

5.2.7: Interview Types and Techniques

Learning Objectives

- Differentiate between types of interview situations and identify appropriate interview techniques for each



Every interview you participate in will be unique. The people you meet with, the interview setting, and the questions you'll be asked will all be different from interview to interview.

The various factors that characterize any given interview can contribute to the sense of adventure and excitement you feel. But it's also normal to feel a little nervous about what lies ahead. With so many unknowns, how can you plan to “nail the interview” no matter what comes up?

A good strategy for planning is to anticipate the type of interview you may find yourself in. There are common formats for job interviews, described in detail below. By knowing a bit more about each type and being aware of techniques that work for each, you can plan to be on your game no matter what form your interview takes.

Using your LinkedIn, GlassDoor, or Zip Recruiter account and other web searches, you can sometimes learn more about the company you will be interviewing with. That may help you plan for the types of interviews listed below. Most of these prepare for a series of interviews, which is more common than a single interview followed by an offer.

Screening Interviews

Screening interviews might best be characterized as “weeding-out” interviews. They ordinarily take place over the phone or in another low-stakes environment in which the interviewer has maximum control over the amount of time the interview takes. Screening interviews are generally short because they glean only basic information about you. If you are scheduled to participate in a screening interview, you might safely assume that you have some competition for the job and that the company is using this strategy to whittle down the applicant pool. With this kind of interview, your goal is to win a face-to-face interview. For this first shot, though, prepare well and challenge yourself to shine. Try to stand out from the competition and be sure to follow up with a thank-you note.

This is where studying the job ad or other reference may be the most helpful. That starting point has many specific words describing the opportunity. Work to use those words in your interview and think about the experiences you have that use those concepts. For example, if you were a “supervisor” and the ad talks about a “manager,” be sure to describe how many people you “managed” rather than how many people you “supervised.”

Phone or Web Conference Interviews



If you are geographically separated from your prospective employer, you may be invited to participate in a phone interview or online interview instead of meeting face-to-face. Technology, of course, is a good way to bridge distances. The fact that you're not there in person doesn't make it any less important to be fully prepared. In fact, you may wish to be all the more "on your toes" to compensate for the distance barrier. Make sure your equipment (phone, computer, Internet connection, etc.) is fully charged and works. If you're at home for the interview, make sure the environment is quiet and distraction-free. If the meeting is online, make sure your video background is pleasing and neutral, like a wall hanging or even a white wall. (See Module 9: Communicating Through Technology for more on video calls.)

If you are not familiar with web conferences, be sure to do a mock run with a friend first to trouble shoot any issues. This helps you become comfortable with the controls and camera settings. It has been known to happen that candidates dress well for the camera but forget about the laundry hanging in the background. Test volume as well so that you do not waste valuable time on the call saying "can you hear me?" People want to see your face more than your toes, so understand where that distance is. Position your camera in a place you will naturally look, which is right over the screen that the interviewer is seen on.

One-on-One Interviews

The majority of job interviews are conducted in this format—just you and a single interviewer—likely with the manager you would report to and work with. The one-on-one format gives you both a chance to see how well you connect and how well your talents, skills, and personalities mesh. You can expect to be asked questions like "Why would you be good for this job?" and "Tell me about yourself." Many interviewees prefer the one-on-one format because it allows them to spend in-depth time with the interviewer, and they feel it is easier to build rapport face to face. As always, be very courteous and professional. Have a portfolio of your best work at the ready.

These interviews begin with an entry to the room and a handshake. Practice yours, since a handshake is often the first impression you make.

Panel Interviews

An efficient format for meeting a candidate is a panel interview in which perhaps four to five coworkers meet at the same time with a single interviewee. The coworkers comprise the "search committee" or "search panel," which may consist of different company representatives such as human resources, management, and staff. One advantage of this format for the committee is that meeting together gives them a common experience to reflect on afterward. In a panel interview, listen carefully to questions from each panelist, and try to connect fully with each questioner. Be sure to write down names and titles, so you can send individual thank-you notes after the interview.

If you have created personal business cards, this is the time to hand each interviewer one. Hand them out yourself rather than slinging them across the table. Be sure to make eye contact.

Serial Interviews

Serial interviews are a combination of one-on-one meetings with a group of interviewers, typically conducted as a series of meetings staggered throughout the day. Ordinarily this type of interview is for higher-level jobs, for which it's important to meet at length with major stakeholders. If your interview process is designed this way, you will need to be ultra-prepared as you will be answering many in-depth questions. Stay alert.

Lunch Interviews



In some higher-level positions, candidates are taken to lunch or dinner, especially if this is a second interview (a “call back” interview). If this is you, count yourself lucky and be on your best behavior, because even if the lunch meeting is unstructured and informal, it’s still an official interview. Do not order an alcoholic beverage, and use your best table manners. You are not expected to pay or even to offer to pay. But, as always, you must send a thank-you note.

Many candidates worry about the right food to order. Think of the meal interview as more of an interview and less of a meal. Order a moderately priced item that is not likely to be difficult to eat. Then plan to focus on engaging with the other person more than digging in.

Group Interviews

Group interviews are comprised of several interviewees and perhaps only one or two interviewers who may make a presentation to the assembled group. This format allows an organization to quickly pre-screen candidates. It also gives candidates a chance to quickly learn about the company. As with all interview formats, you are being observed. How do you behave with your group? Do you assume a leadership role? Are you quiet but attentive? What kind of personality is the company looking for? A group interview may reveal this.

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