

INTERVIEW POINTERS

1. BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

Do your research before you get to the interview.

- Visit the company website and read up on:
 - the CEO
 - the company's mission statement
 - company facts, including the number of offices globally, the countries in which it operates, financial statements if available, future growth plans and so on
- Visit www.bd.co.za and www.fm.co.za and type in the company name to get up to date on recent news about the company
- Read the job spec thoroughly, familiarising yourself with the main objectives of the role
- Make a note of five things you would like to tell the interviewer about yourself and five things you would like to ask about the position, company, or culture
- It is worth thinking about how you would answer questions before arriving for the interview. Most questions are open-ended and will give you the opportunity to expand and explain yourself in detail

2. DURING THE INTERVIEW

Having the right education and skills might get you an interview, but it's what happens during the interview process that gets you hired.

What follows are the key traits most interviewers look for – make sure you portray them at your next interview.

- **Enthusiasm:** Everyone loves a candidate full of good energy – enthusiasm is contagious and will leave the interviewer energised
- **Manners matter:** Remember to dress the part and show positive body language by sitting up straight, making eye contact and smiling
- **Be mature:** Mature employees know how to focus and concentrate on delivering results, something all employers love
- **Good judgment:** An employer tests your judgment by asking you questions that start with “tell me about a situation or a time when...” Make sure you arrive prepared
- **Are you loyal?** Prospective employers will like you if you show you're loyal to something, whether it's a cause, company, or sport
- **Positive and vibrant.** A positive employee is always more welcome than one who always feels down. Positive employees are also more approachable and easier to get along with. So, ensure you are positive and vibrant during the interview process
- **Do you do more than required?** If you can demonstrate to the interviewer that you can and want to do more than is expected of you, you're on the right track
- **Can you graciously handle criticism?** The typical question that tests this is, “What are your weaknesses?” As a professional, you have to be able to recognise the areas that need work and identify what you could do to turn your weaknesses into strengths
- **Are you a team player?** Interviewers want to know that you're the right fit for the team and a good team player

- **How smart are you?** A successful candidate answers questions clearly, in full sentences and with good grammar and pronunciation
- **Time is important.** Are you punctual? If not, you should polish this skill; punctuality matters in the working world
- **Resilience.** Do you break down or persevere through tough times? Interviewers ask questions to test if you can work under pressure, so think of a few examples before the big day
- It is in the detail. Before sending off your CV, check it once, twice and a third time, just to be sure there are no spelling or grammatical errors. Interviewers pay attention to this as it shows your attention to detail

Also think about the following during your interview:

- Use your own practical experiences when answering questions, and think for a few seconds before you speak so that your answer flows
- Ask your own open-ended questions, such as, “Can you give me an indication of how your financial department is structured?” “Can you give me a brief overview of your current business plan?” “When do you close off your financial year?” “Why is this position vacant?”
- Ask questions relevant to what the interviewer has discussed, to show that you are interested and have been listening. Possibly ask for more detail
- If the opportunity arises, ask the person interviewing you about their background, how long they have been at the company, where they were before joining, where they went to university or whether they are a CA or MBA. This serves to find mutual ground. For example, you may find you attended the same university, have mutual friends or both did articles at the same firm
- Let the interviewer know if you are interested in the position and want the job. Express your interest after the interview and ask for the next step forward. Thank them for their time and say that if they offer you the position you would accept it without a second thought – show commitment and enthusiasm!

3. HOW TO PREPARE FOR A BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW

- During a behaviour-based interview, the interviewer tries to assess your past performances to get an indication of your future success.
- The questions usually begin with, “Describe a time when you...” or, “Tell me about a situation where you...”
- The interviewer seeks specific examples that demonstrate if you have the skills needed for this job. It's important to be prepared for these types of questions. An interviewer can usually easily tell if you're not — and assume you haven't done your homework. To best prepare for behaviour-based questions, you need to think about your experiences that most closely match the skills you'll need to succeed at this job. It helps to understand exactly what the interviewer is looking for in this position.
- Spend time researching the company and learn as much as you can about it. Review the job description and then come up with relevant examples before the interview. Practice relating these examples as stories (see the article, Telling Stories in the Interview, below). You can also use stories to demonstrate personal character traits, in addition to skills and experience.
- To turn your examples into organised stories, use the problem-action-result (PAR) formula. Begin by explaining the problem or situation you faced. Next, describe the actions you took to solve the problem. Finally, outline the successful results.
- Take your time describing the problem. This shows you understand the bigger picture and realise your actions can affect the company's goals and strategies
- When talking about your actions, explain why the situation was challenging – this makes your accomplishments more significant. Be sure to include your most important contributions
- Actions speak louder than words. Instead of simply saying you know how to handle a challenging situation, tell a story to illustrate how you successfully dealt with one

- Your delivery is as important as the subject matter of your story, so be comfortable telling the story. This shows you are also comfortable with the actions you're conveying. You want to portray yourself as confident about your abilities and actions
- Naturally, use only examples that had successful outcomes and show you in a positive light
- Ensure the interviewer recognises the results of your actions so that he/she can understand and appreciate your value to an employer
- Make sure you give the interviewers the information they are looking for. Ask for feedback. Ask whether your example addressed their question or whether they would like another one

Of course, it is impossible to anticipate every imaginable interview question. But if you spend enough time thinking about relevant examples and rehearsing your delivery, it will make it much easier for you. You'll be able to think on your feet, adapt your examples to whatever questions the interviewer throws at you and sound confident in your storytelling.

4. ETIQUETTE ESSENTIALS

- Arrive no more or less than 10 minutes early to an interview, and allot enough time to stay for as long as necessary
- Shake your interviewer's hand when you enter his or her office
- Show consideration and respect for everyone with whom you interact, throughout the interview
- Turn off your cell phone and put your PDA away
- Never cancel at the last minute. It shows a lack of consideration for your interviewer's time
- If you are running late, please call ahead to inform the client in advance and not after the time you should have arrived.

The little things really add up when you are being interviewed for a job. If you give 100 percent effort from beginning to end, you will leave a good lasting impression.

5. USING ANECDOTES TO IMPRESS RECRUITERS

- This article is worth reading before you prepare for your interview.
- Telling Stories in the Interview
- Relatively few people blow the interview. The problem is that they fail to impress the interviewer with their capabilities and, thus, are easily forgotten as candidates. This often occurs because individuals tend to talk in generalities in the interview rather than articulating specific accomplishments and achievements.
- Describing your past experiences by using stories or anecdotes is one of the most effective means of impressing a recruiter.
- Using stories to describe your accomplishments help you stand out and be remembered. The reason this is true has to do with one of the basic premises of adult education. Adults tend to remember examples better than they remember facts. Thus, if you list off a string of strengths such as resourcefulness, articulate, and pleasant to be around, no one will remember what you said fifteen minutes after you leave the interview.
- Moreover, by simply articulating a laundry list of strengths, you are not backing up your claim. Maybe these really are strengths, but who knows? By describing situations in which you demonstrated those strengths, you will both convince the interviewer that these are indeed strengths of yours and you will have a higher probability of being remembered after the interview is over.
- Telling stories about your background is a skill. Some people are naturally good at it while others are not. However, it is a skill that most people can master with a little practice. The trick is to establish a format for your anecdotes. This will enable you to avoid being too brief or overly long-winded. The acronym STAR is often helpful in providing this framework.
- First, think about a situation or task that you faced. Describe this situation in two or three sentences. This establishes the background for your story so that it can be understood by the recruiter.

- Next, describe the action that you took. At this stage, it is important that you speak about what you specifically did. There is a tendency for candidates to gloss over their accomplishments and, thus, hide their light under the proverbial bushel. While you don't want to appear arrogant, you do want to take credit for the role that you played.
- Conclude your anecdote by describing the result you achieved. Discuss how your work helped your employer. Whenever possible, try to discuss the result in measurable or qualitative terms.
- For example, an accountant described a time in which an accounting system he expected to implement quickly was threatened by a manager who was slow to commit his support. To convince the manager to support the accountant's effort, the accountant proposed a 7:00 am meeting to discuss the project. Both this presentation and the accountant's willingness to meet so early impressed the manager who gave his approval. The accounting system decreased the time it took to process invoices by 25%.
- Pretend you are an interviewer who just heard the anecdote from the accountant. You will probably associate the accountant with such positive traits as initiative, hard-working, detail-orientated, and resourcefulness. Additionally, you would likely remember this anecdote and the accountant for some time to come. Thus, it is easy to see why using stories in the interview is such a powerful weapon.
- Identifying the right stories to tell is a critical step. You will want to prepare an array of anecdotes that can be deployed as needed during the interview. The first step is to compile a list of situations or activities in which you have been successful in the past.
- These can relate to work, school, or other outside interests. You should be able to come up with an initial list of at least 30 situations. For each of these, write out the corresponding action that you took and the result you achieved. Do not worry if you cannot quantify all of your results. While it makes for a more impressive story if you can, sometimes the result is simply that the project was completed on time.
- A final step before the interview is to put yourself in the interviewer's shoes. If you were hiring someone for this job, what types of skills would you be looking for? Write them down. Review your list of anecdotes to identify which stories demonstrate your skills in those areas.
- Finally, practice articulating your accomplishments out loud. There is a world of difference between thinking how you will say something and actually saying it.
- By working on preparing and articulating your anecdotes, you will find that you will be remembered positively while your competition becomes a blur in the recruiter's mind.