

Interview Readiness - research and preparation

Prior to attending an interview you need to do your homework, make certain that you are well informed and ready to answer any question that might be thrown your way. It is important to remember that your attitude is as important as aptitude and ensuring that you are prepared mentally is 50% of the job done.

On your marks, get SET, GO, jump start your career!

By following this step by step approach, it is difficult for you to go wrong.

1. Visit the website for the company that will be interviewing you www.?.com and look out for some of the following information:
 - Who is the CEO?
 - Company's Mission Statement
 - Facts about the company such as:
 - number of offices globally
 - countries operating in
 - financial statements if available
 - future growth / expansion plans etc.
 - Current news / activities
2. Enter the company's name into an archive search on www.bd.co.za (Business Day).
3. Enter the company's name into an archive search on www.fm.co.za (Financial Mail).
4. Make sure to go through the job spec thoroughly.
5. Make a note of 5 things that you would like to tell them about yourself.
6. Make a note of 5 things that you would like to ask them about the position / company / culture etc.
7. It is always worth thinking about how you would answer particular questions prior to the interview, most are open-ended questions and will give you an opportunity to expand and explain yourself in detail. If you have prepared your thoughts beforehand you will be better able to respond.
8. Draw on your own practical experience when answering questions, take your time and think your responses through for a few seconds before answering. It is far better to answer a question thoroughly and with confidence than to continually have to revisit your responses which only leads to confusion and the impression of hesitancy on the part of the interviewer.

9. A key consideration here is to continually think about what your factual response is and then how you have put your response across in such a way that the interviewer can assess your ability to explain yourself clearly and understandably. Realistically the client will be just as interested in seeing how you react and learn from experiences, as they will about what you've actually achieved or done. It is NOT wrong to highlight situations or incidents that have not gone according to plan. Everyone has things go wrong and if you are able to demonstrate your ability to be self critical, to understand why things possibly hadn't worked and learn from your experiences, the client will see this as a positive quality.
10. Ask open-ended questions such as:
 - Can you give me an indication of how your financial department is structured?
 - Can you give me a brief overview of your current business plan?
 - When do you close off your financial year?
 - Why is this position vacant?
11. Ask questions which pertain to what the interviewer has spoken about, this shows that you are interested and have been listening - possibly ask for more detail.
12. If the opportunity arises, ask the interviewer about their own person background:
 - How long they have been at the company?
 - Where were they before joining the company?
 - Where did they go to university (are you a CA / MBA)?

This line of questioning will assist you in finding mutual / common ground, attending the same university or if you both did your articles at the same firm may mean that you have mutual friends for example.
13. If you are interested in the position and want the job - EXPRESS that! Once the interview is concluded mention that you are interested in the position and that you would like to know what the next step forward is. Always thank them for their time and say that if they offer you the position that you would accept it without hesitation – show commitment and enthusiasm!
14. By actively posing your own questions, you are leading the interview rather than the interviewer simply asking question after question of you. The interviewer will obviously need to cover certain areas, but you can maintain a healthy equilibrium by asking as many relevant ones as possible without appearing to be evasive.
15. Remember, the client wants to see honesty, sincerity, professionalism and the ability to approach all your experiences (past and present) with a positive attitude and a desire to learn from them.
16. Call me after the interview and let me know how it went!

ARTICLE OF INTEREST

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Telling Stories in the Interview

Relatively few people actually blow the interview. The problem is that they fail to impress the interviewer with their capabilities and, thus, are easily forgotten as candidates. This often occurs because individuals tend to talk in generalities in the interview rather than articulating specific accomplishments and achievements. Describing your past experiences by using stories or anecdotes is one of the most effective means of impressing a recruiter.

Using stories to describe your accomplishments help you stand out and be remembered. The reason this is true has to do with one of the basic premises of adult education. Adults tend to remember examples better than they remember facts. Thus, if you list off a string of strengths such as resourcefulness, articulate, and pleasant to be around, no one will remember what you said fifteen minutes after you leave the interview. Moreover, by simply articulating a laundry list of strengths, you are not backing up your claim. Maybe these really are strengths, but who knows? By describing situations in which you demonstrated those strengths, you will both convince the interviewer that these are indeed strengths of yours and you will have a higher probability of being remembered after the interview is over.

Telling stories about your background is a skill. Some people are naturally good at it while others are not. However, it is a skill that most people can master with a little practice. The trick is to establish a format for your anecdotes. This will enable you to avoid being too brief or overly long-winded. The acronym STAR is often helpful in providing this framework.

First, think about a **situation** or **task** that you faced. Describe this situation in two or three sentences. This establishes the background for your story so that it can be understood by the recruiter.

Next, describe the **action** that you took. At this stage, it is important that you speak about what you specifically did. There is a tendency for candidates to gloss over their accomplishments and, thus, hide their light under the proverbial bushel. While you don't want to appear arrogant, you do want to take credit for the role that you played.

Conclude your anecdote by describing the **result** you achieved. Discuss how your work helped your employer. Whenever possible, try to discuss the result in measurable or qualitative terms.

For example, an accountant described a time in which an accounting system he expected to implement quickly was threatened by a manager who was slow to commit his support. To convince the manager to support the accountant's effort, the accountant proposed a 7:00 am meeting to discuss the project. Both this presentation and the accountant's willingness to meet so early impressed the manager who gave his approval. The accounting system decreased the time it took to process invoices by 25%.

Pretend you are an interviewer who just heard the anecdote from the accountant. You will probably associate the accountant with such positive traits as initiative, hard working, detail-orientated, and resourcefulness. Additionally, you would likely remember this anecdote and the accountant for some time to come. Thus, it is easy to see why using stories in the interview is such a powerful weapon.

Identifying the right stories to tell is a critical step. You will want to prepare an array of anecdotes that can be deployed as needed during the interview. The first step is to compile a list of situations or activities in which you have been successful in the past. These can relate to work, school, or other outside interests. You should be able to come up with an initial list of at least 30 situations. For each of these, write out the corresponding **action** that you took and the **result** you achieved. Don't worry if you can't quantify all of your results. While it makes for a more impressive story if you can, sometimes the result is simply that the project was completed on time.

A final step before the interview is to put yourself in the interviewer's shoes. If you were hiring someone for this job, what types of skills would you be looking for? Write them down. Review your list of anecdotes to identify which stories demonstrate your skills in those areas.

Finally, practice articulating your accomplishments out loud. There is a world of difference between thinking how you will say something and actually saying it.

By working on preparing and articulating your anecdotes, you will find that you will be remembered positively while your competition becomes a blur in the recruiter's mind.