How to maximise your interview performance

You've written your cv, you've applied for the job, you've been invited for interview. This is your opportunity to shine, or not! Good preparation is vital; the following guidelines should help you to give your best possible performance at interview.

Before

Well in advance of the interview, read through the job description and consider where your experience is relevant or otherwise. If you lack some of the required skills, this is likely to be an area of focus during the interview. Be prepared to discuss how your other experience compensates, or to say how you intend to overcome any deficiencies. Do remember, though, that a job description is written before suitable candidates are found and it's often the case that the right candidate for the job will possess some of the required experience but not all.

Anticipate and prepare answers to some of the standard interview questions that often get asked.

- Some examples:
  - Why do you want to work for us?
  - Why do you want this job?
  - What do you know about our company?
  - Why did you choose your profession?
  - What are your strengths/weaknesses?
  - What do you like/dislike about your current job role?
  - Why are you looking for a new position?
  - What has been your greatest achievement to date?
  - How would you describe yourself?
  - How would your friends or colleagues describe you?
  - What are your future aspirations?
  - What can you offer to your new team/company?

- Prepare some questions of your own.
- Visit the company's website and find out as much as you can.
- Make sure that you know how to get to the place where the interview will be held. Take a copy of the address and contact details in case of location confusion. Leave more time for the journey than you think you will need.
- Allow plenty of time for the interview itself and remember that it might run on longer than you expect.
- Don't be late - but if you are delayed en route then call ahead, explain your situation and give a realistic revised arrival time.
- Switch off your mobile phone when you arrive.
- Be nice to the receptionist - you might be working there soon!

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During

- First impressions really do count. Make sure your appearance is appropriately professional. Don't wear 'comedy' ties or socks.
- Give a handshake that is firm without crushing. Maintain frequent eye contact but don't stare. Smile. Be yourself.
- Answer the questions that are asked, and check that you are on the right lines if you sense that you may be going off at a tangent.
- Don't smoke. Avoid telling inappropriate or unfunny jokes.
- Be aware of your body language; promote positive signals and limit negative ones.
- Don't undersell yourself; talk about your positive points, without being arrogant.
- Don't criticise your current or last employer too much.
- If you don't know the answer to a question, say so. In technical interviews, say how you would go about finding out.
- Ask any relevant questions that haven't been answered already.
- Don't talk about salary / rate unless the interviewer raises the subject. Be honest and realistic about your earning expectations, and make sure that what you say is consistent with what you said when first applying for the job.
- At the end of the interview, ask what the next stage will be. Ask the interviewer if he / she thinks that you are the sort of person they are looking to employ.

After

- Call your recruiter after the interview with your feedback.
- Send an email if you feel that you need to supply any extra information, or just to thank your interviewer.
- Cross your fingers!

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