

CHAPTER 9

types of interviews

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CHAPTER 9: TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Congratulations, you have landed the opportunity to interview! Your resume and networking has paid off. You might have a phone interview prior to an in-person meeting, but it's still an interview. This is truly a success, so savor it and feel a sense of accomplishment.

In one of the Five O'Clock Club books, it is written that an interview is really an information gathering session. It's not about getting the job. It is really about the employer and the candidate having a conversation where they share their experience (candidate) and listen to the need that must be filled (employer).

Knowing that you are interviewing the company as well as they are interviewing you can truly change your mindset as the candidate. Utilize all of your own hiring skills to determine if you would really want to work for this company, this person or this business unit. (Keep in mind that you should never take a job for a person or leave a job for a person ... as people come and go). Take a position for all the right reasons which you have already discovered in Chapter 3, *Find Your Passion*.

If you've been keeping up with the lessons in the prior chapters, you may realize that I have great admiration and belief in the Five O'Clock Club Books. Kate Wendleton has stated that "an interview is show time. You are up against people who have rehearsed and know their lines. Are you ready?"

TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

Ok, it's time to learn about the different types of interviews that you may encounter, and how to best prepare, even when you are unaware of the type of interview that a particular organization may utilize.

These include, but are not limited to:

- Phone screens
- Traditional interviews
- Case method
- Group/panel
- Behavior based (my personal favorite).

THE PHONE SCREEN

The phone screen may be a simple conversation with the hiring manager or staffing specialist to gain some preliminary information. For example, a supply chain position is available that requires BW (Business Warehouse) expertise. Your resume has BW embedded as part of your functional capability, and is considered a key word for the staffing function. Your resume appears as one that should be screened for the first phase of the process.

The person who contacts you for the interview may or may not be the hiring manager. No matter who reaches out to you, be prepared to respond in a professional manner with enthusiasm and energy. This is critical in a phone interview. (Don't sound desperate but rather interested, calm and engaging.).

The questions may be technically positioned, or it may simply be a conversation regarding salary, relocation, and overall interest in the role. This is also a time when the person conducting the screening would seek confirmation on your education, the reason for seeking a change, or why you are no longer employed with your last employer.

From my first-hand experience as a Staffing Director, I would ask the hiring manager to provide me with at least two technical questions in order to be able to screen out those who truly did not have the expertise required for the role. This allowed for a more focused and productive in-person interview process in most cases.

Some people have advised that when you are participating in a phone interview to stand up or sit very professionally with your resume, position profile, and information on the company in front of you, in order to be ready to respond to any type of question.

With all of this information shared, it is clear that a phone interview is a critical component of the interview process, and preparation should be done with that in mind. Therefore, don't dismiss it as a casual conversation. It can be a "make it" or "break it" conversation, so be prepared for anything.

TRADITIONAL INTERVIEW

The traditional interview typically consists of an interviewer asking random questions with or without any standardized process. The questions may vary from candidate to candidate. Sometimes the questions may begin with “Tell me about yourself,” or “Where do you see yourself in the next five years?” Personally, I think these are awful questions, and are a sign that the interviewer is unaware of the quantitative and qualitative interview processes. But you need to be prepared to respond, and therefore have a more sophisticated approach in your response. Give specific examples to help the interviewer gain a visual and a fact based history of your experience. Don’t be intimidating or condescending, but definitely share your expertise without being too general or vague.

GROUP OR PANEL INTERVIEW

A group or panel interview may include 3 to 10 people on an interview team, interviewing one potential candidate, all at the same time. A well prepared group interview team will have assigned specific questions for each interviewer. As the candidate, it can be an intimidating situation, but remember the interview is an information gathering session. You are interviewing all of these people as much as they are interviewing you. Be sure to give eye contact to each person on the panel with each question, but pay particular attention to the person who has posed the questions.

This may not be considered the most effective means of conducting an assessment of an individual’s skill set or talent, but it is the organization’s decision to utilize this method. Therefore, you need to be prepared to respond accordingly. There may be a variety of reasons why a company may implement this method, such as time constraints. Perhaps novice interviewers are observing as well as participating in the process with those who are more experienced.

This was the case with a team of new interviewers for a position I was responsible for filling. There were five of us on the interview team, and each of us were assigned questions. Because of my experience, I was able to not only probe for depth in response from the candidates, but also teach the interviewers the value of not stopping with the answer to the first question.

Let me give you a specific example of what I mean. (I know for those who have attended my workshops and speaking engagements, you've heard this story before, but it really does drive the point home). We were interviewing for an administrative role in a location with over 1,500 employees on site. There were two candidates being interviewed for the position. Candidate A was an internal employee who was located in a remote facility in NJ with approximately 150 employees on site. Candidate B was an external candidate, however, she was doing the job as a temporary employee for the past six months. Of course, Candidate B would be more aware of the day-to-day role, but as part of our promote-from-within policy, Candidate A was truly a viable candidate, as long as she could meet the minimum requirements.

Both candidates were asked the exact same questions. Technically both were capable of handling the position. Now evaluate their responses when asked the following question.

Question: Why is this position of interest to you?

Candidate A: Because of the opportunity. (Keep in mind Candidate A is working in a 150 employee site, therefore this would make perfect sense to those on the interview team).

Candidate B: Because of the opportunity.

Question to both candidates: Describe "opportunity".

Candidate A: Because you have the day care center and a gym at this facility.

Candidate B: Because I want to become a nurse, and you have tuition reimbursement. Since it will take me at least six years to get my license, I will work very hard, and as I have already demonstrated, I will not disappoint. And since I'm in the healthcare industry, it will not only provide an advantage with my studies, but I believe it will be an investment for this company to hire someone like me to be able to showcase this company in my studies.

Guess who got the job? Yes, Candidate B, because she clearly articulated what was in it for the company.

In addition, the interview team saw the importance of asking the next probing question. If we would have been satisfied with the candidate's initial response of "the opportunity," we would not have learned of their intentions to a fuller perspective as well as the difference in business acumen. "The opportunity" was a good first answer; but the next level down is even more critical. Be prepared to take the interviewer to the next level, even if they don't ask the next probing question.

THE CASE METHOD

The case method requires the candidate to respond to a hypothetical industry related situation. This method evaluates analytical and problem solving skills on the spot. Consulting and investment banking institutions have traditionally used this method. In this situation, the candidate would have an industry specific situation posed during the interview, and would be required to analyze and develop a solution. There typically isn't any pre-work involved prior to the interview.

In my experience, the case method, within the pharmaceutical world has been utilized for roles where the employees are required to present to physicians, associations, or KOL (Key Opinion Leaders). Being a knowledge expert in a particular therapeutic field also requires strong presentation skills. This method provides the opportunity to assess both areas.

Prior to a full day of interviews, candidates are forwarded information on a particular product and asked to present on this topic, based upon what they learned from the data provided, and their interpretation and understanding. The interview day will include a series of one-on-one behavior based questions (the next method to be outlined), culminating with the presentation to all of the interviewers. It can be a rather intense process, but as described, these roles require this type of skill set. The case method has proven to be one of the most effective means of assessing those candidates who possess the highest capability.

BEHAVIOR-BASED INTERVIEWS

Behavior-based interviewing is based upon the underlying assumption that "past

behavior is a predictor of future behavior.” The behavioral interview is fact-finding, it is observable, and it is verifiable. The focus is on the past actions of the candidates. It is not based on “what you should do” or “would do” (hypothetical).

These are standard questions posed both from a functional (what you did) and a behavioral (how you did it) perspective.

The questions typically will begin with “describe a time,” “tell me about a situation,” “give me an example of when you did...” Here are a few sample questions: “Describe a situation in which your efforts influenced the actions of others? What was the situation, how did you manage it, and what was the end result?”

Does this sound familiar? It certainly should, as this is exactly the same format that you have just used to structure your accomplishments SAR/PAR (Situation/ Problem), Action, Result. The PAR/SAR process provides the formula to respond to behavior-based questions. Now you have the opportunity to articulate your accomplishments while providing a more in depth understanding of “how” you were successful, not just the “what.”

You should now be familiar with all the interview styles discussed above and have a good idea about how you might approach an interview. Don't forget that this is an information gathering session which works two ways, so be confident.

LOGISTICS OF THE INTERVIEW

The next section of this chapter will provide some details on the logistics preparation. Be sure to ask the person who calls to schedule the interview the names and titles of those who will participate on the interview team. Also ask if you should be prepared to complete an employment application, or if there may be some type of testing for this particular position.

We had an example of this situation from one of the networking group participants who stated he thought his interview was going to be with two people. When he arrived, he was given a battery of technical questions in a testing format, followed by five one hour interviews with members of the interview team. He was completely caught off guard, and totally unprepared to spend the day. The

lesson learned – ask questions!

In addition to the planning aspect of your interview day, seeking the names and titles of the interview team will allow you the opportunity to conduct some research on them, and have well developed questions prepared for each team member.

Next, take a dry run to the interview location during rush hour. This will let you determine how much time it will take for you to get to the interview location. There is nothing worse than being late for an interview...it's not a good first impression, especially when your blood pressure is elevated, and you probably won't respond to questions well since you're pre-occupied about trying to calm down and appear confident.

Be sure to dress appropriately for the interview. I've coached candidates, especially those who are internal candidates, to wear a suit. It demonstrates your true interest in the position. Remember this is a competition. That does not mean the deciding factor between candidates is the suit, but it does send the message of genuine interest.

Some simple tips that follow are common sense to most, but you'd be surprised how many people actually miss the mark. They include:

- Don't chew gum
- Turn off cell phones and pagers
- Clean teeth, hair and nails
- Dress professionally
- Polish your shoes (this applies particularly for men)
- Bring a notepad and pen to take notes
- Carry water and mints
- Don't smoke*

*Note: Extra tip on the "Don't Smoke" Rule: Do not smoke in your car before you enter the building. Most offices today are smoke free. It is obvious when someone has been smoking, long before the handshake. The other point about smoking is that there is a real bias against people who do smoke these days. Usually, during the workshops, we ask people to chart their reasons for having a negative reaction to

smokers. Some responses include – these people will take many smoke breaks, they will be absent because of health issues, and they will be more costly to the company because of these health issues.

(Please understand this isn't a vote against smokers, but is presented as a reality check. A good candidate might be eliminated simply by virtue of the recruiter having detected cigarette smoke on their breath or clothing.)

FIRST IMPRESSIONS – GOOD OR BAD – WILL BE NOTICED

Whether any of these suggestions are valid is not the point. The point is that some people will make a hiring decision based upon what they observe during the interview. First impressions are very important, so be prepared to make a good one!

During the interview itself, be engaging and interested. Show enthusiasm, be articulate, clear and concise. Give appropriate eye contact. Respond to the question and then be silent. Do not ramble. If you feel you haven't responded appropriately or clearly, ask the interviewer if you answered their question.

Be sure you have stayed current with technology. You do not want to casually inform a potential employer that you don't really know how to use your cell phone. This could send a message that you are not energized or interested in staying up to date with the latest software and overall technology.

Let's talk about silence. Know when you have completed your thought, and stop. Wait for the next question. Too many times people think it's better to add more details, but that's not true. The more concise the response, the better. So get comfortable with silence. My friend, Chris McCarthy (yes, Stephen's Mom), did a lot of coaching in her position, and she always emphasized the importance of silence to her candidates. The last thing you would want to receive as part of the feedback from an interview that didn't go well is "he/she just wouldn't stop talking."

Don't be afraid to ask for a question to be repeated if you don't understand what is being asked. Again, remember that this is an information gathering session, not an inquisition. So feel free to talk to the interviewer; one human being to another.

Once the interviewer has completed their questioning, hopefully enough time has

been scheduled for you to be able to ask questions. Make sure these questions are well defined and business-related (and are derived from your research in Chapter 5). Don't ask about salary, bonus, vacation, sick days, etc. Salary in particular should have been discussed at the beginning of the process with the Human Resources Director; in order to be certain all parties' expectations are met.

In addition and possibly most important, treat each person you meet as if he/she were a key player in the decision-making process. Do not diminish anyone, including the receptionist and administrative assistants.

