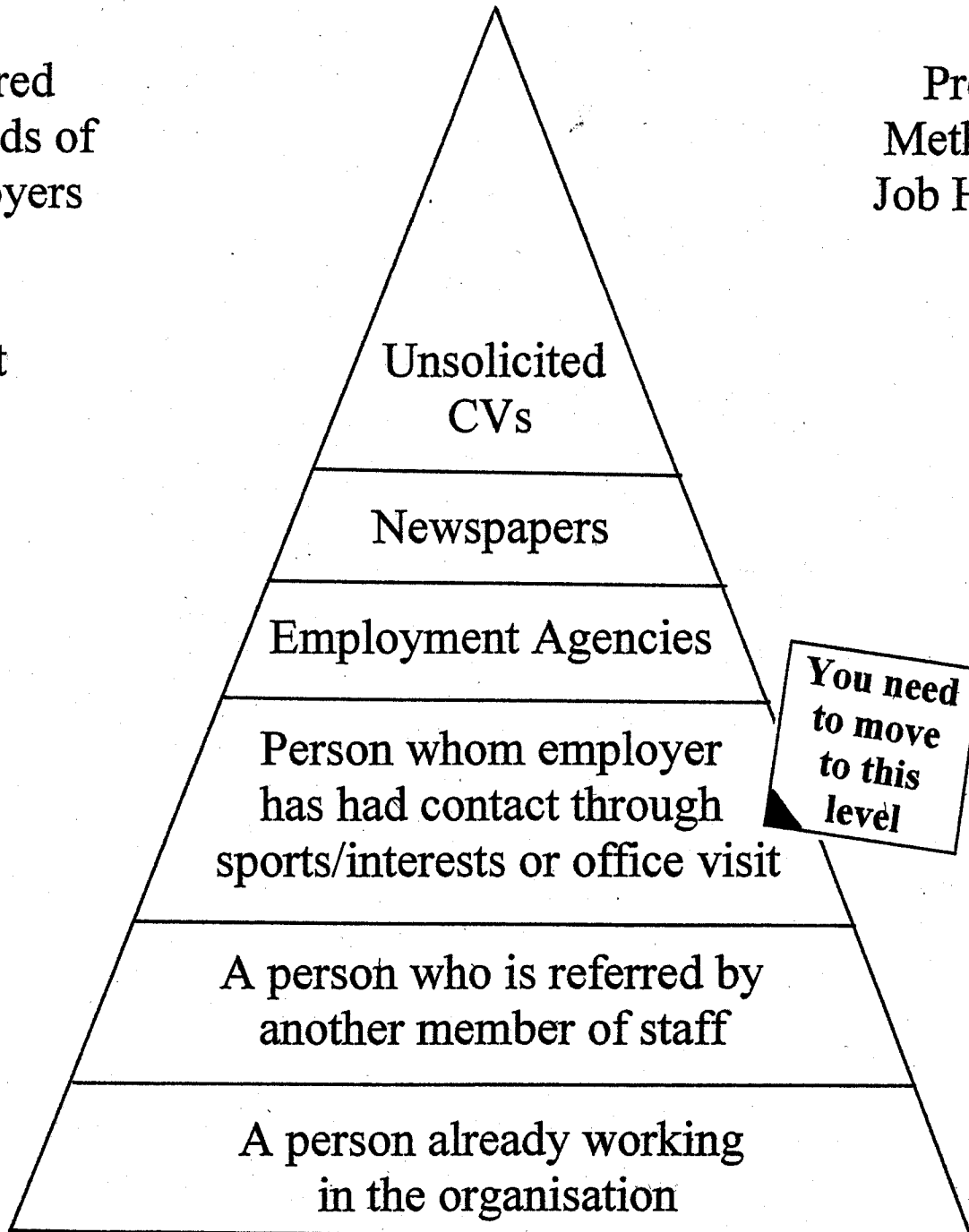
A person who is referred by  
another member of staff

A person already working  
in the organisation

You need  
to move  
to this  
level

Most

Least



# Turn the tables on an interviewer

It can often be the worst day of your life, although it needn't be. **Helen Perkins** provides a guide

**ASK** anyone what their five most enjoyable ways of spending a working day would be and you can be pretty certain that attending an interview will not be one of them, even for the interviewer.

An interview is often seen as an inevitable ordeal, but it doesn't have to leave you with the feeling that you should just crawl back into the woodwork. It can be a good, perhaps even enjoyable experience and there are ways of increasing your chances of success.

You need to have a "master plan" and to develop ways of taking control of the interview. This doesn't mean fixing the interviewer with a menacing look and recounting your experience and personal qualities at breakneck speed. The way in which you take control needs to be balanced and well judged, that is, weighing up how much to say about what and how to present yourself.

For years experienced interviewers have been taught to use a variety of techniques. Now here's your chance to employ some of those same techniques yourself.

**Think ahead.** Spend a minimum of one hour and a maximum of an evening planning what you want to achieve. Too little time and you will not cover all

the important issues; too much can be overkill.

Think about what impression you want to create, what important things in your past experience you want to talk about, what you are good at and what you are no good at.

Above all think about things that you have done that mark you out from the crowd. Keep it genuine. A few embellishments may be acceptable, but out-right lies are not.

#### **Draw up a crib sheet.**

Research the company before the interview, read the papers or relevant professional journals and get hold of any in-house newsletters or promotional literature to get ideas for specific questions.

#### **Self-confidence sells.**

Make an effort with your appearance so that you feel good but avoid over-dramatic statements. Unless you're applying for a job as a croupier or dancer, heavy make-up, dangling earrings and clanking bangles are distracting. So are loud ties and suits.

**Body language.** This is hard to change overnight but there are some obvious tips. Remember to keep eye contact, sit forward and try to keep arms and legs uncrossed. Leaning back, with arms folded, staring at the floor looks defensive.

**On the day.** Take your crib sheet with you, along with a copy of your application, CV, the job ad and any job description. If you know you make a nervous candidate, try to learn ways of coming across better and refuse the offer

of coffee or tea - shaky hands are a dead giveaway. Don't leave everything to the interviewer. Early impressions are important and a late flourish of intelligent good points is no good. Equally, taking over the interview will not make you popular.

Focus what you want to say on what is relevant to the job. "It's really surprising how often candidates look totally blank when asked how well they think they match the profile for the job," says a recruitment consultant. "It's as if they saw no need even to think about their skills in relation to those looked for in the successful candidate."

One-on-one interviews have been shown to be more productive and are easier to control, but panel interviews are still the norm. Make sure you listen to the introductions and know each interviewer's special area of interest. Listen to the questions carefully and use each one as an opportunity to get your point across at the same time as answering the question.

#### **Real life examples are far better than waffle.**

Interviewers like to pose questions about how you would deal with certain tasks or problems, such as prioritising a sudden heavy workload or motivating a junior colleague. Try giving a short answer to the specific question but lead on to give an account of what you did in a similar situation in your present or previous job. Keep it short. If you have spoken non-stop for more than

five minutes without anyone else getting a look in, it's best to stop.

Try to judge reactions to your answers: If the interviewers are looking down at their notes rather than at you, you may have missed the point. Don't be afraid to put them on the spot. Try saying: "Does that answer your question?" This way you get another shot at it.

#### **How to say goodbye.**

Whether things have gone well or badly, after you've had your turn at question time (see right), end on a high note. Take the initiative in saying pleasant things about the interview and finding out how soon you can expect to hear an outcome. If you still want the job, don't forget to say so.

#### **If you don't get the job...**

Never mind. Remember, you wouldn't have been selected for an interview if the company didn't think you could be the right person. Think about how you could have run the interview differently and put this into practice next time. If you thought it went well but get a rejection, ring up to ask if there was anything in particular you could improve on. This is especially worth doing if you are trying to break into a particular career route.

"Everyone gets turned down sometime, even the boss," recalls one company chairman. "What matters most is that you come away from an interview feeling that you didn't let yourself down. Then you've kept the confidence to do even better next time."

#### **FIVE QUESTIONS THEY'LL LOVE ...**

Ask them to describe their ideal candidate for the job. If they mention experience or skills you haven't had the chance to talk about, talk about them now. If not already covered, ask about development and training opportunities. How can you progress with the company? Are there any relevant qualifications you should think about getting? If so; does the company help with studying for these? If it's a team role, ask about the skills and experience of other team members (but not what they're like). Try to ask something relevant about the company to show that you have taken an interest in more than just the job. Ask the interviewer what they most enjoy about their job and what makes it exciting for them. This will help you judge whether the company is right for you.

#### **...AND FIVE TO TURN THEM OFF**

Don't ask about pay, hours of work, holidays or perks. You should have this information already, but if not, ask about these things when offered the job and before accepting it. Don't ask why the last person left the job. Asked as a direct question it will not gain you any useful information and may mark you out as trouble. Don't ask for your expenses if these have not been offered. The policy on expenses should have been clear in the invitation to the interview. Don't set any conditions on when you need to hear if you have got the job. If you do have deadlines on other offers, ring up the next day to discuss this. Don't ask whether you have got the job. Question time is still part of the interview and few people like to give instant feedback.

# get that first job

**What** Candidates need help to take control of job interviews, says **Jane Oakshott**

## How

It is a paradox that the most employable students are often those most fazed by interviews. Being conscientious and self-critical, such students foresee multiple possibilities for tripping up and, once in the hot seat, seem barely capable of connected thought.

Much has been written on interview technique — the right questions to ask, how to direct the interview, how to negotiate successfully for the top salary. Such strategies are excellent for those established on the career ladder. But they are counsels of unattainable perfection for the average final-year student approaching a first interview with little work experience and a paralysing awareness of competition.

Interview training must begin by suggesting areas in which a candidate can take control. Planning is crucial (see box right). Skills, knowledge and qualifications can be assessed from the CV. The purpose of interviewing is to complete the picture, to find out, quite literally, whose face fits.

The point of the interview is per-

sonal communication. The candidate's task is straightforward: to make sure that nothing interrupts or obscures his or her communication with the interviewer.

It is no good giving the right answers if the interviewers cannot hear what you say. Fully focused communication ensures the best possible exposure for the candidate's qualifications and is a clearly defined aim within the sphere of control of the most inexperienced or nervous candidate.

But how to achieve it? Two main signals — visual and aural — are involved. Emotion tends to be communicated visually, while the voice communicates the facts. Visual signals have most impact, hence the vital importance of the first impression.

Eye contact is the strongest of all visual signals. The candidate who looks directly and often at the interviewer is remembered more positively than one who does not.

### Advice to students

■ Look carefully at the person asking a question to make sure you understand

■ As you answer, keep your gaze moving along the panel

■ If one person seems worried, bored or irritated, look more at him or her during that answer

**Why** Nerves can make even the best qualified and brightest students perform badly

■ If you find eye contact difficult, look at the bridge of the nose — it is less embarrassing and has the same effect.

Aural clues work in both directions. It is almost more important to listen carefully than to talk because of the nuances of tone that put a spin on the simplest words. In English, the meaning of words is carried in the consonants. It is vital to pronounce all consonants clearly, especially at the beginning and ends of words. Unfortunately, nerves can badly affect clarity of speech by tensing the tongue and jaw: simple exercises such as lip stretches and raspberry blowing can help.

### Advice to students

■ Speak at a slightly slower rate than normal to avoid tripping up or swallowing words

■ Use lips and tongue firmly to ensure consonants

■ If you are asked to repeat something, go from the beginning. They have usually caught the last bit.

In practice, such as in answering a difficult question, all the visual and aural signals should work together.

### Advice to students

■ Take your time with difficult questions — but do not go blank

■ Have some useful delaying

phrases up your sleeve, such as "That's difficult to answer briefly" or the all-purpose "It depends what you mean by..."

■ When you have given a respectable full answer (never just "yes" or "no" on its own), ask if they would like more detail on any aspect of the answer.

The end of the interview is almost as important as the beginning. A hangdog expression will not retrieve a bad interview, but a cheerful exit will leave a positive impression.

### Advice to students

■ No matter how you feel, keep your back straight and head up

■ Thank them with a big smile

■ Leave with minimum fuss.

Interviews are as individual as the people involved and there can be no blueprint for a perfect performance. Getting the basic communication skills right allows individual personality to make an impact. As in learning to drive, the mechanical skills have to come first: confidence and style can then follow with practice.

Jane Oakshott is a voice and performance coach who owns and runs **Presentation Plus**. She also teaches a module at the University of Leeds on BA broadcast journalism.

## Don't sweat an interview

### Think positively

- Remember that an invitation to interview is fair proof of your being a serious contender
- Find out all you can about the company, particular areas of concern, competitors work or recent policy decisions
- Review your CV in relation to the demands of the job
- Think of yourself positively - if you are bad at routine think of yourself as flexible; if you can't stand computers, perhaps you're people-orientated
- Try it from the other side of the desk. Interview three friends for an imaginary job. Which of the candidates stands out as the worst? Which was the best and why?

### Plan ahead

- Make travel arrangements well in advance, allowing plenty of time for delays
- Set out clothes and documentation the night before
- Arrange something in the area to look forward to after the interview - visit a friend or a special shop so the interview becomes part of a good day.

### Look the part

- Dress simply in two colours (clutter free for the best impact)
- Well ironed shirt, clean nails, polished shoes
- Clean hair, kept back from the face so as not to come between you and the interviewer
- No jangling or dangling jewellery to distract the interviewer
- Stand tall with head up
- Keep your back straight to maximise breathing capacity. This gives impression of health, alertness and confidence
- Stand a moment in the doorway and take in the scene
- Smile at the interviewers as you take in a good breath
- When seated, angle your chair so you can see everyone
- Keep upright posture throughout the interview. As 80% of people over 25 are slightly deaf, most interviewers will, perhaps unconsciously, prefer candidates who make it easy for them to lip read
- Illustratory gestures are fine, but avoid empty fiddling

# The Dreaded Interview

## How to perform effectively at employment interviews

### Background

A first interview, particularly if it takes place away from the employer's own premises, at an hotel or on campus, is likely to be quite short - typically 20-30 minutes. If you are going to be convincing in such a short period of time, thorough preparation is essential.

Be aware that in reality the interview process judges not the best person for the job but the person who interviews the best. So the task is to differentiate yourself from all the other applicants, to appear to be the best person for the job, to present the truth in the best possible light.

Employers are essentially seeking Merit and Fit

**Merit:** Merit includes experience, skills, education, knowledge, information. On most occasions all the people who are being interviewed have all five. So you need to clearly show these qualities and how they will benefit the organisation.

The interviewer will be trying to judge whether you

- will be competent to do the job
- have the necessary basic knowledge and understanding to enable you to benefit from the specialist training you might be given
- have the potential to gain promotion and take on responsibility
- can communicate your thoughts and ideas in speech and in writing
- are enthusiastic, determined and resilient
- can make decisions

**Fit:** This is the realm of emotion, opinion, feeling, essentially likeability ie do they like you?

- It is important and is influenced by :
- Appearance – dress, grooming, deportment
- Openness – the ability to meet the interviewers as equals
- Confidence
- Sense of Humour – not too dry and demonstrated once or twice during the interview
- Friendliness
- Honesty, Sincerity, Integrity – as these are really hard to portray, you need to tell them, during the course of answering the questions, that you are honest, sincere and have integrity
- Interests – that you are passionate about something

Most people dislike interviews. So part of your preparation for the interview is to get beyond the emotional response and project that you are comfortable and at ease. It is important to find out the best way to do this for yourself. It is the ironical truth that you will probably do best in an interview for a job you don't care too much about. If you really want the job you will be more nervous and so will not present as well.

### Preparation

**Research:** Research the role and the organisation. Don't just rely on the Internet and the standard reference sources. Try to go that step further in your research. This impresses the interviewer and increases your odds of linking your skills and the employer's needs.

**Review:** Re-read the employer's literature and other relevant material so that you have a reasonable knowledge of the organisation's culture, turnover, CEO, structure, turnover, activities, products or services, competitors, location etc.

Read through your copy of the application form, CV and covering letter - you don't want to contradict yourself.

**Prepare possible answers:** Work through possible questions and think how you would support your answers with sound evidence based on past experiences and activities. There has been a change in interview technique from "Tell me what your strengths are?" to leading questions like "What aspects of your academic training differentiates you from other graduates?"

Your interviewer is not looking for a right answer, but is testing the depth of your knowledge of yourself and of the job you are applying for, and your attitudes on life in general.

Be prepared to substantiate facts with specific examples. It is important to be specific in your answers, eg How are your core competencies different from those of by other applicants? What role do you play in a team which makes you so valuable?

**Clothes:** Your dress must show that you have made an effort for the interview, and needs to reflect current accepted fashion standards, while at the same time being physically comfortable. Wear one level of formality above what you will wear to work.

**Location:** Make sure you know where and when the interview is, and how to get there. Aim to arrive in time to get your breath back and settle down, but not so early that you get bored or nervous. It is never acceptable to be late, but if you find that you are going to be late be sure to telephone and give a likely arrival time.

### The Interview

**What to tell the Employer:** Clearly articulate why you want the position. Tell them

- what you like about the organisation - a positive interest in the prospective employer shows your research, commitment
- how you have the very skills, knowledge and experience that they need. Ensure that you provide evidence to support your claim.

You must attempt to score "maximum points" during the interview by including these issues in your answers. If the questions do not give you the opportunity then you must make the opportunity yourself.

**What the Employer wants to know:** The employer is seeking information to help make a competent decision about whether to hire you. The main things they want to establish are

- why are you here - why did you pick us
- what can you do for us - what are your special skills and knowledge
- what kind of person are you - will you get along with us
- can we afford you - what are your salary needs

**You need to convince them that you are a safe choice.**

**Body Language issues:** 90% of a message comes from body language, intonation, facial expressions etc. We believe the body language before we believe the words, so it is best to sit forward, use gestures and show enthusiasm.

**Working a Panel:** The person who asks the question, owns the answer. So direct the answer to that person but catch the eyes of the other panel members. In this way you can show that each person is important. Try to create a feeling of intimacy – the more you can break through the barrier of formality, the better. In this way you will make a connection with the interviewers.

**Repeating the questions:** The biggest immaturity is rushing into the answer. Use pause. Use silence. Repeat the question to yourself. This is like saying “Oh good question – let me think about this one.”

**How do adults learn:** An awareness of how adults learn will help you to ensure that your answers work effectively for you.

- First and last: adults remember the first and the last and not the middle. So the first and last parts of the interview or of your answers are important
- Disable the automatic pilot: sometimes people will drift off in the middle of your answer and lose concentration. So, alert them to the completion of your answer by saying “And finally...” “And in conclusion...”
- Pictures: adults learn from pictures we create in the mind. Make the story short, sharp and relevant, and the picture crisp and clear. You will need to establish the pictures before you go into the interview. Think about pictures for a success you can talk about and a problem that you have had and how you overcame it.
- Taking from the Known to the Unknown: We need to be in a comfortable known space before we feel happy going into the unknown. Don't assume knowledge. Tell the interviewer first what they do know, and then take them on a journey to the unknown.

**The Beginning of the Interview:** The interview begins when the interviewer first sees you. Take the initiative and shake hands with the interviewer as this avoids confusion and embarrassment. Make eye contact and smile.

There will be an introductory exchange to allow everyone to settle in. Don't overload the process at this point. Although the interviewer may ask questions, there is no need to give detailed answers. The message you want to convey is that you are here to participate in a formal interview and that you are ready to get to work.

## The Questions

**Questions They Will Ask You:** The same types of questions are asked across the different industries, and can be answered in the same way. The important point to remember is that there are no correct answers. Always be asking yourself “How can I use this question to show that I am the best candidate.”

When they ask about experience they are really asking to be told about lessons that you have learned. So talk about the lessons you have learned.

Be honest. If you do get right through to an appointment, you will be subject to expectations about what you can achieve. If you have not been honest during the application process you will not be able to fulfil these expectations.

**Question Type 1) Why You ?** This usually comes indirectly in the first 3 minutes, and is your chance to say why you are the

best person for the position. If you don't get this question you must find a way to introduce it and then to explain your merits.

Often you will need to reflect back to the interviewer what the job entails, how it can be done well, why it is important to the company. Once you have outlined how you perceive the job, you can then explain how well you fit the job requirements.

**Question Type 2) Tell me about yourself:** This is essentially saying “I don't know you and without knowing you, I can't like you. Tell me about yourself, so that I can know you and get a feel for you.”

Remember that you are using these questions to show how well you fit their requirements so tell them about aspects of yourself which will persuade them to employ you.

**Question Type 3) List Questions:** These are common questions and they ask for lists of all sorts, eg What changes, programmes, tools, strengths, steps you would take.

Don't start the answer at the start of the list. Rather begin by introducing the list and give your understanding of why the list is there and the rationale for why each item is on the list.

Don't start by saying how many items are on the list eg “There are 5 steps I would take”. If you then forget a step you are in trouble. Say “There are several steps...”

If you are being prompted to extend the list then you have obviously been too narrow in your answer.

**Question Type 4) The “What If” Question:** Don't fall into the trap of saying what you would do. There is no question that is so narrow that there is only one answer. See it as a list question and answer as you would a list question. eg “What would you do if you were confronted by an angry customer?” The reason why the customer is angry is an important, but unspoken, component of the question. So answer “There are a number of things I could do in this situation. If the customer was angry because.... Then I would ....” And list the options.

Don't be concerned about getting the right answer. Rather be concerned about presenting the logic behind your answer.

**E) Behavioural/Experiential Questions:** Many interviewers are asking these types of questions. eg “Can you tell us about a time when you worked with a team on a project and had to deal with difficult interpersonal dynamics. What happened? Was the project outcome successful?” Use the answer to show your qualities that will be of benefit in the position.

**F) Strengths and Weaknesses:**

**Strengths:** Relate every strength back to the job you are applying for and don't talk about strengths that don't relate to the job.

**Weaknesses:** This is the demon question - a Catch 22 - which is effectively asking “Tell me why you should not get this job?” It is not your job to tell the interviewer why they shouldn't appoint you. Use the question to your advantage and do not give them a reason why they shouldn't give you the job.

**Possible strategies:**

- Use humour
- “I prefer to see this as something I am still working on”
- “In the past...”
- “This is what it has cost me”
- “What I have come to realise....”
- “I have learned that ...”

**Questions You Will Ask:** Interviews are a two-way communication, and it is important that you make use of the opportunity to find out what you want to know about the organisation. Towards the end of an interview it is common for candidates to be asked if they have any questions. Always be prepared with questions that show that you are thinking seriously about the position and making an active decision

about whether you want to work for them. Don't ask questions like "how many other candidates?" "what is the salary?" Use every second to sell yourself, to show that you are motivated and understand the business. It is quite acceptable to have a list of questions written down. If all your questions have been covered during the interview, tell the interviewer. "I did have some questions to ask about promotion possibilities but we covered that area fully during the interview."

Never say "No I don't have any questions." This is showing that you are not interested enough to ask questions.

### **End of the Interview**

At the end of the interview make it clear that you are interested in the job, if this is appropriate. Thank everyone, shake hands and leave. Do not get involved in small talk at this point.

### **Remember**

NOT What is the right answer ?

BUT How do I use this question to my benefit?

And as Jack Nicholas, golfer, said

"The more I practise, the luckier I get."

# Ten Truths You Are Never Told About Job Interviews

## **The tricks and tactics employers use to test your winning power! By Lisa Collier Cool.**

**The job you've always wanted could be just one interview away. Wouldn't you love the opportunity to look inside the mind of your interviewer and discover exactly what she's really looking for? We asked several powerful decision-makers to reveal their secret interview strategies and to share the surprising reasons they hire the candidates they do.**

**ONE: Most employers decide whether or not to hire you in the first five minutes.** Or even earlier, according to a publisher. "One woman so impressed me during her initial phone call about a job that I decided to hire her before I'd even met her in person." What was this applicant's winning strategy? "I was intrigued when she called at 9am the day our ad for a sales representative ran, and asked about a job without mentioning the ad. I was curious and asked if she'd seen the ad. When she said yes, I realised she was using just the sort of attention-getting ploy I would have used. That, plus her eagerness to be interviewed that afternoon, convinced me she had exactly the energy and initiative the job needed."

The initial seconds of contact are equally crucial during the face-to-face meeting. Try to show confidence, notes one company manager. "How someone walks into your office is revealing. Does she hesitate over which chair to take? Or does she sit right down, open her briefcase and take out a folder with a fresh copy of her

CV? Another thing I consider quite significant is the applicant's response to my initial question, "Did you have any trouble getting here?" If she makes the trip sound like an adventure and gives a positive answer, or comments favourably on our location or offices, I feel drawn to her immediately.

**TWO: Interviewers may test you if they suspect you're exaggerating or lying in your CV.** "Everyone is a high-flier in their CV, so the first thing that I do is ask a quirky question about the most irrelevant skill or the tiniest accomplishment mentioned," says the vice-chairman of an investment bank.

One of the most widely used honesty tests is, "What has been your greatest success and worst failure?" The owner of a furniture-store chain hired one manager because he was impressed by the past failure the candidate revealed at the interview. "He said he once fired three employees because they'd let an inventory problem get out of hand. Reflecting on the expense of training the new workers, he decided his black-and-white view of life was wrong - and began working harder to solve the problems of difficult employees, instead of firing them right away."

Another popular truth test is the question, "How would you describe a typical day at your current job?" The more mundane a task you mention, the more sincere your answer sounds, says the office manager of a PR company. "I love to hear about all the little things, whether it's licking stamps or carrying boxes down to reception to be

picked up by the courier. Those little details tell me the applicant doesn't think it's beneath her to pitch in."

**THREE: The stranger the question, the more important it is that you give a fresh, inventive answer.** "I have a question people really hate," confesses the managing director of a record company. "I ask them what they think the floor size of my office is. It might sound off-the-wall but I find that confronting people with a practical problem to solve really helps me evaluate their business skills." A quirky favourite of the partner of an advertising agency is, "Do you watch a lot of television?" He finds that the response reveals both the applicant's honesty and her suitability for the business. "It's not a trick question. I'm looking for someone smart enough to know that watching TV is an asset in this business. When I had several great applicants for a trainee position, the one who got the offer showed a true fascination with our most important advertising medium - TV."

**FOUR: Researching the company counts for more than anything on your CV.** "I'm always pleased if someone applying as a store manager has visited one of our shops, but one applicant made a tremendous impact when he said he'd been to all nine - and had intelligent comments about each," said the owner of a chain of stores. "I've never felt more convinced that I should hire someone than I did at that moment."

**FIVE: The "wrong" answer can win you the job.** You may intrigue a potential employer by not saying what you think they want to hear, as was the case with an applicant interviews by the personnel director of one company. "I loved the way she responded when I asked her salary requirements. She named a higher than usual figure and added, with total conviction, "I know I'm worth it."

An original or even funny answer could improve your odds of being remembered - and hired. "One woman I hired really amused me, says an executive director, "by asking me what I was looking for, listening carefully to my reply, and then saying, "I know just the person for the job!"

Seeming almost too eager for the job may work in your favour, too, notes another manager. "I remember one job candidate who completed the interview and left my office, only to run back two minutes later and ask me, "Where do I stand? Is there anything you didn't ask me that you'll be wondering about in an hour?" This convinced me that she was so determined to get the job she just wouldn't take no for an answer."

**SIX: Watch out for traps.** Several interviewers admit they try to tempt applicants to make the wrong move. The offer of a cup of coffee is actually a test of character for the manager of a computer company. "When an applicant arrives at my office, I'll offer to get her a coffee, but I'll think poorly of her if she accepts. Our customers don't want to wait on someone there to deliver a sales pitch.

Other interviews say they pay close attention to how someone reacts to a tour of their company, The owner of a PR firm was so charmed by the way an applicant acted during a tour that she hired her. "She noted that our work space is mainly an open area filled with ringing phones and rushing people, she said she'd be happy to share an office. I loved that - especially as she was applying for a high-level position."

**SEVEN: Fifty-five percent of the decision to hire is based on non-verbal cues,** says a communications expert. "Maintaining eye contact with the boss is the most important aspect of creating a good impression, because it conveys honesty. Other elements are leaning forward and sitting on the edge

of the chair to signal enthusiasm, smiling and keeping your hands still and relaxed to indicate confidence."

When it came to interview outfits, there was plenty of agreement on what was taboo: very short skirts, low-cut tops, ultra high heels, jangly, flashy jewellery and too much make-up often put off prospective employers. "How could I possibly think she'd be serious about her work if she looked like she was dressed for a party?" asked one employer. The safest bet for most interviews is a suit, skirt and jacket or dress, with a few expensive-looking but subdued accessories.

**EIGHT: Even if the interviewer seems to be unimpressed, don't be dissuaded** - you may be doing better than you imagine. "A lot of people I've hired thought they'd totally bombed at the interview," reports one employer. "That's because, even if I'm secretly delighted with someone, I don't believe in giving a lot of positive feedback during the interview. I am curious to see how an applicant performs under the pressure of uncertainty."

It's also possible to bounce back from serious mistakes. One woman's "wrong" moves proved to be a strong argument that she should be hired, recalls a career counsellor. "She'd made a few radical career switches but explained her reasons for these moves eloquently, adding that she felt her own mistakes would add empathy and depth to her career counselling. I agreed with what she was saying and gave her the position."

**NINE: The questions you ask are as revealing as those you answer.** "Even though one applicant for a job actually did a worse presentation than two other people, I hired her because she asked such interesting questions in the interview," recalls one PR executive. "She slowed down the pace of the discussion with several follow-up questions about the goals of our group, letting me see the kind of depth she would bring to this publicity campaign. I was also struck by how closely she listened to what I said - most applicants would rather talk about themselves than listen."

A question that many bosses consider appealing is, "How would I spend a typical working day in this job?" Not only does it encourage a

would-be employer to visualise you in the position, but it shows an interest in the actual work. "The person I hire needs to be fascinated by the reality of the job, not its sex appeal," says the vice-chairman of an investment bank. "I try to scare an applicant a little by saying she'll spend 12 hours a day under fluorescent light, eating stale coffee and staring at numbers of on a screen. If she's still fascinated after that, she's probably right for the job."

A question the job candidate should always ask is "When could I expect to hear from you?" "Interviewers like to see a gleam in your eye and hear a passion for the job in your voice at the end of the interview," explains the communications expert. "This question leaves them feeling that you really want the job." An enthusiastic comment at the end of the interview can be the clincher that gets you an offer, adds one manager. "The main reason I hired one secretary was that she radiated interest. The last thing she said to me was, "This is exactly what I want. This is it!!"

**TEN: A follow-up call can make all the difference.** Whether someone makes a follow-up call to interviewer - and how they handle it - can make a strong impression. "I really like it when someone is clever enough to work out the best time to call me, because it suggests she has the sales sense to detect a window of opportunity and exploit it, says a marketing manager. The speed of the follow-up is crucial to one employer. "If I don't hear from that person within three days of the interview, she's history."

Sending a follow-up note if the decision proves negative may also pay off. Says the owner of a chain of stores, "One person I didn't hire as a manager at one of my shops sent a note saying, "Even though I didn't make it into the final selection, I enjoyed speaking with you very much and I'd be really interested in any future opportunities you feel might be right for me. Although I didn't consider this woman experienced enough to be a manager, I felt that anyone who could write such a note was worth employing in my company. So I saved it until a sales position in one of our better stores opened up - then called her up to make her an attractive job offer."

To land the right job, learn to make the right impression

# Four Minutes That Get You Hired

BY CONNIE GLASER  
AND BARBARA SMALLEY

The 28 year -old had spent six years working at night while attending university during the day. "I always wanted to be a teacher," she says, "and I worked hard to earn my degree. When I finally graduated, I was very optimistic." She had hopes of landing a teaching position at a nearby primary school.

With the help of friends who taught at this school, she arranged an interview with the principal. "I noticed a tiny run in my stockings the morning," she recalls. "I thought about changing, but I knew I'd be late if I did. By the time I got to my interview, the run stretched from my ankle to my knee. I walked in and apologised for not looking my best. I spent the rest of the interview trying to sit so that he couldn't see the run."

The would-be teacher didn't get that job. In fact, one of her friends told her the principal's only comment was: "If a person doesn't take the time to present her best image at an interview, what kind of teacher is she going to be?"

First impressions are often lasting ones. Indeed, if you play your cards right, you can enjoy the benefits of what sociologists call the "halo effect." This means that if you're viewed positively within the critical first four minutes, the person you've met is likely to assume that everything you do is positive.

Four minutes! Studies tell us that is the crucial period in which impressions are formed by someone we've just met. Within a mere *ten seconds*, that person will begin to make judgements about our professionalism, social class, morals and intelligence. People tend to focus on what they see (dress, eye contact, movement), on what they hear (how fast or slowly we speak, our tone of voice and volume), and on the actual words we use.

Bungle a first encounter, and in many cases the interviewer will mistakenly assume you have other negative traits. Worse, he or she may not take the time to give you a second chance.

Most employers believe that those who look as if they care about themselves are more likely to care about their jobs. Research shows that physically attractive people are generally perceived by prospective employers as more intelligent, likeable and credible. Your goal should be to come across in the best possible light - attractive in the way

you dress, in your gestures and facial expressions and in your speech.

Here's how to make those crucial four minutes count:

**Look your best.** It signals success. Studies have linked dress sense to higher self-esteem and job satisfaction. And one study found that it pays, literally, to project a professional image. Judith Waters, a university professor, sent out identical resumes with either a "before" or an "after" photograph of hypothetical job candidates to over 300 companies. (No company received both "before" and "after" photos of the same person.) Waters asked them to determine a starting salary for each "candidate". The result? Salaries were eight to 20 per cent higher for those whose resumes had been accompanied by the photo with an upgraded image.

Yet many people fail to understand the importance of projecting a professional image. For example, a 32-year-old Worked for ten years as an administrative assistant in a large accounting firm. When the office manager retired, she applied for the position. She wasn't even granted an interview.

"I thought it was an oversight, so I asked the director of personnel what had happened," she says. "He told me I didn't fit the image of an office manager. He suggested I revamp my wardrobe - get rid of my neon coloured skirts and dangling earrings - before I applied again for another position. I was shocked. I do a great job, and the way I dress shouldn't have any bearing. My clothes reflect my personal style."

Forget about personal style. At work, your clothes must convey the message that you are competent, reliable and authoritative.

Dress for the job you *want*, not the job you have. If you've arranged an interview with a company you've never visited and aren't sure what to wear, ask for a copy of its annual report and study what the employees pictured are wearing, or drop in ahead of time to see how they dress.

**Monitor your body language.** How you move and gesture will greatly influence an interviewer's first impression of you. In a landmark communications study, psychologist Albert Mehrabian discovered that seven per cent of any message about our feelings and attitudes comes from the words we use, around 38 per cent from our voice, and a startling 55 per cent from our facial expressions. In fact,

when our facial expression or tone of voice conflicts with our words, the listener will typically put more weight on the non-verbal message.

To make your first encounter a positive one, start with a firm handshake. If the interviewer doesn't initiate the gesture, offer your hand first. Whenever you have a choice of seats; select a chair beside his or her desk, as opposed to one across from it. That way there are no barriers between the two of you and the effect is somewhat less confrontational. If you must sit facing the desk, shift your chair slightly as you sit down, or angle your body in the chair so that you're not directly in front of your interviewer.

Monitor your body language to make sure you don't seem too desperate for the job, or too eager to please. When a 26 year-old telemarketing specialist applied for a promotion, her interview went so well she was offered the job on the spot. "I was ecstatic," she recalls. "But I reacted to the offer with too much enthusiasm. Once the boss sensed how excited I was, he knew I wasn't going to turn him down. Consequently, he offered me a lower salary than I'd hoped for. I'm convinced I could have got more had I contained myself."

**Keep a poker face.** Audrey Nelson-Schneider, a communications consultant, says that inappropriate smiling is the most common example of non-verbal behaviour that undercuts verbal messages - making you appear weak and unassertive.

Good eye contact is also important. One study found that job applicants who make more eye contact are perceived as more alert, dependable, confident and responsible.

**Say what you mean.** Your goal is to exude confidence and be believed. Clinch that favourable first impression by making your words consistent with your body language and appearance. If they aren't in tune, the mixed messages that you will send out are bound to confuse your interviewer.

Open and close your conversation on a positive note. For example, if you've studied the company's annual report - and you should have! - consider remarking on any substantial progress the firm has made within the past year, or cite an area of company involvement that interests you. When you leave, summarise why you are the best

candidate for the job and thank the person for his interest.

**Use a person's name when talking.** It's the best way to get - and keep - his or her attention. And avoid verbal clutter. As business consultant Marian Woodall puts it: "Successful communicators talk in short sentences and even in bulleted items."

**Master the art of small talk.** Most people who *appear* comfortable with strangers in social and business situations will tell you that they've worked hard to look that way. Their advice? Read a weekly news magazine and at least one daily newspaper so you can hold your own in a conversation.

**Ask questions.** Too often when people meet, they feel awkward and are at a loss for words after the introductions are made. Almost every-one likes to be asked questions, so do not be afraid to be the initiator.

Finally, there is the matter of *how* you speak. Any voice coach will tell you that you can learn to sound more relaxed, more assertive and more confident. One good technique is to record your voice on tape. "As you play it back, be alert for voice tones that sound apologetic, tentative, meek or imploring," suggests management and communication consultant Norma Carr-Ruffino.

In his book, *You Are the Message: Secrets of the Master Communicators*, media consultant Roger Ailes suggests a voice improvement exercise he calls "tape and ape." Get a recording of a famous actor or actress reading a classic. Then record yourself reading the same selection and compare. "Your goal isn't to become a performer," says Ailes. "But when you hear good speech and attempt to emulate it, you will improve your voice."

As Christopher Lasch states in his book, *The Culture of Narcissism*: "Nothing succeeds like the appearance of success." So use those crucial first four minutes to your complete advantage. Look your best, move with confidence, speak with conviction - and the job you want can be yours.

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# Interview Questions

These questions have all been asked during interviews of students over the past 5 years. Practicing answers can be of immense benefit, especially for the behavioural questions and general themes.

## General Themes

Most questions fall within these four themes

1. Why do you want to work for this firm/organisation?
2. What have you got to offer? What do you see as your strengths?
3. Who are you? Tell us about yourself
4. What will you cost? What are you worth?

## Behavioural Questions - Past behaviour predicting future performance

1. Tell us about a time when you were part of a group or a team and experienced conflict. What role did you play? What did you learn? How would you do it differently next time?
2. Tell us of a time when you felt your communication skills served you particularly well.
3. Tell me about a time when you took a leadership role within a group.
4. Tell us of a time when you did something that did not go particularly well.
5. Tell me about a time when you experienced failure / disappointment. What did you learn?
6. What are the accomplishments that have given you the most satisfaction?
7. What is a goal you have set and how did you go about achieving that goal?
8. How do you deal with conflict?
9. How do you react under pressure?
10. How do you go about planning and / or managing time?
11. Give me an example of your problem solving style.
12. Give me an example of how you have provided good customer service.
13. What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
14. What experience have you had of working with people of other cultures?
15. When have you done something without being asked?

## A miscellaneous selection of questions

1. What do you know about us as a company?
2. What do you imagine a \_\_\_\_\_ does?
3. What do you see as the major issues facing our company?
4. Why did you choose your particular course?
5. Why did you choose to come to Otago?
6. Outline your personal goals for this year?
7. What are your career goals?
8. Where do you see yourself in five years time?
9. What challenges are you looking for in this position?
10. How do you think that you have changed personally since you started university?
11. If people were talking about you, what weaknesses would they say you have?
12. What do you think you will find most difficult about being a \_\_\_\_\_? How would you deal with this?
13. What self-improvement learning do you do?
14. Tell us about your honours project.
15. Why did you change study direction 3 years ago?
16. Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you have been involved with? What have you gained through these activities and what have you contributed?
17. What current issues do you feel strongly about?
18. How would you see Treaty issues being important within our work?
19. How would your flatmates describe you?

20. What do you do for fun?
21. If you were to be reincarnated what would you like to return as?
22. If you could choose what era would you like to be born into?
23. What else should we know about you?

### **Remember**

- Do not think “what is the right answer?” Think “how can I use this question to demonstrate my suitability for this position?”
- Focus on your accomplishments and skills, and give specific examples.
- Make your thinking transparent. Show how you are working through questions.
- Be diplomatic and discreet. Don’t badmouth anybody.
- Point out your skills by telling the interviewer what other people think of you eg “My supervisors have told me that I am very good at....”
- Recognise that an interview is communication between two or more people. Each person needs to participate fully and take some responsibility for the communication to be effective. Work to develop rapport with the interviewer.

### **Case Study Exercises (crucial to practise if the goal is a Management Consultancy firm)**

- A) A forestry company is planning to merge with a pulp and paper company and wants help sorting out the process. What opportunities or issues could result from this?
- B) A manufacturer has just found out that his only competitor is making 5% more profit than he is. He wants to know why and what to do about it.
- C) Work out a feasibility study for a company which needs to invest in a \$10 million piece of machinery.

### **Remember**

- Use the panel in front of you to get information.
- Transparently show your process of problem solving.
- Some of the consulting companies have hints on their web sites for approaching case problems.
  - The 4 P's: Price, Place, Promotion, Product
  - The 4 C's: Competition, Customer, Cost, Channels

### **Questions which you may want to ask during the interview.**

1. What kind of orientation or training programme will I complete when I begin the job?
2. What are the duties and responsibilities of this position?
3. What would a 'day in the life of a \_\_\_\_\_' with your firm typically involve?
4. To whom will I be accountable in this position?
5. What will be biggest challenge I'll have in this job?
6. Is there a periodic employee appraisal or performance review? How is this organised?
7. Will the company support on-going study?
8. Will there be opportunities for increased responsibility and broader experience in the company?
9. What is the quality and variety of the firm's clients?
10. How much contact will I have with management?
11. What do you enjoy/dislike most about working in this organisation?
12. I find it interesting that you are expanding into .....Could you tell me more about that?

### **Remember**

- Ask genuine questions about information which is not readily available in the company information sources - otherwise you will expose your lack of preparatory research.
- Know why you are asking the question. If you ask an idle question, and the interviewer asks why you want to know the answer, you will have to justify yourself.

# Second Stage of the Selection Process

## Information about meeting senior staff, further interviews, group activities, psychometric testing and assessment centres.

You have had your first interview and now you have been asked to attend a second interview. This is an achievement and means that you have a good chance of being appointed to a position. Congratulations!

## What can you expect?

Second stage selection processes take many different forms, from a straightforward meeting with senior staff to a range of activities which are used particularly by bigger organisations. These could include individual and panel interviews, groups discussions and exercises, presentations given by the applicant, psychometric testing or any combination of these in an "assessment centre".

### 1 - Visiting the Premises/ Meeting with Senior Staff.

This is fairly straightforward and simple. You may meet with more members of staff, particularly at senior level, be given a tour of the premises and possibly invited to lunch or drinks with the staff. If this is in another city you can expect to be flown there and may be required to stay overnight in a hotel.

### 2 - Individual Interviews.

These are generally held at the employer's premises and are a more searching version of the first interview. There may be interviews with several different people concentrating on different aspects eg your personality, motivation and interests, and technical aspects of the job (especially for a scientific or technical position). See general

interview advice for guidance for this option.

### 3 - Panel Interviews.

In a panel interview there may be three or more interviewers. Usually one takes the chair and introduces the others, each of whom will ask a few questions before passing you on to the next. One member may simply act as an observer. General interview advice holds good in these situations. Give your attention to whoever is speaking at the time but include all members of the panel in your answer.

### 4 - Group Discussions and Exercises.

The aim is to see how you work with and react to others, how quick and shrewd you are in summing up people, situations and evidence. Group exercises may include working through a case study in a group eg to study a batch of company papers relating to an industrial problem, deciding with your team how to prioritise and deal with the contents of an "in-tray" or debating a particular issue. A group of perhaps six or eight candidates may be given a general topic to discuss eg "Should lead be used in petrol?" or "Is there a case for censorship?" It may be leaderless or candidates may be asked to take turns in the chair.

Alternatively you may be given a business game in which to participate, a practical problem to work on or a hypothetical situation eg you are survivors of an aircraft crash in a desert, which of the items of equipment available are most important to survival? You will probably have time to study the problem before being asked to discuss it. In some cases candidates may have to decide their own solution, then present it to the group and persuade them of its pertinence.

### 5 - Individual Presentations.

You may be asked to give a short presentation either about yourself or a specific topic. If you have to choose the topic, make a careful selection, preferably one on which you can be both knowledgeable and interesting.

If asked to suggest topics for discussion, eg on current affairs, select those which are intellectually

stimulating, and brief yourself well. It is always advisable to watch current affairs programmes and read the newspapers carefully and analytically in the weeks before second interviews to provide yourself with discussion starters and the ability to participate in both formal and informal discussions.

### 6 - Psychometric Testing.

These may be used as a tool to short list applicants especially where the number of people applying is large, or as a further selection tool at the second stage.

*"There is good evidence that tests which are professionally used and evaluated can provide objective, reliable and relevant information concerning the likelihood of job success."*

(Saville and Holdsworth Ltd, 1997, Practice Leaflet)

Tests are used to measure job-related competencies and assess applicants on a similar set of performance objectives.

The most common types of tests are *aptitude tests*, *personality tests* and *vocational preference tests*.

Aptitude tests assess things such as mathematical abilities, literacy, computer aptitude and critical thinking.

Personality tests are used to provide a profile of personality type or personal characteristics. They help to assess leadership skills, management styles and appropriate working environments.

Vocational preference tests are used to assess how consistent your career interests are.

Aptitude tests can often be used to select applicants for interviews, while personality and vocational preference tests are better used as an adjunct to the interview process.

### 7 - Assessment Centres.

The term "assessment centre" is used to describe a series of exercises which candidates undertake while being observed by a team of managers or consultants who act as assessors. Candidates do not compete against each other at an assessment centre. They are tested and measured individually against a predefined set of criteria.

*“The Assessment Centre will be an intensive situation at which the company will learn about you. But, more importantly for you, you should gain an insight into what the company is like, and you should learn about your own strengths and weaknesses. Whether the company tells you how you did or not, you should have a better feel for what your weaknesses are and what actions you should take to remedy them.”*

**Mark Oliver**, Principal Adviser, Employee Relations, Comalco Smelting.

An assessment centre offers graduates an opportunity to sell themselves and to find out much more about a prospective company than a brochure or presentation will ever achieve.

The tasks are designed to create an environment to enable you to perform well, and to test competencies, each one covering a range of attributes deemed relevant by the organisation. These may try to measure intellectual, technical and/or interpersonal capabilities, academic knowledge, how suited you are to the work etc. If you see this as a fun, challenging and rewarding experience you can't lose, even if you don't win the job.

Remember, the assessment centre is not the place to be someone you think an employer wants to see. Be yourself.

## How to Prepare Yourself

Although the second stage of selection may appear daunting it can be a positive experience. Many graduates and students have said that despite early fears and nervousness, they enjoyed the experience and gained additional skills at the same time. Their advice is to relax, be yourself and stay confident.

- Try to keep as calm as possible and do not overindulge the night before, or on the day.
- Always assume that you are being assessed from the moment you walk through the door until the moment you walk out again. Informal lunches, evenings, etc, may not be formally marked but the assessors will be weighing you up.
- Think about the kinds of qualities the interviewer may be looking for. Positive qualities include

making contributions, keeping focused on the task at hand, listening to others, co-operating in a team, getting others to talk and demonstrating good judgement. Negative qualities may include not making any contributions, ignoring what others are saying, monopolising discussions and being unable to accept criticism.

- Most graduates find difficulty in coming to terms with the balancing act between saying too much or too little, listening versus talking, leading versus following etc. As this balance differs company by company you cannot know what a particular company is really looking for. So forget the artificial surroundings and your preconceptions and enter into the spirit of what you are asked to participate in. Make sure you say and/or do something in each activity.
- Energy, enthusiasm, creative ideas, attention to detail and facts coupled with persuasive arguments, respect for people and a sense of humour is a hard combination to beat.

At all times learn more about the company by asking questions of the executives, managers and staff present. Find out about the organisation and gather information to help you decide if you want to work there.

### For Psychometric tests

- Make sure you arrive for the test in plenty of time, give yourself a chance to get familiar with the environment and try to relax. A good night's sleep, deep breathing exercises and imagining calm situations can all help you to relax.
- Listen carefully to all instructions given to you and read the written instructions before starting.
- Do the questions you are familiar with first. On many tests it is the number of questions you get right that counts, not the number of questions you answer.
- Work at an even pace. If you cannot answer a question immediately, leave it and come back to it later.

- If you have time, review your answers and check that you have not missed anything out.
- Try not to answer questions on psychological / personality or vocational tests in the way you think employers want them to be answered. Remember that they are used to assess a particular set of personality traits and **there is no right or wrong answer**. These types of tests are also designed to "catch" fake answers so it is best to answer them as honestly as you can. Be yourself.
- Remember that the tests must be designed so that genius scores can be accommodated within a test that is given to "non-genius" people. This is achieved by making the questions progressively harder and by providing many more questions than can reasonably be answered in the allotted time. So - do not expect to finish the test.

## Resources for Further Information

*Books, videos and files with further useful information are available at the Careers Advisory Service – north east corner of the Information Services Building (beside the Central Library).*

# Interviews

## FEEDBACK FROM COMPANIES RECRUITING AT OTAGO 1996 - 2000

### General Comments

- Sparkle! It is a marketing exercise; you must market yourself with conviction and confidence.
- Realise personality is important - build good rapport with the interviewer.
- Remember to be honest under all circumstances.
- Practise, but prepare for anything! Don't come with preconceived ideas. Be ready for non-standard questions - 'off the wall', current affairs, whatever....
- Listen and think before answering. Don't be afraid to pause for thinking time.
- If you are asked to actively problem solve within the interview, be transparent about your method i.e. talk through your problem solving process
- You need to be prepared for "behavioural event" interviewing; i.e. questions based on past experiences in order to identify competencies required in the job - "past behaviour predicts future behaviour." This is the only way some companies interview, so think in advance about examples from your experience which demonstrate the competencies which may be required.
- Provide examples of what you *would do* in a given situation, even if it has not arisen in your experience.
- Tailor your interview answers to the employer, rather than giving generic answers.
- Be informative but not lengthy. Students should try to engage the interviewers in a dialogue rather than just trying to answer the questions and get out of the room as soon as possible. However know when to stop talking.
- Many companies use psychometric testing as part of their interview procedure. You need to be prepared for the different types of tests which may be used. The Careers Advisory Service has practice tests and resources designed to introduce you to psychometric testing available.
- Relax - if possible! But, if you have attended several interviews, be careful that you don't become too relaxed.

### Questions

- Prepare questions to ask the employer. You need to ensure the job suits your aspirations. Do not ask questions to which you already know the answers or could figure out with a little thought.

### The Company

- "Not many applicants had taken the time to find out about us." This comment was the most commonly repeated comment from all employers, and can be addressed easily given a little preparation and forethought.  
Conduct research on the employer and the commercial framework of the employer's business. A quick visit to the Net is not enough. The Careers Advisory Service has information such as Annual Reports and Corporate Profiles available for most companies participating in Graduate Recruitment.
- Research the company
  - what they do;
  - the structure of the firm;
  - the positions available in different areas;
  - the main competitors;
  - the current business environment in which they operate.
- Research the position
  - what does it involve?
  - what competencies are necessary?

### Yourself

- You need to show you are self-aware.
- Make sure you present yourself at the interview in an appropriate and professional manner. This relates to your attitude prior to, during and after the interview, as well as your appearance.
- Be prepared to talk about what you have to offer (strengths and weaknesses). You need to be able to think about situations or experiences that demonstrate your skills and competencies and be able to relate them confidently and fully.
- Combine knowledge of yourself and the company's needs. You must link these two up, otherwise it is a nonsense.
- Be aware of what you want from a career. Think more about what you want to do and why. Often students have no game-plan for studies or career.
- Think about which area of the company you would like to work in if you have a choice.

# Career and Job Web-Sites

A more comprehensive list is available at the Careers Advisory Service website:  
<http://www.otago.ac.nz/careers>

## Employment Sites - General

**Adecco:** <http://www.adecco.co.nz/>

**Capital Consulting:** <http://www.capitalconsulting.co.nz/>

**Career Opportunities New Zealand:** <http://www.career.co.nz/>

**Employment.com:** <http://www.employment.com.au/>

**Gradnet:** <http://www.hr-alliance.com.au/>

**Job Café:** <http://www.jobcafe.co.nz/>

**JobNet NZ:** <http://www.jobnetnz.co.nz/>

**Jobs 4 Grads:** <http://www.jobs4grads.net/>

**Jobs Ireland:** <http://www.jobsireland.com/>

**Kiwi Careers Vacancy Links:** <http://www.careers.co.nz/lists/vacancy/vaculist.htm>

**Manpower Services:** <http://www.manpower.co.nz/Internet/Home/Default.asp>

**MonsterBoard:** <http://www.monster.co.nz/>

**New Zealand Herald Net Classifieds:** <http://netclassifieds.nzherald.co.nz/>

**NZ Jobs:** <http://www.nzjobs.co.nz/>

**Orange Jobs:** <http://www.orangejobs.com/nz/graduates/index.htm>

**Pipers Career Links:** <http://www.piperpat.co.nz/nz/careers.html>

**Seek:** <http://seek.co.nz/>

**WINZ:** [http://www.winz.govt.nz/find\\_a\\_job/index.html](http://www.winz.govt.nz/find_a_job/index.html)

## Employment Sites - Specialised

**Candle New Zealand:** <http://www.candlenz.co.nz/> (*IT&T Vacancies*)

**Combined Computer Services:** <http://www.ccs1.co.nz/> (*IT Vacancies*)

**Duncan & Ryan Associates:** <http://www.duncanryan.co.nz/> (*IT Vacancies*)

**Enterprises Consulting Group:** <http://www.enterprise.co.nz/> (*IT Vacancies*)

**Lacey Lee Recruitment:** <http://www.laceylee.co.nz/> (*IT Vacancies*)

**Spectrum:** <http://www.spectrumit.co.nz/> (*IT&T Vacancies*)

**NZ Government Jobs Online:** <http://www.jobs.govt.nz/> (*Government Sector*)

**Scientific & Technical Recruitment:** <http://www.scitechrecruit.co.nz/> (*Scientific*)

**Synergy:** <http://www.synergyconsult.co.nz/> (*Pharmaceutical, Medical & Scientific*)

**Dave's ESL Cafe:** <http://www.eslcafe.com/jobs/> (*Teaching English Overseas*)

**Education Gazette:** <http://www.edgazette.govt.nz/> (*Education*)

**Action Jobs:** <http://www.actionjobs.com/> (*Adventure & Action*)

**Experience:** <http://www.experience.com/> (*US Vacation Work*)

## Curriculum Vitae Preparation Sites

**Career City:** <http://www.careercity.com/content/resumes/index.asp>

**Career Development Manual:** <http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infocecs/CRC/manual/resumes.html>

## Job Interviews

**Seek Virtual Interviewer:** <http://www.seek.co.nz/if.asp?loc=edctr>

**Career Linx:** <http://www.careerlinx.regina.sk.ca/pound/howto/interview.htm>

## Psychometric Testing

**SHL Group Direct:** <http://www.shlgroup.com/direct>

## Career Self-Assessment

**MonsterBoard Career Test:** <http://content.monster.com/>

**Reality Check:** <http://www.careerlinx.regina.sk.ca/pound/reality/index.html>