In today’s job market, it is hard enough to obtain good leads, let alone request an interview. On average employers bring in 3-4 candidates for personal interviews, with each capable of doing the job. The interview setting is the perfect venue to showcase your talents and to separate yourself from the competition.

Research and planning are critical steps in the interview process. Here are things to prepare in advance:

**Interview Agenda**
- You need the name and title of each person you’ll meet.
- Interview length.
- Special discussions to take place.

Employers should provide you with this information. If a recruiter sets up the interview, this person may inform you about backgrounds and styles of the interview team members.

**Company Research**
- History
- Profitability
- Competitive standing
- Growth plans
- Resources
- Financial stability
- Buyout risk
- Management style
- Promotion policies
- Turnover/morale
- Work environment and culture.

**Information Sources**
- Company Websites
- Search engines
- Job descriptions
- Current and past company employees
- Competitors
- Articles
- Directories
- D&B reports
- Social media sites (e.g., LinkedIn)
- Recruiters.

**Things to Bring to the Interview**
- Resume (multiple copies)
- List of patents, publications and presentations
- Articles about your work
- Awards and certifications
- Recommendation letters
- Performance reviews
- College transcripts
- Salary history.

**The Telephone Interview**
Telephone interviews are usually screening tools by companies to determine which candidates to interview in person. After screening your resume, an employer may want to ask a few key questions on the phone about your capabilities and interest level before committing to a personal meeting.

Be sure to (1.) prepare thoroughly, (2.) focus with no distractions, (3.) have your resume, job description and company information handy, (4.) ask questions to learn more about the company and opportunity, (5.) request a personal interview and (6.) obtain an e-mail address to send a follow-up note.

**The Personal Interview**
Now we move on to the next step of the interview process—the personal interview. Below are some general rules to follow:

**First impression.** Be on time and display a professional appearance, firm handshake, good eye contact and posture, positive attitude, enthusiasm, confidence, attentiveness and listening skills.

**Ask questions.** Good questions include (1.) What is a typical week in this role? (2.) What are the biggest challenges? (3.) What are the main objectives in this role? (4.) How do I earn a gold star for you (the boss) in the
first year? (5.) How will my performance be evaluated? (6.) What is the company’s future direction? and (7.) What is the company culture?

**Answer questions.** Be ready to answer (1.) Tell me about yourself (this is your chance to stand out; be sure to focus on big accomplishments), (2.) Why are you job searching? (3.) What is your biggest weakness (name a weakness you have worked to improve)? (4.) What are your strengths? (5.) What would be your ideal role? (6.) Where do you want to be in 3-5 years? (7.) Why are you interested in our company? and (8.) Why should I hire you?

**50/50 rule.** Half of what gets you hired is your education, experience, skills, capabilities and success record. The other half is your goals, interests, attitude and motivation. Show the employer you are excited about the opportunity, that the position is a logical step for you and that you are likely to be a high achiever and stay with the company for many years to come.

**Salary.** Do not bring up salary. If the employer discusses salary, respond professionally. Do not mention salary figures, either current compensation or salary desired. Express that money is important, but the opportunity is much more important, and that you want to focus on your potential long-term future with the company.

**Closing.** Ask about (1.) the next step in the process, (2.) when you will hear further, (3.) where you stand among candidates and (4.) any concerns or reasons you would not be hired. Be sure to stress your interest!

**FOLLOW-UP**

Enthusiastic follow-up can make the difference when a company is undecided about going to the next step or making you a job offer.

**Etiquette.** Send a thank you letter 1-2 days after your interview. Follow-up by e-mail is timely and most common today. Send a note to each interview team member. Follow-up over time to express continued interest. With each communication, provide new information or ask an important question.

**Letter structure.** Keep things simple and include (1.) a thank you, (2.) the benefit you bring, (3.) the reason you are interested and (4.) request for further consideration.

**Persuasion letter.** If you are the company’s second choice or they have specific concerns, write a detailed letter to influence further interest. Give concrete examples of your success in pertinent situations and how it was achieved. If there are concerns about your interest, stress what you like about the job and how it fulfills your career goals.

Good luck in making the most of your next interview!

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