

Career Planning & Interview Tips

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Finding The Right Position For You

It is important to realize that the job search and process is an investment of time and a trial of patience. However, starting your job search without having an understanding of your career objectives makes little sense. Interviewers quickly eliminate candidates who are uncertain of the direction they would like to take. **But remember, success is when preparation meets opportunity!**

Self-assessment is the first and most important step in any job search, as it allows you to identify your interests, skills, goals, values and potential and match them with the best opportunity. A solid understanding of yourself contributes to a focused and confident presentation during an interview. In addition to preparing you for a successful interview, self-knowledge can help you with your long-term career planning, assuring your next position will get you a step closer to your career goals.

Listed below are some areas to consider and get you started.

What are my abilities/attributes:

- Technical skills
- Team player v. individual contributor
- Communication skills - written & oral
- Clinical trials

What are my personal concerns:

- Family Needs
- Compensation
- Corporate culture
- Geography

What is my compatibility with:

- Peers
- Managers
- Corporate policies
- Clients, internal and external

In addition to self-assessment, you also may want to consider the value of a professional recruiter who specializes in your field. You can obtain a confidential evaluation of what opportunities are currently/potentially available to you given your specific skills, requirements and goals and also get a pulse on the marketplace and what you can expect once you start your search and throughout the process.

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Preparing For The Interview

You've identified an opportunity you would like to explore further. You always hear that you should prepare for an interview, but are not quite sure how to do so. While you certainly want to gather information to help you determine if this would be an appropriate career move and a place where you would enjoy coming to work each day, remember that there is always competition for a good opportunity. The more prepared you are, the easier it will be for you to stand out against other candidates.

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The Telephone Interview

In most cases a company will choose to have a brief telephone interview with a candidate before setting up a personal interview. Telephone screens offer an introduction to the firm, responsibilities of the job and technical skills needed without taking too much of either person's time. Telephone interviews can be difficult since the conversation is not backed up by personal presentation and expressions. Therefore, it is important to keep a few things in mind when preparing for the call.

Always sound alert and interested. Enthusiasm will increase your chances of being invited for an in-house interview.

Eliminate background noise and interruptions. You will seem unprofessional or inattentive if the caller can hear your television, radio, children, computer keyboard, etc. Turn off your cell phone! Try to make your environment sound as quiet as possible to appear 100% focused on the call.

Be prepared. Keep your resume, appointment book and a list of questions you have near the phone.

Give concise answers. Think of questions that might be asked and formulate your answers accordingly. Make sure to give enough detail but don't go off track.

Ask questions. Show your interest in the opportunity by asking questions that are focused on the position. Do not ask about salary or benefits. A telephone interview is not the time to discuss those issues.

Inquire about the next step. At the end of the conversation ask what the next step will be. Express your interest in further pursuing the opportunity!

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The Personal Interview

You've been invited into a firm for a personal interview. Again, preparation will be the key to appearing confident and ready. With a little effort and focus you will leave a positive and lasting impression.

Confirm your appointment. A few days before you interview, make sure you have accurate directions and a contact name and phone number. Don't wait until the day before the interview.

Know where you are going and Be On Time! Your prompt arrival indicates courtesy and a commitment to your profession. Making sure you know where you are going in advance will alleviate any nervousness about traffic and potential miscalculations of time and location. There is rarely a good excuse for being tardy to any business meeting.

Dress professionally. A first impression is the strongest impression. Even if a firm has a relaxed dress code you should dress conservatively, preferably in a suit.

Know your subject. Do some basic research on the firm. With the advent of the internet, company information is readily available. Having knowledge of the company demonstrates your intent and enthusiasm.

Brush up on technical skills. Review as much of your recent and past work experience as you can. This will help you to recover lost details and facilitate your recall of them during the interview.

Let the interviewer talk. Be courteous to the interviewers and let them take the lead - especially early in the meeting. Some interviewers have a set agenda/list of questions they have to get through. Ask your questions when related issues are addressed by the interviewer.

Stress accomplishments. Always remember to market yourself to the best of your ability.

Ask good questions. Be sure to ask questions relating to business issues and operational procedures in addition to questions that will address the factors on your wish list. Interviewers are impressed with candidates who show knowledge and interest in the position and organization.

Use examples. Answer questions directly and concisely but vary the length of your responses and answer questions in a variety of styles and approaches. Use examples and imagery rather than lecturing to expand on points and issues.

Be yourself. Project yourself as flexible by showing there is more than one way to handle a given situation. Avoid controversial subjects such as politics, religion and other issues that generate strong emotional reactions, but don't always agree with the interviewer. If you are pressed for answers on a subject on which you disagree with the interviewer, be honest but not argumentative. Walk away from the interview with a balance between flexibility and independence.

Bring two clean copies of your resume, along with a complete list of references and contacts, to the interview.

Use positive body language. Remember to smile and use posture that demonstrates attentiveness and a positive self-image. Face your interviewer, sit up straight. Don't forget a firm handshake!

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The Salary Question:

If you are planning to interview, be prepared to discuss your current salary and other related earnings. Prospective hirers want to understand how you are compensated, and what your expectations may be, in order to ensure your needs are within their capabilities. A recruiter, in your field of specialty, would be a good source of information to help you make this assessment.

How to handle the salary discussion:

Know your total compensation and the various components (base, bonus, stock options, etc) and when you are due for your next review. Be honest with your representation of these numbers. (This information will be verified at some point in the process!) Your compensation expectations should be realistic and representative of the position's responsibilities. Be ready to present your expectations clearly and consistently through the process.

Remember to demonstrate flexibility with your expected pay. This means to be open to what the prospective hirer feels is appropriate for your background in comparison to the job and their internal company structure. Your career and the actual position are the main priorities at this point in the process. You do not want to leave a negative impression by appearing overly focused on monetary issues. If you leave the impression that you will consider any fair offer, you are leaving the door open, not only for current consideration but for future possibilities as well.

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Frequently Asked Interview Questions

General

- Tell me about yourself.
- Why are you changing jobs; what is interesting to you about this job?
- What are your long- term professional goals?
- What do you like most about your current position? Least?
- What do you feel you can contribute to this organization?

Experience

- Describe a typical day at your office.
- What is your role within your department?
- Do you supervise or manage people? If so, to what extent?
- What is your experience with external entities? (FDA, software vendors, CROs, etc)
- What are your technical competencies?
- How would you describe your ability to communicate technical issues to non-technical people?
- How do you prioritize projects and/or crisis situations?

Attributes

- How would you describe your abilities as a team player?
- What is your leadership style? Do you enjoy being a leader? Why? Would you prefer to not be in a leadership role? Why?
- How would you or past employers describe your personality? (initiative, enthusiasm, stability, consistency, etc.)
- How would you or past employers describe your work habits? (address issues promptly, met deadlines, provide accurate paperwork, etc.)
- How do you perform under pressure?
- What do you like to do outside of work?
- Be prepared for hypothetical questions where you will be asked to explain what you would do given a certain situation. These types of questions address how you respond to situations in a short amount of time. They also attest to the extent of your business knowledge.

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After The Interview

Write a thank you note. Even in this day and age of technical advances, your best bet is to hand write a brief note to the primary interviewers. Thank them for their time, tell them you enjoyed your meeting and if appropriate, express interest in the position or in hearing from them soon.

Keep a record of your initial impressions of the day, what you learned and also questions that you still have that will need to be addressed. Very often the interview process can take 3-6 months. Writing down your thoughts will help keep information from various interviews/companies sorted and assist in stirring your memory on events and issues that may become important later.

If you get an offer always respond enthusiastically! Leaving a positive impression at this point is extremely important. If you are disappointed by the offer, don't start to negotiate on that first call. It's better to wait a day (but no more than one day) to make your request. Even if you're not interested in the position, it's best to let a day go by before you decline the offer. Waiting makes it appear as though you've given the offer some serious thought before responding. This is appreciated by the prospective company. Again, whether you have an inherent interest or not it is always important to make a professional and positive presentation.