

10.7: Selling U - Selling Yourself in an Interview

Learning Objectives

- Understand how to prepare for a successful job interview.

In many ways, gearing up for a job interview is like gearing up for a sales presentation. You can't control the outcome of the interview, but you can control the preparation that goes into the interview. Preparing beforehand, paying attention to logistics, and knowing what to expect will set you apart from your competitors and put you in the best possible position to let your personal brand shine. Here are ten steps that can guide you through preparation for and follow-up after every job interview.

Ten Steps to Successful Interviews

1. Be ready to show and sell.
2. Accept and confirm the interview.
3. Research the company.
4. Rehearse your elevator pitch.
5. Prepare your answers to popular interview questions.
6. Prepare *your* questions and answers.
7. Prepare for the logistics.
8. Prepare your wardrobe.
9. Make a personal connection during the interview.
10. Follow up, follow up, follow up.

Step 1: Be Ready to Show and Sell

In a sales presentation, you want to make your product come to life by showcasing it in a way that gets your audience involved. You want your prospect to “smell the leather in the car.” The same is true at a job interview; it's not just about your résumé. Let your interviewer see examples of the work you've done and help her to envision the work you can do for her company. You can start preparing for this now, while you're still a student. Bring your portfolio on every interview. If you need some tips, review the *Selling U* section in Chapter 6.

Step 2: Accept and Confirm the Interview

When one of your target companies calls or e-mails to offer you an interview, don't leave anything to chance. Grab a pencil and paper or your personal digital assistant (PDA) and take down the information you'll need to know on the day of the interview. Do you have the correct day and time written down? Do you know the name, title, and office location of the person with whom you'll be interviewing? Do you have directions to the company's location? Keep in mind that Googling the company's address on the day of your interview may not get you where you want to go. Sometimes companies have large campuses with a number of buildings, and Google won't be able to tell you how to find the right entrance to the right building and how to find your contact person's office once you get there. Take care of logistical details like this beforehand, so you won't have anything to slow you down on the big day.

While you have a contact from the company on the phone, take the opportunity to ask whether there is a job description on the company Web site that you can review before the interview. It's also a good idea to ask for the title of the job for which you will be interviewing and the names and titles of the people with whom you will be interviewing. You should also ask for your interviewer's phone number and e-mail, and bring the phone number with you on the day of the interview in case you are unavoidably delayed. E-mail your interviewer several days in advance of the interview to confirm your appointment, or call her the day before. This demonstrates professionalism and ensures that everything will run smoothly. Kim Richmond, “10 Tips for Successful Interviews,” presentation in the How to Market Yourself as a Brand to Get the Job You Want Workshop Series, Upper Merion Township Library, King of Prussia, PA, June 1, 2009.

Step 3: Research the Company and Your Interviewer

Just as you would never go into a sales presentation without carefully researching your prospect's company beforehand, you should never go to a job interview without the same kind of preparation. Begin by reviewing the job description on the company Web site

if it's available. Then spend some time on the Web site, researching the company's mission statement and description. If you know which department you might be working in, pay careful attention to any specific details you can learn about this department on the Web site. Some of the basic facts employers will expect you to know include

- How many locations and employees does the company have?
- Does this company deal in B2B or B2C services?
- How long has the company been in business? Have they recently merged or been acquired?
- Is the company expanding globally?
- Does the company have any new products or services?
- Have the CEO or others in the company been recognized for any achievements or publications recently? Kim Richmond, *Brand You*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 186.

Then go beyond Web site research; after all, your interviewer knows what's on his company's Web site, so don't just repeat back the information you find there; show him your motivation and professionalism by coming prepared with your own research. Use the company's product or service and talk to other people who use the product or service. Go online and read what customers have to say about the company. Go through the company's purchasing process so you can understand the workings of the company from a customer's point of view. Kim Richmond, "10 Tips for Successful Interviews," presentation in the How to Market Yourself as a Brand to Get the Job You Want Workshop Series, Upper Merion Township Library, King of Prussia, PA, June 1, 2009. Read any recent press releases or press coverage about the company.

Don't forget to research your interviewer. Chances are, he has a profile on LinkedIn so you can get some insight about him and even see what he looks like. Also do a Google search as you may learn about his personal hobbies and other pertinent information.

Step 4: Rehearse Your "Elevator Pitch"

Don't be surprised if one of the first questions your interviewer asks is something along the lines of "tell me about yourself." This is a common opening question, designed to put job candidates at ease, but it can be one of the hardest questions to answer. "As part of your job-search arsenal, having a good elevator speech is a critical tool," says Alysia Foster, consultant and managing partner at the Centre for Strategic Management. "Sometimes all you get is 30 seconds to make a good impression." Laura Raines, "Making Your Pitch," *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, Jobs, 2007 (accessed May 16, 2010).

Review the *Selling U* section in Chapter 5 to be sure your elevator pitch is your strongest starting point. Then, rehearse, rehearse, rehearse so it sounds and feels natural as a response to that dreaded first question, "Tell me about yourself."

Video: Tell Me About Yourself - A Good Answer To This Interview Question



Step 5: Prepare Your Answers to Popular Interview Questions

"Tell me about yourself" is only one of a number of popular interview questions for which you should prepare before going into the interview. While there's no way to know which questions you'll get for sure, you can be relatively certain that your interviewer will ask at least one or two of the common standbys. Preparing answers to popular interview questions beforehand will empower to respond with clarity and poise. "What traps a lot of people is they think and talk at the same time," says Bill McGowan, founder of Clarity Media Group. "It's better if you know your conversational path." Sarah E. Needleman, "The New Trouble on the Line,"

Wall Street Journal, June 2, 2009. The best way to have a powerful conversation is to review your brand positioning points from the *Selling U* section in Chapter 1 and your FAB in Chapter 6. These can be included in an answer to just about any interview question. Practice telling your stories out loud so they are concise and focused, yet sound natural.

Video: TOP 7 Interview Questions and Answers



✓ Common Interview Questions - Refer to the Video Above When Studying the Following Information

What Are Some of Your Greatest Strengths?

Most candidates will respond to this question in generalities like “I’m a strong self-starter” or “I’m highly organized.” You already have your personal brand positioning points and stories to go with them, so why not use them here? You will set yourself apart if you can illustrate your strengths with the anecdotes you have prepared ahead of time. For example, “My leadership skills are among my greatest strengths. As the shift leader at Olive Garden, I scheduled the wait staff and resolved customer service issues during my shift. The restaurant had the highest customer satisfaction ratings during the two years I worked there.”

What Are Some of Your Weaknesses?

The interviewer isn’t looking for any deep confessions when she asks you this question. According to CareerBuilder.com, “The secret to answering this question is using your weaknesses to your advantage. For instance, if you say that you have trouble with organization, you can follow this up by saying that because organization doesn’t come naturally to you, you make a conscious effort at the beginning of a new project to plan out your goals. It’s never a good idea to simply name a weakness and finish off by telling the interviewer it’s something you are working on. On the other hand, it’s also important to be honest when you respond to the weakness question; don’t try to pretend that you are without faults because that won’t make you look good either.

This is one of those questions for which your research beforehand will pay off. This question is as much about your knowledge of the company as it is about your qualifications. Career strategist J. T. O’Donnell says “You can craft a better answer by asking [yourself] what the company wants and why. Then ask yourself how your story and the company’s story match up. This is a lot like presenting the customer-specific benefits of your product in a sales presentation. Prepare a story that can illustrate what you have to offer.

Why Do You Want to Work Here?

This question is another opportunity to showcase your company research. Consider what you know about any challenges or issues that the company faces and how your skills and experience will be beneficial. What community service or internship experiences might be relevant? For instance, “I know that your company is about to launch its first e-mail marketing campaign, and I would really like to be involved as this project gets off the ground. Last year I was in charge of writing the e-mail newsletters for the local food bank and expanding their list of subscribers, and I would look forward to putting that experience to work in a professional capacity.”

Why Should I Hire You?

This can be a difficult interview question, but not if you are prepared for the answer.

This is an example of an industry-specific interview question you might hear if you are interviewing for a marketing position. Whatever field you are going into, make sure you have done your research and understand the industry so you can respond to industry-specific questions. For example, if you are interviewing for a job in advertising, be familiar with the major advertising campaigns and be ready to discuss your favorite and why you think it works.

Where Do You See Yourself in Five Years?

Your interviewer won't want to hear that your five-year goal is to be working in a different industry. Talk about your personal goals that relate to the job. This will demonstrate that you understand the company and are motivated to succeed there. CareerBuilder.com, "Answering 6 Common Interview Questions," *CNN.com*, December 9, 2005.

What Are Your Salary Expectations?

This is a problem you should avoid responding to directly if possible. A good response would be to deflect the question: "I would expect compensation that falls in the standard salary range for this industry." It's a good idea to research salary ranges for your industry so that you will be ready to negotiate when the topic of salary does come up, but let your employer put a figure on the table first. "Common Interview Questions," *USA Today*, Careers and Workplace, January 29, 2001, <http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/Careers/12/09/six.questions/index.html> (accessed May 16, 2010). If you feel that you have to respond to this question with a direct answer, just be warned that once you name a figure, you shouldn't expect your employer to offer you more than that if you decide to take the job. It's a good idea to do your research before any job interview by researching current salaries for the position for which you are interviewing at Web sites such as Salary.com, or use Web 2.0 techniques and ask an online community such as Salarymap.com. The following article includes several resources:

How Many Years of Experience Do You Have Using Excel (or Other Software Programs)?

You don't want a question like this to cost you the position, especially considering that many software programs can be learned on the job. Don't give false information, but you can try responding with your own question; try asking how much and what level of experience is required for the job. If you have a more specific idea of the answer the interviewer is looking for, you can provide a more convincing response as to why you should be considered for the job, even if your answer doesn't match exactly what the interviewer is looking for. Sarah E. Needleman, "The New Trouble on the Line," *Wall Street Journal*, June 2, 2009.

What Did You Like Least about Your Last Job?

Interviewers often ask this question to get you to reveal conflicts. Avoid going this route. In job hunting, you should never reveal anything negative about a former employer. Whatever you mention in your response, choose something that isn't directly related to the job for which you are applying. And make sure to end your response on a positive note: "I'm ready for the challenges of my new job." Kim Richmond, *Brand You*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 196.

Step 6: Prepare Your Questions and Answers

Toward the end of the interview, every interviewer will ask you if you have any questions for him. So make sure you have three or four questions in mind. Preparing these ahead of time will show your interviewer that you have thought about the position and the company. Here are a few questions to consider asking:

- What opportunities will there be beyond this position in the company?
- What would the ideal person for this position look like?
- What are some challenges facing the department in the next three months? What role will the person in this position play in tackling these challenges?
- How would you describe your company culture?
- What are the next steps in the hiring process?

After the interviewer responds, be ready to follow up by restating your strengths. Kim Richmond, *Brand You* 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 186. For instance, if you ask what qualities the ideal candidate for this job should have, your interviewer might mention something you hadn't thought of mentioning earlier. You can respond by telling a relevant story about a specific time when you overcame an obstacle or helped a colleague solve a problem.

You can ask these questions even if you already know the answer. If you interview with multiple people in the organization, it is OK to ask the same question multiple times. It will help to get a variety of perspectives—and keep in mind that the questions you ask are also a way of showcasing your experience and your knowledge about the company.

✓ You've Got the Power: Tips for Your Job Search

When Do I Ask about Salary?

Finally, even if you have questions about salary and benefits, *don't* ask them now. Always delay a conversation about salary as long as possible. In a sales presentation, you wouldn't pull out a pricing schedule before your customer had expressed a strong interest in buying the product; keep the same idea in mind going into a job interview. It's best to let your interviewer bring up salary—and that might not be until after the second or third interview. Be patient; the longer your prospective employer has to get to know you, the more opportunities you have to point out why you would be a good addition to the company. If you sell yourself well throughout the interview process, you might even receive a higher offer.

Step 7: Prepare for the Logistics

Before you interview, take care of the logistics just as you would for any sales presentation. Control the things that are in your power to control so that you can focus on your performance during the interview. Double check that you know where you'll be going (including building, room, and/or suite number) and allow extra time for travel in case you get stuck in traffic. Make sure you know the title of the position for which you will be interviewing. Remember to assemble your materials the night before the interview: have your work samples ready to go in a portfolio and print at least four extra copies of your résumé on twenty-four-pound paper. Bring these extra résumés in your portfolio. Even though your interviewer will have already received your résumé, she may not have it on hand, and you should always be prepared in case you are asked to meet with anyone who was not on the original interview schedule. Kim Richmond, "10 Tips for Successful Interviews," presentation in the How to Market Yourself as a Brand to Get the Job You Want Workshop Series, Upper Merion Township Library, King of Prussia, PA, June 1, 2009. Arrive early, fix any wardrobe malfunctions, and get ready to give a stellar presentation.

Step 8: Prepare Your Wardrobe

Your wardrobe is part of your personal branding, so make sure you dress like a professional when you go to your interview. This holds true even if you are interviewing in a more casual industry; you can always dress down *after* you get the job.

- Dress conservatively. Go for a suit or dress in dark or neutral colors (black, gray, or navy for the suit). Avoid hypertrendy clothes or clothes that otherwise make a bold statement. Women should avoid dresses with thin straps or low necklines.
- Make sure your suit or dress fits you well. If it needs to be tailored, have it done. You will use the suit in your new job, and a good fit will increase your confidence during the interview.
- Wear appropriate, professional shoes. Both men and women should wear conservative, close-toed shoes in a dark or neutral color to complement their wardrobe. Women should avoid stiletto, open-toe, or platform shoes. Men should avoid athletic shoes and make sure their shoes are polished.
- Wear appropriate accessories. Avoid flashy jewelry or watches. Carry a professional briefcase or handbag—**no backpacks or messenger bags**. Keep in mind that even your accessories are part of your personal brand.
- If you have tattoos or body piercings, make sure they are not visible during the interview. Make-up such as Conceal FX available at Sephora.com will camouflage tattoos. It is acceptable for women to wear conservative earrings—but avoid anything large or distracting.
- Select appropriate hosiery. If you are wearing a suit, your socks should match your pants or shoes. Women wearing skirts and dresses should always wear pantyhose (even if you think you have a great tan).
- Make sure your clothes are ironed. Do this the night before. Kim Richmond, *Brand You*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 197. Lay out your clothes the night before so that you will have one less thing to worry about on the day of the interview. Wrinkled clothing and stains are considered among the biggest grooming red flags for job interviews, according to a recent survey of employers conducted by Gillette Career Advantage. "USA Today Snapshots," *USA Today*, Money, December 30, 2009, 1B.
- Ensure impeccable grooming, including a conservative hairstyle and appropriately manicured fingernails. Don't forget deodorant and a breath mint; body odor or bad breath can be a turn off in an interview. It's a good idea to stop in the restroom right before you go to the interview for one last check in the mirror (it's the perfect time to have a breath mint).

Step 9: Make a Personal Connection during the Interview

Make an effort to connect personally with your interviewer. People want to hire people they like. Smile, make eye contact, and greet him with a strong handshake. Allow yourself to relax and begin the conversation with some small talk. Notice the

surroundings in your interviewer's office. Does he have school memorabilia, family photographs, sports paraphernalia, or vacation photos? Try to discover commonalities that will allow you to make a connection. During the interview, remember to smile and maintain eye contact, and when the interview is wrapping up, make sure to close by telling the interviewer you want the job. Kim Richmond, "10 Tips for Successful Interviews," presentation in the How to Market Yourself as a Brand to Get the Job You Want Workshop Series, Upper Merion Township Library, King of Prussia, PA, June 1, 2009. Most of all, relax, enjoy the conversation, and be yourself.

Step 10: Follow-Up, Follow-Up, Follow-Up

Don't wait to do this! Get in contact while you are still fresh in your interviewer's mind: write a thank-you e-mail the same day. Details on how to write a successful follow-up e-mail are covered in the *Selling U* section in Chapter 11. Besides the e-mail, send a hand-written thank-you note on a plain, white business note card. Mail this the same day, so that your interviewer will receive it the next day or the day after. Very few people send handwritten "thank-you's" anymore, so this extra touch will make you stand out—and it only costs the price of postage, so why not do it?

During your interview you should ask the interviewer for a time frame so that you will know when to expect a response. If you haven't heard back by the appointed date, follow up with a phone call. Asking your interviewer for a time frame is essential to follow-up: if she isn't planning to make her hiring decision for another two weeks, calling her after one week will only be an annoyance. Be persistent, but keep in mind that there is a fine line between persistence and pestering. When you get voice mail, you can leave a message—once—but then keep calling back until you reach your contact. Following up by phone signals that you are still interested in the job and motivated enough to pursue it. Kim Richmond, *Brand You*, 3rd ed. (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall, 2008), 188. Sometimes hiring decisions get delayed because of issues that come up at the company, so not hearing back by the date you were expecting is not necessarily an indication that you weren't selected for the position.

Key Takeaways

- A job interview is like a sales presentation; a successful interview requires a lot of preparation.
- Always be ready for a job interview with a professional portfolio and interview suit including shoes and other accessories.
- When you receive a call for an interview, take the time to write down the date, time, location, title of the position for which you will be interviewing, and the people (names and titles) with whom you will be interviewing.
- Do your homework and thoroughly research the company, its products or services, customers, and competition. The company's Web site is a good place to start, but if possible also use the product or service or call the company's 800 number as though you were a prospective customer.
- Prepare for the most likely questions you will be asked including "tell me about yourself." Review your brand positioning points and stories you want to tell in response to the most commonly asked interview questions.
- Be prepared with questions to ask during the interview.
- Delay the conversation about salary as long as possible; avoid the temptation to bring it up during an interview. It's best to let the interviewer bring up the topic when she is closer to a final decision.
- Smile and be yourself during the interview. The best way to sell yourself is to be yourself.
- Follow up after the interview with a thank-you note.

? Exercise 10.7.1

1. Choose one company that is on your target company list, which you created in the *Selling U* section of Chapter 7. Research it thoroughly by visiting the company Web site and that of its competitors, using the product or service, contacting the company by e-mail or phone as a customer, reading about the company and its competitors in the news, and reading blogs and social networking Web sites to see what people are saying about the company and its key competitors. What did you learn about the company that you didn't already know? Based on your findings, list three questions you would ask during an interview.
2. Conduct a role-play with one person acting as the interviewer and one acting as the interviewee using the commonly asked interview questions mentioned in this section.
3. Identify two ways to follow up from an interview and when each should be done.

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