



Crack that next interview

Experts share tips to help you in meetings with potential employers

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You thought you had done fairly well at the interview and had good recommendations from your previous employer, but you still did not get the job. What went wrong—was it something you said or did not say?

Professionals say many recruiters take calls on the basis of how a particular candidate behaves or talks. It may not be possible to outline all your capabilities in a 20-minute interview but you can use these tips from professionals on how to ace one.

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

While most candidates research what the role demands, not many people read up about the company itself. "Knowing about the company is a big positive. It shows that you are interested and committed to the job, and believe in the company's goal. Read the company's annual reports, see what the chief operating officer or managing director is talking about. If there are pieces published, or if they are giving talks, read up on them," says Amogh Deshmukh, managing director, Development Dimensions International (DDI) India, a talent management consulting firm.

Also, find out about the interview team or panel. "I see more people from the younger generation trying to find out who the interviewer might be. And they are not afraid to ask questions either. Usually, people on the interview panel have LinkedIn profiles that candidates can go through. This can help you prepare yourself about the kind of expertise he/she is looking for," says Kinjal Choudhary, head of human resources (HR), VE Commercial Vehicles (VECV), a joint venture between Volvo Group and Eicher Motors.

CARRY AN UPDATED RÉSUMÉ

A résumé which does not have the correct and updated facts does not leave a good impression. Make sure it has the correct details of your last job, dates, responsibilities, etc. It is also a good idea to carry a copy of the résumé with you, even if the interviewer is likely to already have it.

GROOMING IS IMPORTANT

This seems like a no-brainer, but grooming is important, especially for senior roles. Do a quick check to get a sense of how to dress—the recruiter you have been in touch with can answer questions about the company's dress culture, such as if the work attire is formal or semi-formal.

"No matter what type of company, it's key for a candidate to look well put together. Even if it's a start-up, opt for a semi-casual look. Make sure you are well groomed and comfortable in what you wear," says Tia Paranjape, associate director, The StyleCracker Project, an online personalized fashion styling platform. She says women should opt for a muted colour palette, minimalistic accesso-

ries and natural make-up. "Also, choose a suitable heel size and shoe that is both comfortable yet classy," Paranjape says.

Men should go for well-fitted formal shirts and trousers, with polished shoes. "A blazer and a tie is highly recommended for leadership interviews. And, of course, well-groomed hair and a light cologne," says Rituparna Chakraborty, co-founder and executive vice-president of staffing company TeamLease.

ANSWER THE TOUGH QUESTIONS

Almost every interview has questions like, where do you see yourself in five years; tell me about a mistake you have made; or your weakness, etc. Prepare for such questions instead of avoiding them or trying to think on the spot. "Answering these questions shows your humility and also shows that you are self-aware. You have made a mistake, which is only human, then you have analysed it. And you will not repeat the same thing again," says Dimple Jha, talent acquisition lead at Sapient Razorfish, an agency providing technology services and marketing consultancy to brands.

BE SPECIFIC

A good interviewer will always probe for answers, so don't blabber or try to sound overconfident. If you are asked to elaborate on how you are a team player or what your leadership skills are, try to give specific examples instead of exaggerating. "A lot of people we interview give answers they have almost memorized, or asked their friends and copied. It does not work like that. We need to hear examples of a situation where you showed your leadership quality, for example," says Deshmukh.

Many professionals also follow something known as the STAR (or situation-timeline-action taken-result) format. Choudhary says it would be a good idea to "give a real example, even if it is a hypothetical question. For example, if you are asked to imagine a crisis situation, you can respond by giving an example of how you reacted in an actual crisis".

DISAGREE, BUT LOGICALLY

There may be times when you don't agree with what the interviewer says. While it does not make sense to agree just because an offer is at stake, be respectful. "If you disagree with something, give reasons for it. Pay attention to what the interviewer is saying and do not cut him/her off in between. Showing respect for others is the least you can do during an interview," says Choudhary.

Sonia Puar, assistant professor (clinical psychology) at Amity University in Noida, adjoining Delhi, says candidates must also work on their body language since interviewers pick up on non-verbal cues quickly. If you start fidgeting and playing with any object around you, a pen or your hair, etc., it shows that you are nervous. It's important to show them that you are in control of your emotions. Be friendly but serious, advises Puar.

ASK QUESTIONS

While it may seem like you should be the one answering questions, it's important to be asking your interviewer questions as well. This shows that you are both engaged and interested in the organization and the role.

Go in prepared, say experts. "Frame some questions for the interviewer. You can ask about the growth prospects of your role, or about the benefits the organization gives, about work-life balance, or about mobility (the prospect of moving cities with the same role)," says Jha.

Some questions may be premature—candidates should steer clear of those. Enquiring about the compensation package at the first stage of the interview is not a good idea, says Chandrasekhar Sripada, clinical full professor (organizational behaviour and strategic human capital) at the Indian School of Business (ISB), Hyderabad.

Prof. Sripada says: "Rumour-based questions are also a deal-breaker. For example, if you say you have heard from someone that the company has been firing a lot of people and ask for the reason, it might not come across well. However, if you say you have seen on Glassdoor that the company's negative feedback is about a high attrition rate or the company being bureaucratic, you can ask them to comment. How you frame your statement will make a lot of difference."

FOLLOW UP

You should follow up after an interview rather than leaving it to the company to get back. Those who do, tend to overdo it. Find a balance. "Maybe share an article about a topic you discussed during the interview. Try to build recall, instead of sounding desperate. It is okay to ask for the interviewer's phone number, email or, at the very least, LinkedIn profile. Irrespective of the outcome, it might be a good idea to be in touch," explains Chakraborty.

Chances are you will face questions similar to the ones in previous interviews. But you still need to prepare well. The basic hygiene factors, the questions you ask and the way you answer are all going to make or break that next interview.



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