

Candidate Prep Sheet

Candidate Interviewing Tips :: Proven Techniques for Presenting Your Qualifications

The question-answering rule says, "Answer every question in terms of your background and qualifications or in terms of the job to be filled."

- **Tell me about yourself.** Means "Tell me about your qualifications?" This is the most common interview question asked by prospective employers. Pre-plan a three-to-five minute answer describing your education and then mention each job in terms of accomplishment or performance indicators.

Before formulating your 3 to 5 minute answer, we suggest you put yourself in the place of the employer and ask yourself: "What would I want to know about this person in order to thoroughly understand what they have been responsible for and how well they have performed?" Consider your responses to the other questions and exercises in this Candidate Prep Sheet and include relevant and important information.

- **Competency questions** normally are trying to determine how well you performed in the past. By preparing in this area, it allows you to answer questions more readily and to weave this important information about your past experience into the conversation throughout the interviewing process.
 - Typically an employer wants to know about your technical knowledge acquired through education and on the job experience.
 - They want to know about your human relation skills, and your managerial ability or potential.
 - They want to know about your problem solving capabilities, your work ethic, and your accomplishments.
 - You may think of other areas an employer would want to know about but these will be the most critical.
 - The best way to proceed is to write out the questions an employer would want to know before you put your 3 to 5 minute presentation together. The answers to those questions should be incorporated into your presentation.
- **Personality questions** attempt to determine if you have the qualities being sought. "What kind of manager are you? Are you creative?" Answer these questions in terms of the obvious answer supported by past or present experiences as proof of your claim.
- **Motive questions** are asked to determine if you would enjoy the job. "Describe your ideal job." "Would you prefer to work for a large or small company?" "What did you like most/least about your job?" Answer these questions as they relate to the job for which you are interviewing, following the

question-answering rule. Be specific and emphatic.

Competency Questions

Two very good techniques to make past projects, qualifications and experience top of mind are the “memory jog” exercise and “1-2-3- mini-story technique”.

- Begin with your own “memory jog” of past education, projects, job responsibilities, and any outside activities that you have been involved that helped to develop you as a professional or demonstrate skills required in the bulleted items above. Create a list of all accomplishments, tasks, and/or projects as well as qualities, attributes and special skills that you have demonstrated in the past. This technique helps to you to present skills and qualities as opposed to stating job titles. This also helps candidates better identify “transferable skills” that will apply to positions and responsibilities beyond current or past job titles.
- By using the 1-2-3 mini-story technique – i.e., state the problem or opportunity, describe your solution or recommended action and emphasize the positive results – you can demonstrate your competency in any of the areas noted above. Make sure to prepare at least one 1-2-3 mini-story that demonstrates your ability in the areas noted above: human relations skills and managerial ability (self and others), problem solving capabilities, work ethic, accomplishments, and any other areas an employer would consider most critical for the job at hand.

Motive Questions

Answer motive questions enthusiastically. Show the interviewer that you are interested in the position and that you really want the job. Remember to maintain eye contact and be sincere.

How can you contribute to this company?

- Be positive and sell! Bringing strong technical skills, enthusiasm, and desire to complete projects correctly and efficiently are good responses.

Why should I hire you for this position?

- Explain your qualifications and how they “fit” the available position. Address your interest in the job and the field and why it is work that you enjoy. Emphasize your ability to successfully perform the duties required.

Why do you want to work for our firm?

- Make a compliment about what the company does, its location, or its people. Other positive remarks might be about the company’s product or service, content of the position or possibilities for growth or advancement. Research about the company is important here.

Where do you hope to be in five years?

- Use conservative growth positions that clearly show you plan to be there in five years, and that their investment in you will pay. Be sure that you know what can and cannot be achieved by the ideal candidate in the position. Never tell the interviewer that you feel you’ll be more successful than they are. But do show a strong desire for promotions.

What interests you most about this position?

- Teasing the interviewer with a truthful one to two-word answer such as, “the challenge” or “the opportunity”, will force them to ask you to explain. Here again, you have a chance to demonstrate your knowledge of the company.

How long do you plan to be with this company?

- As with marriage, most employers expect an until-death-do-us-part attitude, but they can be equally

attracted to the candidate with ambition and candor. "As long as I continue to learn and grow in my field," is a reasonable response.

What are your career goals?

Your answer should depend on a specific time frame:

- Short term – "I want to be the best in my current position, while learning additional responsibilities. This, in itself, will assure my commitment to the firm and raise me to the next level of responsibility and promotion. I see myself wanting to stay technical but learn the necessary skills to lead people and projects."
- Long term – "After proving my abilities, I see myself in a firm with the possibility of moving into a level of management that allows me to keep my skills sharp."

What are you doing to achieve your goals?

- "I look at continued learning as the key to success. I continue my education, as you see from my resume, by taking company educational courses, when offered, and college courses. I also read trade publications and magazines to keep me informed about the current and future directions in my field. When possible, I participate in professional organizations in my field."

Salary Questions

Salary discussions should be avoided early in the hiring process, if possible. Do not state a starting figure.

If asked what you desire,

- A suitable reply: "I am looking for the right opportunity and I am confident that if you find me the best candidate for this position, you will extend me your best and most fair offer." Or, money is important to almost all of us but before I could give a specific dollar amount, I think first you should decide whether I am the right fit for this position and I must determine if this is the right career move for me.

What is your current salary?

- Answer truthfully. "I'm presently earning \$_____." Remember that "salary" includes base, bonuses, commissions, benefits, and vacations as well as sick days and personal days. Also, if you are due a raise in the next three months, state the approximate percentage you expect.

Exploring your Background Questions

What kind of decisions are most difficult for you?

- Again, be truthful and admit not everything comes easily. Be careful what you do admit to so as not to instantly disqualify yourself. Explain that you try to gather as much information and advice as you can to make the best decision possible.

What causes you to lose your temper?

- Everybody has a low boiling point on some particular issue. Pick one of yours; something safe and reasonable. People who are late to meetings, blame shifting, broken appointments and office "back-stabbing" are suitable responses. Don't say that you never fly off the handle. You won't be believed.

What are your greatest accomplishments?

- Be ready to recant one of two stories that demonstrate strong capabilities or achievements that will

make you attractive to your new employer. A special project that you pioneered at your previous job, cutting department expenses, increasing productivity or receiving frequent promotions are a few examples.

How do you feel about a younger male/female boss?

- A question like this usually means that your boss will either be younger or of the opposite sex or both. Be certain that if you register any concern, you will probably not be hired. Explain that their age or sex is of no importance to you. You are only interested in their capability and what you can learn from them.

What kind of worker are you?

- Again, no one is perfect. Showing that you tackle every assignment with all of your energy and talents is admirable but mention that you also learn from your mistakes.
- Show enthusiasm. Strive to project eagerness and interest. Be a conversationalist by being yourself.

PRACTICE DOES MAKE PERFECT!

One of the most overlooked elements of interviewing is practice. To look your best in front of interviewers, here are some pointers:

- Honestly assess your employment background and develop explanations for any weak points.
- Prepare a list of tough questions that may be asked. Then develop answers to those questions. You may be asked about your reasons for wanting to leave your present job and what you like most/least about your job. Many of these questions are aimed at finding out if you have the qualities being sought. For example, if you are asked what type of manager you are, be sure to support your answer with specific examples.
- Practice responses alone and then with a trusted friend who isn't reluctant to offer constructive criticism. An excellent sounding board is your career coach.

DELIVER A COMPELLING AND MEMORABLE PRESENTATION!

Having prepared and practiced, you're ready to present yourself to the interviewers. You may ask the employer to provide an interview timetable, including names and titles of persons with whom you'll be talking.

Dress Properly:

- For men: conservative suit, white shirt, contrasting tie, shoes shined, socks over calf.
- For women: skirted suit or dress with matching jacket, neutral-colored hose, simple pumps, minimum makeup.

Your behavior should be friendly, yet businesslike. Listen closely to questions and make sure your responses are concise and relevant. Don't allow your responses to wander. If the answer to a question is complex, use examples to make your point. Show interest in the company and the interviewer by asking questions yourself, but do so without dominating the interview. As the interview moves to a close, express your appreciation and your interest in the opening.

While the interview or interviews may be over, there's more you should do. Write thank-you letters and

continue to follow the company's business activities.

Candidate Interviewing Tips :: Employers Like to be Interviewed Too!

Finding out what you want to know about the company, its products, services, people, and work environment will be important. Asking good questions during the interview allows you an opportunity to continue selling yourself. Have a list, don't cross-examine, make them job related, ask questions that require an explanation.

- Interest questions pertain to: job opportunity, the company, its people, its product/services.
- Job-satisfaction questions relate to: importance of job, responsibility and authority, recognition and career potential
- Past-performance questions concentrate on people who previously held the position, their performance and where they are today.

Past Performance Questions

Why isn't this position being filled from within the company?

- You may discover that nobody in this organization would accept it or that your future fellow employees are a weak lot.

How many people have held this job in the last five years?

Were they promoted or did they leave the company?

- If the turnover has been high, you have a right to suspect that the job may leave something to be desired. Or it could mean that you can expect to be promoted quickly.

How did you get started in the company?

- A good way to get to know the interviewer better and gain insight into the promotional path the company follows.

What are examples of the best results produced by people in this job?

- Here you may discover you are overqualified or in a position to ask for considerably more money.
- Sales questions help you determine the kind of person the employer wants to hire in terms of education, experience, future performance and personality. When you understand the kind of person the employer wants to hire, you can say, "I can do the job you want done because I did it before and I did it well."
- Ask for the job. Summarize what you've done that ties in with the new position and, "Do I have the qualifications for which you are looking?" then state "I can do what you want done and I want the job!"
- Avoid questions relating to salary, fringes, vacations and retirement until the job is offered and you accept.
- ALWAYS SEND A FOLLOW-UP LETTER.