

Dan Gross title 7

# INTERVIEW GUIDE

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## YOU'D BETTER BE PREPARED!

All of the hours you've devoted to preparing your resumé, making contacts, and researching potential employers are little more than preparation for the single most important stage of the job search, the *interview*. Without an interview, you cannot make the sale and, because you seldom get a second chance, you *must* be certain that you're well prepared.

The success or failure of an interview is often determined before the meeting actually takes place. Your performance in this situation will reflect the thoroughness of your research, as well as the thought and practice you've given to the process.

And practice is the key word. If you can obtain the use of a video camera, do so. Have your spouse or a friend throw you questions (you'll find plenty in this guide), then view each taping at least twice, once for the content of your answers, then again for your appearance and the image you're projecting. Ask yourself: Are you relaxed and in control of the situation? Are you speaking clearly? Do you sound natural or over-rehearsed? Are your arm and hand movements distracting? Are you making proper eye contact or always looking away?

In the beginning, your performance at home will be somewhat better than in an interviewer's office so, for that reason, it's important that you not interview *first* for the job you really want. Give yourself a chance to perfect your interviewing skills before going for the *big* one.

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## THE FOUR STAGES OF AN INTERVIEW

1. The first stage is to have prepared an overview statement which briefly describes who you are and your professional background. As a rule, this overview would give the interviewer a capsulized version of your career path, something about you as an individual and where your job interests lie. This should take no more than a minute or two.
2. In the second stage, you'll want to get general information about the position you're discussing. You need to learn about the responsibilities of the job, the objectives to be achieved, and the role it plays in the company's hierarchy. Also, you will want to know the level of your authority and how your performance will be evaluated.
3. In the third stage, you need to evaluate how your experience and abilities match the position and the challenges defined. It's also critical to state those accomplishments that support your experience. This might be called a *needs-benefit-linkup*.
4. In the final stage, you will need to summarize your experience and how you see it fitting (or not fitting) into the position. If you believe there is not a match, or there's an obvious gap between what you are all about and what the company needs, you should say so.

## Question = Answer + Probe

Don't be afraid to ask questions during an interview. In fact, an extremely important part of interviewing is *probing* the interviewer for more information and/or "hidden agendas." To *probe*, apply the equation  $Q = A + P$ , which simply means: "Q" (the interviewer's question) = "A" (your answer) + "P" (probe - a question of your own). In other words, once you've answered a question, try to turn it around so that you, too, can gather information. For example, you may be asked, "Do you have any limitations on travel?" Once you've answered, pose your own question (*probe*), "what percent of time is spent on the road?"

### YOUR POST-INTERVIEW CHECKLIST

After each job interview, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you feel good about how the interview went?
2. What did you do or say that particularly pleases you?
3. What did you do or say that you think needs improvement?
4. Did you listen, without interrupting, to the needs of the company?
5. What questions were asked that you think you need more practice in answering?
6. Did you articulate your relevant talents, skills and experience?
7. Did you create an opportunity to discuss your accomplishments?
8. Did you, by words and manner, create a positive image?
9. Did you stick to relevant issues without rambling?
10. Was your voice firm and strong?
11. What phase of the interview was easiest for you?
12. What phase of the interview was hardest for you?
13. Were you at ease?
14. Was the job described one you would like?
15. Did the interviewer seem to like you?
16. Is there a plan for you to come back?

### TIPS ON NEGOTIATING

1. When negotiating for compensation, keep in mind that the results must represent a *win-win* situation for both sides, otherwise nobody wins in the long run.
2. Maintain a positive, but *realistic* attitude, and always try to get the company to commit to a salary *before* you do.
3. Try to avoid comparisons between your previous salary and that of the new position. You should emphasize the difference in responsibilities, companies, market, etc.
4. Concessions may be necessary. You may have to give up something to get a desirable trade-off.
5. Be sure that you have your objective (bottom line) clearly in mind.
6. Aim high to settle high — but be realistic.

### DRESS TO WIN!

"Dressing properly for an interview can immediately indicate you *fit-in*," says David Bowman, Career Consultant to Kinko's. "Attire is critical to the first *in-person* impression an interviewer has of a job candidate, and a good beginning can lead to a good interview.

Should one *always* dress-up for an interview? Not necessarily. Wear the kind of clothing usually worn on the job. For example, for an office job — from president to office clerk — men generally wear a suit or sport coat and tie, and women wear a suit or dress (not a cocktail dress or pants suit). For a technical or production job, more casual clothing may be appropriate. Loud colors and lots of jewelry are definitely a NO — for both women and men.

Obviously, good grooming is a must. Neatly styled and combed hair, trimmed nails and freshly pressed clothes indicate a candidate is together.

In general, it's always best to play it on the conservative side when considering what to wear. The interview is **NOT** the place to exhibit one's independence and freedom of spirit.

*David Bowman is President of TTG Consultants, Los Angeles, and co-author of the book, "How Do I Find The Right Job? Ask The Experts!" (John Wiley & Sons, New York), and "Opening New Doors."*

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## *What to consider when answering the most* **COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS**

In addition to informing yourself about the company you'll be visiting, there are many other ways to prepare for an interview. You'll want to keep "surprises" to a minimum, and the best way to do that is to prepare, beforehand, answers to some of the most common questions you're likely to be asked. The following list should get you started thinking about your answers.

**"Are you a competitive person?"** It's better to indicate that you are a team player, but do compete against your expectations for yourself.

**"You've changed jobs frequently. Why?"** Talk about better opportunities and more money. Focus on more challenge in each job.

**"Have you ever been fired?"** This can be checked, so don't lie! If the answer is yes, you might want to address differences in personalities, styles and/or objectives. Whatever you do, do not bad-mouth the boss or the company.

**"Do you prefer working with others or independently?"** Unless your objective is clearly one or the other, it is better to pick the middle-of-the-road position.

**"What are your travel and/or relocation limitations?"** Be prepared to tell them like it is — it's best to avoid a problem later.

**"How should people criticize you, and how do you criticize others?"** This could be an attempt to discover your weaknesses. Stand for positive constructive criticism — both ways.

**"How many hours per week do you think someone should spend on the job?"** Be very careful here. If you say "as many as necessary," you may be asked to put in fifty or sixty "necessary" hours per week. It might be better to say between forty and fifty hours per week.

**"What do you know about the company?"** Be prepared with some information about such things as products, size, sales, profit, reputation, image, goods, problems, management talent, management style, people, skills, history and philosophy. Do your homework and state that you'd like to know more.

**"Why do you want to work for us?"** Mention a company project you would like to be part of or a company problem you think you can help solve. Describe some contribution you think you can make to specific company goals.

**"You may be over-qualified or too experienced for the position we have to offer."** Possible answers include:

*"A strong company needs a strong person." "Experienced individuals are at a premium today."* Emphasize interest in long-term association and stress the faster return on investment to be gained by your experience.

**"What important trends do you see in our industry?"** If you are a novice, don't fake it.

## MORE COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Will you relocate?
3. What motivates you?
4. What are your short-term goals?
5. What are your long-term goals?
6. What can you do for us?
7. How do you work under pressure?
8. What salary are you worth?
9. What are your three most important accomplishments thus far in your career?
10. What is your greatest strength? Weakness?
11. Give an example of your creativity.
12. Give an example of your analytical skills.
13. Give an example of your administrative skills.
14. Give an example of some of your leadership skills.
15. How do you interact with subordinates?
16. How do you motivate people?
17. How did you get along with your last boss?
18. What do you know about our company?
19. In what way do you feel you can make the biggest contribution to this firm?
20. Why are you leaving your present company?
21. How do you think you would fit in with our firm?
22. Why are you changing fields.
23. What direct supervisory experience have you had?
24. What did you like best about your last (or present) job?
25. Is your present (or past) income commensurate with your abilities?
26. What are your general feelings about psychological assessment?
27. What are your thoughts regarding promotion for yourself? For your subordinates?
28. How would you describe the "ideal" boss?
29. How do you define cooperation?
30. How do you spend your spare time? Do you have any hobbies?
31. What would you do to improve our firm? And how?
32. Could you have done more in your last (or present) job?
33. What suggestions have you offered former employers that were actually adopted?
34. How do you define success?
35. What is the most difficult assignment you have completed?
36. What is the most rewarding assignment you have completed?
37. Give an example of your innovative abilities.

*Remember, follow-up each interview with a letter...*

1. Thank the interviewer for the meeting.
2. Emphasize your interest in the position in question.
3. Review your background and briefly explain how your experience can complement the requirements of the position. Stress accomplishments.
4. Indicate you intend to follow-up the letter with a telephone call to determine if and when the interviewer wishes to see you again.