

## Website Content – Candidate Services

### Interview Preparation

The person conducting the interview is likely to make a judgement on your suitability within the first 30 seconds. They will already have made a judgement on your suitability compared with other candidates based on the CV, but this first interaction is crucial!

Why? It's called the confirmation bias. We have beliefs about all sorts of things, including how people should behave in the first interaction at an interview. Some people have stronger beliefs than others. If your first impression is perceived negatively then the interviewer will sub-consciously look for evidence to support this impression and pay less attention to evidence that contradicts it.

What we know is that biases such as these have a huge impact on selection decisions. To increase the likelihood of success increase your knowledge of interview biases. There are loads of resources out there on the internet, simply google "interview biases".

Good preparation gives you more control over the situation!

There are common sense things you can do to help achieve a good first impression:

- Make sure your clothes are clean and ironed and clean your shoes. Poor personal presentation translates as a lack of self-respect and a lack of respect for the company and interviewer. It also suggests a lack of self-awareness and motivation. If you lack it in the interview then how does it translate for the role?
- Make sure you know where the interview is happening and clarify the time. If it's a long journey work out the expected journey time and leave earlier.
- Arrive at the location 20 minutes early and enter the building 10 minutes prior to the interview. Give yourself some time to relax on arrival.
- Try and get a good night sleep before the interview. Eat sensibly and don't drink alcohol. Eat and drink sensibly on the day, don't have too much caffeine. Stimulants don't help nerves!
- If you smoke try and avoid it before the interview, and if you can't then chew some gum. You might not like to hear it, but smokers stink and the person interviewing you might hate the smell, and guess what, their first impression of you will be negative.

## Unstructured Interviews

So, you've made it onto the shortlist and been invited for a face-to-face interview.

Many organisations still use an unstructured interview to assess candidates, with a review of the CV. These are the key points to consider when preparing:

- The client will have reviewed your CV in advance and picked out areas relevant to the role and the business. Judgements will have been made with regards to your fit for the role and evidence to support these judgements will be more closely attended to during the interview.
- Prior to the interview ask for a job description and think about the key challenges you are going to face. On paper, does your CV suggest you can do this role?
- Re-assess your perception of the concepts of "selling yourself". This is not about showing off or boasting, it's about demonstrating competence.
- Review your previous roles and think about the key experiences you think are important for proving you can be successful. You need to be clear in your mind why you can be successful in the role and it has to be based on factual evidence.
- Even though it's an unstructured interview consider using the STAR approach when discussing roles and the key challenges or successes. This helps you to keep focused on your experiences and ensures you communicate them effectively, especially if you are prone to waffling!
  - What was the Situation or Task you were faced with
  - What Actions did you take and explain the rationale for them
  - What was the outcome or Result
- Consider how your performance was assessed previously. Were you set KPI's and if so can you demonstrate that you achieved them. If it was a sales or commercial role explain how you achieved your figures, the key challenges faced and how they were overcome. If you made changes or introduced new ways of working, what process did you go through and what was the rationale. You need to be able to explain what you did and how you did it clearly and coherently.
- Make bullet pointed notes and adapt your CV so that you can prompt yourself if required.
- If there are any gaps in your experience, or perceived weaknesses, consider how justifiable these are. Try and pre-empt what they are going to say, talk to the consultant handling the role and plan in advance how you might overcome these issues.
- Even if you don't have the required experience, if you can demonstrate your analysis and logical thinking around the area and why you should still be considered this will go in your favour. It shows a level of self-belief and confidence, and using logical thinking demonstrates intellect.
- Think about ways in which your performance differed from others. What was it about your behaviour that made you more successful? Offer examples to back up your claims. For example, saying that you will go the extra mile means nothing unless you can quantify it, and make sure it's not just you doing your job!

## Structured Interviews

These are more commonly known as competency based interviews (CBI).

If the interview is competency based then ask if the company will disclose the competencies to be assessed. Some companies will and some won't. If they do this gives you an opportunity to do some research and prepare more effectively.

If they don't disclose the competencies, reviewing the job description and talking to the consultant will give you a better understanding of the areas likely to be assessed.

This is the process we would recommend you go through:

1. If competencies are provided, research them online so that you have a better understanding of the types of questions they might ask you and the evidence they are looking for.
2. Review the job description and have a think about the relevance of the competencies being assessed to the role. For example, if they are assessing "communication & influence", where will this be key for success in the role? If you know that then you have a better idea of the specific evidence they are looking for.
3. Most competency interviews have a minimum of 4 and maximum of 6 questions. Try and write out a couple of examples for each competency.
4. Use the STAR approach for structuring your answers:
  - What was the Situation or Task you were faced with
  - What Actions did you take and what was the rationale for them
  - What was the outcome or Result
5. Ensure clarity around the actions you took and the rationale for them. Anyone can say, this was the situation, this is what I did and this was the outcome. You need to demonstrate a clear understanding of the how and why!
6. Where you had to interact with others try and provide specific details. They don't have to be blow by blow accounts, but you need to be able to explain the context and general content of conversations. For example, "communication & influence" might look at your ability to get others to buy into a new idea. What was the situation, how did you approach it and why, what sort of challenges did you face and how did you overcome them?
7. CBI's are time limited interviews and a good interviewer will manage you through the process. You need to make sure that the examples you use answer the question asked! If you don't they will likely interrupt you and get you back on track. Likewise they might interrupt you with additional probes or to clarify things. If this happens don't take it personally, it's simply about using your time as effectively as possible.
8. Practice makes perfect. Make prompt cards for your different examples, outlining the key details. You can't sit there reading them out so practice at home to ensure they are communicated clearly and concisely.