

Interview Handbook: Prepare for the Interview and Get the Job

The interview process is a two way conversation designed to help the company determine if you are the right fit for the job and to enable you to make an educated decision about the job.

- The goal of the company is to decide whether or not to extend you an offer.
- Your goal is to help the company decide to extend you an offer.

Your background, qualifications, education & attitude help the interviewer determine if you are the right fit for the position and the right fit for the company. It is also a chance for you to learn the things you will need to know to decide if this position is the right fit for you and your career path.

Note that even though you want to make an educated decision about whether or not you want to work for this company, your *goal in the interview process* is to help the company decide to extend you an offer. It is important not to lose sight of this goal.

It is likely that you will not be the only qualified candidate pursuing this position. How you conduct yourself during the interview may be deciding factor between you and another qualified candidate. This document provides you with tools to help you prepare and excel during the interview process.

1. Preparation:

- Inventory all responsibilities you have performed.
- Be honest with yourself and determine your strengths and weaknesses.
- Determine how this position fits into your short term & long-term goals.
- Evaluate your present position and how well have you performed.
- Ask yourself if you are truly ready to move on.
- Picture yourself resigning to your boss. How does that feel to you? Are you just testing the waters and flirting with the idea of a new position?
- Are you committed to making the decision? If the answer is no, then this likely is not the right time for you.

Deciding:

Right after an interview, or the final interview, you may receive an offer. It is most healthy to know the deciding factors of a job opportunity in advance, so that if you receive an offer, you will know whether or not to accept that offer based on its own merit. Weighing multiple job offers is not a problem, but time is a problem. Over time, as people think about things, they tend to rationalize and move toward something safer, but not always the best option. To prepare you to make a decision before receiving an offer, determine what factors are most important to you and your future career. That way, when you get an offer, you just go down your list, see how the offer rates and make a decision. Those factors should include things like title, function, industry, culture, compensation, company size, benefits, hiring manager, growth opportunity, etc. You may want to assign each factor a score and determine what score is required for a yes, what constitutes a no and what is a maybe. The only time I would not provide feedback to an offer within 24 hours, is if it rated a maybe. You can compare your maybes to each other, but a yes is a yes and a no is a no.

- Make sure to research the company! Utilize resources such as the Internet, trade magazines and annual reports.
- Review your entire resume and be prepared to answer any questions about any item on the resume.

2. Getting there!

- If possible, drive to the interview location in advance.
- Familiarize yourself with the area so you will know where to park, what entrance to go to etc.
- Allow enough time so that traffic and parking issues won't make you late.
- Arrive exactly 10 minutes prior to the interview. If you arrive early, sit in your car. DO NOT arrive late.

3. What to bring with you:

- References: References should be 3 former managers who can testify to the quality of your work. These references should be the same as the ones you already provided to your recruiter.
- Resume: The resume you take to the interview should be the same resume supplied to the interviewer.
- Samples of your work, if possible but be careful! Do not discuss, or show any proprietary information.
- Folder and a pen to take notes and to help you remember questions you might want to ask later.
- At least 5 educated questions about the company and the position.
- **Recruiter's phone number with you so you can give immediate feedback and impressions – if you went through an external recruiter.**

4. Appearance

- No Smoking!
- Fingernails should be neat and clean.
- Hair should be neat and well groomed.
- Don't brush your hair after putting your suit on. Use dandruff shampoo if necessary.
- Ladies should avoid big hairdos and excessive hair spray.
- Avoid heavy aftershaves, perfumes
- Suits should be navy or gray as a general rule.
- Shirts should be tailored and color coordinated.
- Women should wear a closed toe pump.
- It's best to keep jewelry classic and simple.
- Do NOT dress casual. Always wear well fitting, conservative business attire.

5. The interview process

- Ensure that you are adequately and properly prepared.
- Strive to project eagerness and interest throughout the interview.
- Communicate your level of interest in the position and familiarize yourself with the company's products or services.

A Note About “Connecting” with your Interviewer:

A very large part of any interview is not spoken at all – it has to do with physical and verbal queues. People will naturally make a connection with someone who is “like” them and who gives queues that suggest they are interested and positive. This comes naturally to many people and helps make them successful. Here are a few tips to help you connect with your interviewer:

1. Mimic your interviewers rate of speech – not their accent – when you first meet.
2. Mimic your interviewers handshake. If they crush – you crush. If they fish – you fish.
3. Look your interviewer in the eye. If you find it hard to look someone in the eyes, look at the bridge of their nose – they won’t be able to tell the difference.
4. If your interviewer, leans in, you sit up and lean in as well – this shows interest. Don’t fold your arms in front of your chest – this is a closed position and shows disinterest.
5. Note that looking up while answering indicates you are drawing from your memory, while looking down while answering indicates that you are figuring something out or making something up.

- Eye contact is equally important. Speak with confidence while maintaining eye contact with your interviewer and don’t be scared to show some of your personality! Just don’t overdo it!
- If you have something in common with the interviewer, it is appropriate to talk about the mutual interest. Just be careful and don’t get too far off track.
- Answers should contain enough information, but still remain concise. Don’t talk yourself out of the job!
- NEVER answer questions negatively, always paint bad experiences in a positive light – ie chance to learn or overcome a challenge.
- NEVER refer the interviewer back to your resume to find the answer to their question. Answer the question first, and if appropriate you can let them know that there is more detail on the resume.

Most companies have a standard process for interviewing:

- Typically the initial interview is with Human Resources. In this phase the HR person will discuss the company and their benefits.
- Next is generally an interview with the immediate Supervisor of this position
- Usually the last interview is with the Hiring Authority (Manager, VP)

6. Employers often ask "tough" questions.

These are easily handled by:

- By being adequately and properly prepared, so that you can speak with confidence and poise.
- By keeping your responses concise and conversational. When possible highlight your accomplishments using the 1-2-3 mini-story technique
- By never apologizing
- By keeping your explanations brief and factual
- By maintaining a constant interviewing demeanor. Keep your energy up!

Examples of tough questions:

- **What kind of employee are you?** *“My work is important to me and I give each project my full attention. I’ve had the opportunity to grow and learn from each accomplishment and each mistake.”* Or, a comment, in your own words, similar to this.
- **Tell me a little bit about yourself....** Keep it professional. It is appropriate to mention something about your lifestyle, but it should be minimal. The interviewer is asking you

to discuss “yourself” in terms of your career and accomplishments. It is common for interviewer’s to ask questions about personal interests; generally those questions will come after you discuss your qualifications. This is not the time to discuss pets, hobbies, or rare antiquities, UNLESS it relates directly to the position.

- **Tell me about your accomplishments?** Avoid the temptation to list rewards and honors. Choose an accomplishment and describe it for the interviewer. Use the story technique. Clearly state the problem, the solution, and then detail the positive result.
- **What are your strengths and weaknesses?** When discussing strengths be honest and genuine. Avoid overused, generalized responses like “**I’m a people person**” or “**I’m good with numbers**” Try something like “**I think my technical skills are one of my strongest assets.**” Another way to highlight your skills is to say what others have told you. “**In my last review I was told my ability to crunch numbers make me a vital part of the forecasting team.**” Weaknesses are tough to talk about. You want to be honest and show you have developed through your experience. It’s best to show growth and progress. What has been a weakness in the past that you’ve conquered? Did you attend a Dale Carnegie course to improve your presentation skills? Find a way to illustrate how you’ve turned a weakness into strength. Weaknesses that can be turned into strengths: perfectionism, impatience, etc.
- **Why are you looking?** It is important to remember to **NEVER bash your former employer or boss.** A great response to this question is “***I’m looking for the opportunity to further develop myself by joining a business that will allow more opportunities for growth and advancement.***” Keep it positive. If you bash your old boss, chances are you’ll bash your new boss. Your prospective boss does not want to be bashed.
- **How much money? Never state a desired salary figure!** Here’s a great scripted response that other candidates have found successful. “***I’m really looking for the right fit. While salary and compensation are important, I am confident that XYZ Corp. will make me a fair offer based on my qualifications.***” Another tricky question is **what is your current salary?** Do not Lie! Remember to define your total compensation to prevent any confusion down the line. Are you waiting for a performance review and a raise? If so, communicate that to the interviewer. Don’t forget to include bonus, benefits, and perks. Again, if you are prepared, this question is really not that tough. Be honest! . . . **And remember, if you used an external recruiter, your recruiter has told the company your current salary and bonus prior to the interview. The recruiter is paid a commission based on the offer he can negotiate for you; so let him do his job.** If you feel you are underpaid in you present job, it’s not the fault of the hiring company, it’s the fault of your present employer, and perhaps the reason you are considering a change at this point. Any potential employer is going to base their offer on your present salary & compensation.
- **How can you further our cause?** Here is a good place to summarize your strengths, tie in your accomplishments and apply them to the position or company goal. If you are asking good questions, you should have a feel for what the company’s objectives are and how this position fits into the big picture. Do you want to highlight your technical skills here? Management and leadership experience? Do you have knowledge of a particular new system that could significantly improve current production methods?

- **What are your goals? Short-term, long term?** The interviewer typically is listening for a level of commitment from you. Companies make tremendous financial and educational investments in their employees. It is very costly to companies to bring someone on board that doesn't work out. Let them know you plan to maximize their investment in you. **Short-term goals sound like "It's most important to me to excel in my position. As I perform and develop within the company I'd like to take on roles with increasing responsibility". Long-term goals demonstrate big picture thinking. "My mission is to develop into executive management leading a R&D team."**

7. It's your turn to ask questions

Until this point we've only discussed half of the interview. Remember, you need to ask questions to determine if this company and position is the right fit for you. Show your enthusiasm and energy. Engage your interviewer by asking intelligent questions. The questions you ask are equally important as the answers you give. Have a list of 5 questions prepared for the interview. Researching the annual reports, Internet site and trade magazines will give you ample material to talk about. Intelligent questions emphasize your expertise and solidify you as a professional in the industry.

Why is this position open?

How will the person in this position be evaluated?

What is the career path for a person in this position?

What is a typical day in the life of this position?

Who will I report to?

How do you think I would fit into this position and culture?

What projects will the person in this position start with?

What is the projected growth of the company?

What do you like best about this company? What brought you to the company?

8. Concluding the interview:

- **Ask for the job! If you are sincerely interested in this position say so! Summarize for the interviewer what excites you the most about the position. What did they share with you that makes you more interested in the position?**
- Accept an offer on the spot. If they make an offer and it is what you want, then accept it on the spot. But never let them wait more than 24 hours for a response, if you want to consider it some more.
- Ask the interviewer to describe how the process will continue from this point. **What's next?**
- Ask the interviewer if he or she feels you are qualified for the position. This gives you the opportunity to clarify an experience or skill set that might have been overlooked.
- Call me ASAP if you are interested. At the very least leave me voice messages if you desire to continue. Otherwise I will assume you have decided this is NOT the direction you wish to continue. You should have your recruiter contact information with you. Call when you get to your car and summarize the meeting. Together we will take this information and immediate impressions to strategize next steps.
- After the interview it's important to reflect on the conversation and to see if you have all the information you need to accept or reject an offer of employment.
- Writing a brief follow-up thank you letter to the interviewer(s). This is a great testament to your courtesy and professionalism. A thank you note received a day later keeps your information and interest fresh in the interviewer's mind.

XYZ Corporation
Martha Stockton, Vice President, Operations
1232 Maxwell Avenue
Batavia, IL 60510

June 18, 2005

Dear Ms. Stockton, (Don't use the interviewer's first name unless you truly established a strong rapport. Maintain professionalism at all times, and remember this is a formal process, don't be too casual off the bat.)

I appreciate meeting you and the opportunity to explore the position of Director of Engineering. My management experience and technical skills have given me the tools to take the next step to further my career. I am excited at the opportunity to apply my past experiences & contribute my skills to the development XYZ Corporation.

It is great opportunity and I will look forward to hearing your decision.

Best regards,

Scott Wood

9. Resigning

So, you have received and accepted the offer and you are excited about your new opportunity. But there is some business you must attend to. Letting your boss know you are leaving is a hard thing to do. Especially if you have a long history with the company. Resignation typically happens in two phases:

A - Verbally you will explain to your boss your decision to leave.

B - Most companies will ask for a formal resignation letter to keep in your human resources file.

Here are a few tips for a successful resignation

- Resign only when you have an offer for employment and you have accepted it.
- Two weeks notice is professional courtesy and should always be given. Remember this person will be a reference down the line. Maintain professionalism at all times.
- State clearly to your manager within the first ten seconds that you have decided to leave and pursue a new opportunity.
- Your current employer might inquire about your new position. You are not obligated to share any information about your new company. Unless you have signed a non compete, it is perfectly fine to keep this information confidential.
- Your current employer might present a counter offer to you. A counter offer is an attempt to keep you in your present position usually with promises of more opportunities for advancement or compensation. Spend some time thinking about the counter offer so you are prepared if it happens.

XYZ Corporation
Martha Stockton, Vice President, Operations
1232 Maxwell Avenue
Batavia, IL 60510

June 18, 2005

Dear

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation as Engineering Manager for XYZ Corporation effective (DATE); I have accepted a new position in (location)

I believe this position will offer me more challenges and opportunities for growth as well as the chance to strengthen my own experience and knowledge.

Thank you for your time and efforts in my training and advancement for the last 4 years. I hold XYZ Corp in high regard and wish everyone continued success and growth.

My decision is irrevocable and any counter offers extended will be rejected.

Sincerely,

Scott Wood

10. The Counter Offer

Counteroffers are given because many times the employee does a poor job resigning. He/she does a poor job because they have feelings of guilt, deceit, or concerns of feeling

disloyal. Turn the box a little and remember you are moving on for a better opportunity and no one can blame you for taking the opportunity to improve your career. Don't drag it out. Tell your boss within the first 10 seconds and start by saying, "I'm resigning."

No matter what kind of relationship you had with your boss before your resignation, some of the following thoughts are now going through his/her mind:

- This couldn't have happened at a worse time!
- Boy, this will really screw up the vacation schedule.
- I can't lose one of my best people. It will destroy morale in the whole department.
- I already have one opening in my department now. I don't need another one.
- I don't have time to interview, hire and train a new employee.

A counter offer sounds like:

"This raise was supposed to go into effect next quarter but we'll start it the first of the month instead."

"I've been meaning to tell you about our plans for expansion, (which, of course, include you), but it's been confidential and I couldn't tell you before now."

"I'm really shocked! I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you. Let's discuss it before you make your final decision."

We like to think employers give counteroffers because you are the greatest employee ever and they can't live without you. A recent study shows that employers make counteroffers because:

- It's cheaper (and easier) to keep you on board until they can find a suitable replacement for you.
- The boss felt like the employee misinterpreted their intention to increase the scope of their job.
- The boss overreacted
- The boss knew that was what the employee wanted to hear.

A helpful exercise is to write a letter to your boss that you will never send and that your boss will never read. In that letter, spell out why you are leaving, why you are unhappy and why you want to move on. Read it and re-read it until you can confidently state your resignation to your manager.

Counteroffers are made only because someone plans to quit. Will a person have to solicit another offer and quit every time he/she wants a raise or a promotion?

- Before even contemplating that tempting counteroffer, consider the results of a study recently published in the Wall Street Journal. In this study conducted in a three-year period, over 50% of the individuals receiving counteroffers after turning in their resignations accepted them.
- Within eighteen months, 93% of those accepting counteroffers had left, some voluntarily and some fired. All of the remaining 7% were actively seeking new employment.

Points to Ponder on Counter Offers

- Any situation, in which an employee is forced to get an outside offer before being offered a raise and/or promotion, is suspect.
- No matter what a company says when making a counteroffer, the person who stays will always be questioned in terms of loyalty. He/she is no longer considered to be a team player and will usually be the first to go.
- Counteroffers are nothing more than stall devices to give the employer time to find a suitable replacement.
- Decent companies don't make counteroffers...ever! Their policies are fair, equitable, and clearly stated and implemented.
- Employers hate to lose people this way because: It's bad for morale for someone to quit. There's never a good time for someone to quit. It makes them look bad. They might have to work a little harder.

11. Top Ten reasons candidates don't get the job offer:

1. Candidates were unprepared, didn't do the research
2. The salary issue was handled poorly
3. Appearance
4. Inability to answer questions correctly
5. Poor Communication of skills & qualifications. Remember it's not enough to keep referring to your resume! It's about the dialogue!
6. Candidates are too humble! SELL YOURSELF!
7. Bad attitude
8. Not applying skills and qualifications to the employers' needs
9. Candidates didn't ask questions. Strong questions show you are interested!
10. Lack of direction