

Keillar's Interview Hints and Tips

Having made it past all the obstacles in the selection process, you have managed to secure an interview for that dream job. Your qualifications, experience and track record have got you this far, so how you come across in interview is of vital importance. It's true that some people 'interview better' than others but it essentially comes down to two factors: preparation and confidence.

Preparation

Interviewers are continually amazed by the number of candidates who possess little or no knowledge about the company they are interviewing for, so time spent researching the organisation will pay off on the day. Research the company in as much detail as you can – check out their website, brochure and press cuttings and you can even request a copy of their Annual Report. Also, don't forget that we at Keillar are here to help you – contact your consultant and they will have expert knowledge of the client, the environment you'll be working in, company culture and also the employer's expectations for you.

You should know the following before attending interview:

Who is the company owned by – are they private or public?

Is it part of a larger group?

What are its products and services?

Who are their main competitors?

How are they viewed in the marketplace?

What is their growth potential for the future?

Don't forget that you will also be expected to have detailed knowledge of your current / former employer, so bring yourself up to date on facts and figures.

Essential Dos and Don'ts

DO

- Ensure that you know the exact time and location of your interview, along with who you are meeting, their role within the company and how to pronounce their name. First impressions count
- Be punctual and allow yourself plenty of travel time
- Switch off your mobile phone!
- Introduce yourself courteously to all members of staff that you meet – not just those interviewing you. You never know who they will ask for their first impressions later on!
- Have a firm (but not aggressive) handshake
- Dress conservatively and smartly. You are a potential new representative for their organisation
- Smile and maintain good eye contact throughout
- Listen as well as speak

- Remember to address each interviewer if there is more than one present
- Take a moment to think before answering a question, so you construct your response carefully
- Show willingness to learn and progress
- Come prepared with a list of questions to ask – 10 is a good number; you will probably cover 5 in the interview
- Ask what the next step will be

DON'T

- Answer questions with 'yes' or 'no'. Expand whenever possible
- Be the first to bring up the subject of salary. Getting the job is the main priority – salary negotiations will follow
- Slouch in your seat
- Condemn your current employer
- Show a lack of career planning
- Lie! Answer all questions honestly

Typical Interview Questions (and their hidden meanings!)

Q: Tell me about yourself? (I want to hear you talk)

A: This is a conversation starter and is nearly always asked. Talk about your qualifications, career history and range of skills. Particularly emphasise those skills that are most relevant to the position on offer.

Q: Describe your achievements to date: (Are you successful?)

A: Another common question, so prepare beforehand. Select an achievement that is career related. Identify the skills you used in this situation and quantify the benefit.

Q: Has your career met your expectations? (Are you confident, happy, positive, ambitious?)

A: Answer must be a resounding 'yes', however, if you feel you are moving too slowly, then give reasons for this. Qualify your answer.

Q: Tell me the most challenging situation you have faced recently and how you dealt with it? (Are you logical? Do you show initiative? What is your definition of difficult?)

A: This is a trap question. To avoid it select a difficult work situation that was not caused by you, the options available, how you selected the appropriate one and why and how you resolved it and what the outcome was. Ensure that it is positive.

Q: What are your strengths? (I hope you're honest, what have you got that's different? How can I use you in the team? What value will you add to the company?)

A: You are going to get asked this question, so there is no excuse for not being prepared. Discuss your main strengths. List three or four ways they could benefit your employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency, ability to learn quickly, determination, positive attitude and your

ability to relate to people and work as a team. Provide examples and be prepared to back them up.

Q: What are your major weaknesses? (What aren't you interested in? What will you need help with? What's your self-awareness like.)

A: Don't say 'none' - we all have. There are two options available when asked such a question - use a professional weakness such as lack of experience on your part in an area that is not essential to the job on offer. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered a strength and the steps that you have taken to combat this.

Q: Why are you leaving your current employer?

A: Should be a straightforward answer - looking for more challenge, responsibility and experience. DO NOT be negative in your reasons for leaving, positive reasons are better.

Q: How do you deal with confrontation? (Are you strong? Can you admit you're wrong?)

A: Again - this is a trap question. Demonstrate that you're willing to listen, implement changes where necessary, but you have the courage of your convictions and will be firm when necessary

Q: Why do you want to work for this company? (Are you prepared, knowledgeable? What's the image of the company externally?)

A: Show you have researched into the firm's position in the market, what the company's strategy is, how long the particular department you are interviewing for has been around and what their corporate image is looking to project.

Your Own Questions for Interview

An interview is a two way process – as well as the employer interviewing you, you are also assessing your prospective employer. Below are some questions you might want to consider:

What will my role entail?

How has this position become vacant?

How does my role fit into the structure of the overall department?

How will my performance be monitored?

Who will I report to?

Will anyone report to me?

What are the opportunities for further training?

Where is your company going? Expansion plans?

Will this position involve travelling?

What does my daily routine involve?

What is the objective of this organisation/department/team?

What sort of person does well here?

How might I influence my own future in the company?

Which of my skills are required to do this job?

How does the culture of this team, this organisation compare to others?

What is it about this department and organisation that you (the interviewer) enjoy?

Closing the Interview

If you are interested in the role, ask about the next interview stage if appropriate. If the interviewer offers you the job on the spot and you want it,

accept it there and then. If you require further time to think it over, be tactful in saying so and qualify your reasons. Try and provide a definite date as to when you can provide an answer.

Do not be disappointed if no definite job offer is made the interview stage. The interviewer will in most cases need to consult colleagues first or interview other suitable candidates.

If you feel that the interview is not going well, do not be discouraged.

Sometimes this is part of an interviewer's technique to see how you perform under pressure - and may have no bearing on whether you will/will not get the job. Display a positive attitude at all times.

Don't forget to say 'thank you' to the interviewer.

Competency-based interviews - The 'STAR' approach

The acronym STAR stands for

Situation

Task

Action

Result

It is a universally recognised communication technique designed to enable you to provide a meaningful and complete answer to questions asking for examples. At the same time, it has the advantage of being simple enough to be applied easily.

Many interviewers will have been trained in using the STAR structure. The information will be given to them in a structured manner and, as a result, they will become more receptive to the messages you are trying to communicate.

Step 1 – Situation or Task

Describe the situation that you were confronted with or the task that needed to be accomplished. With the STAR approach you need to set the context. Make it concise and informative, concentrating solely on what is useful to the story. For example, if the question is asking you to describe a situation where you had to deal with a difficult person, explain how you came to meet that person and why they were being difficult. If the question is asking for an example of teamwork, explain the task that you had to undertake as a team.

Step 2 – Action

This is the most important section of the STAR approach as it is where you will need to demonstrate and highlight the skills and personal attributes that the question is testing. Now that you have set the context of your story, you need to explain what you did. In doing so, you will need to remember the following:

Be personal, i.e. talk about you, not the rest of the team

Go into some detail. Do not assume that they will guess what you mean

Steer clear of technical information, unless it is crucial to your story

Explain what you did, how you did it, and why you did it

What you did and how you did it

The interviewers will want to know how you reacted to the situation. This is where you can start selling some important skills. For example, you may want to describe how you used the team to achieve a particular objective and how

you used your communication skills to keep everyone updated on progress etc.

Why you did it

For example; when discussing a situation where you had to deal with conflict, many candidates would simply say: "I told my colleague to calm down and explained to him what the problem was". However, it would not provide a good idea of what drove you to act in this manner. How did you ask him to calm down? How did you explain the nature of the problem? By highlighting the reasons behind your action, you would make a greater impact. For example: *'I could sense that my colleague was irritated and I asked him gently to tell me what he felt the problem was. By allowing him to vent his feelings and his anger, I gave him the opportunity to calm down. I then explained to him my own point of view on the matter, emphasising how important it was that we found a solution that suited us both.'*

This revised answer helps the interviewers understand what drove your actions and reinforces the feeling that you are calculating the consequences of your actions, thus retaining full control of the situation. It provides much more information about you as an individual and is another reason why the STAR approach is so useful.

Step 3 – Result

Explain what happened eventually – how it all ended. Also, use the opportunity to describe what you accomplished and what you learnt in that situation. This helps you make the answer personal and enables you to highlight further skills.

This is probably the most crucial part of your answer. Interviewers want to know that you are using a variety of generic skills in order to achieve your objectives. Therefore you must be able to demonstrate in your answer that you are taking specific actions because you are trying to achieve a specific objective and not simply by chance.

And Finally... 6 Frighteningly Simple Mistakes That Lose People Jobs

- NEVER look casual. Even if the company you want to work for is the most laid back on the planet, make sure you wear a suit, have a shave and look smart. Remember, you don't work there yet – so show the interviewer that you're taking this seriously.
- Ignore the weather! Even if it's blazing hot, always take your suit jacket along with you. Keep it off and neatly folded on your way to the interview, then slip it on just before you enter the building.
- Make sure you pop to the bathroom once you arrive. Not only will this give you a chance to have a quick check on your appearance, it's also imperative to make sure you're not distracted during your interview!
- Take care of your hair. If you need a haircut – get it done before the interview! It will make you look sharper and, just as importantly, make you feel more confident.
- Don't get let down by your accessories. If you're bringing a bag or briefcase, make sure it looks as good as new. And give some thought to coats and umbrellas – if it's raining on the day of the interview you

don't want to turn up in a muddy anorak or wrestling with a massive Mickey Mouse umbrella.

- Don't overdo the perfumes. You're not going on a dinner-date in the evening, you're trying to land a job. So think pleasant, not ravishing