

■ Interviewing: Putting Your Best Foot Forward

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Interviewing is one of the most dynamic forms of business and professional communication. The interview gives you a chance to prove to a potential employer that you are capable, competent and qualified. Therefore, it is important that you learn as much as you can about interviewing in order to effectively market yourself during an interview.

Throughout this and other Career Center articles you will find "Time Out" boxes that provide hints, reminders and suggestions related to the topic. Symbols are defined as follows:

☛	Bombs (stuff you should not do)
★	Superstar Stuff (stuff you should do)
📖	Common Knowledge (stuff you should know)

■ INTERVIEW FORMAT

No two interviews or interviewers are ever alike. However, a typical 30-minute screening interview will follow a format similar to this:

• Greeting and Introduction

The first few minutes of an interview usually consist of a firm handshake, a quick and professional introduction and some small talk to develop a rapport between you and the interviewer. Make sure you smile and that your initial presentation of yourself is positive. It has been said that an employer spends the first minute of the interview developing an impression of you and you spend the rest of the interview confirming their impressions or changing those impressions.

• Overviewing the Position and Interview

After the greeting, the employer may begin the interview by giving you an idea of how the interview will proceed. In some cases, the interviewer will briefly describe the position and/or the organization. This may last about three to five minutes.

• Answering the Interviewer's Questions

This is the "heart" of the interview where the interviewer asks you questions. This section of the interview will typically last about 15-20 minutes. In a good interview, you will be talking about 70% of the time and the interviewer will be listening. Remember that this is your chance to elaborate on your qualifications. Refer to the Answering Questions section of this article to learn how to handle interview questions effectively.

• Asking the Interviewer Questions

In most cases, the interviewer will turn the tables and give you an opportunity to ask questions. Always ask questions. Before the interview make a list of about 20 potential questions you would like to ask.

Some of these questions may be answered during the course of the interview. However, you should still have a few good questions remaining in your list. Plan to ask three to five questions that reflect your genuine interest in the position or organization. You may also want to ask the interviewer to provide additional information about a topic discussed during the interview or refer to information you learned during your employer research. This will communicate to the interviewer that you were listening and prepared for the interview. You will have about three to five minutes to ask questions.

• Closing the Interview

It will take about three to five minutes to bring the interview to a close after you have asked your questions. The interviewer may outline what you can expect to happen next in the employment process and/or invite you for a second interview. Thank the interviewer for his/her time and end the interview with a friendly smile and another firm handshake.

TIME OUT



Testing

Some employers require interviewees to take standardized tests. These tests can be used to measure a variety of Beta Fide Occupational Qualifications (BFOQs). Usually, these tests measure skill level in specific areas.

■ TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

As an interviewee, you may find yourself in several different interview situations. Here are a few examples of potential types of interviews and a few guidelines for each:

• The One-on-One Interview

Probably the most frequently used interview, this meeting incorporates an individual approach to the interview process. Following the guidelines listed in the "GRATEFUL INTERVIEWEES..." section of this article will prepare you to excel in this type of interview.

• The Panel Interview

In a panel interview, you will be interviewed by several individuals at one time. Interviewers may take turns asking you prepared questions. If you are being interviewed by a panel, relax, get a feel for the group dynamics, and keep communication lines open by periodically making eye contact with all panel members as you respond to questions.

• The Satellite/On-Line Interview

In an effort to save time and money, many employers are conducting satellite or on-line computer interviews. Typically, in this type of interview the interviewee is sitting in front of a camera that is attached to a

computer or television and communicates with the interviewer who communicates using similar technology.

give the tour leader your undivided attention and ask interesting questions.

- **The Group Interview**

The Group Interview is almost the complete opposite of the Panel Interview. In the Group Interview there is one interviewer and several interviewees. Basically, interviewees "compete" to see who will surface as the leader of the group. The person who answers questions professionally and diplomatically wins the competition and the right to continue in the interviewing process or to get the job. This is frequently used when an employer has many people to interview and few people to conduct the interviews.

- **The Meal Interview**

Frequently utilized by business professionals, the Meal Interview will give the interviewer a sense of your ability to function in social settings. Brush up on your table manners and rules of professional etiquette, order non-messy foods, treat your server with respect, and order a moderately priced meal. Avoid drinking alcohol because even a few ounces can lessen your ability to maintain a professional demeanor.

TIME OUT

- ★ **Panache That Pays**

If you need to "brush up" on your business and professional etiquette, plan to attend the Career Center's annual Dining and Professional Etiquette Dinner. This workshop is presented by St. Louis Etiquette Consultant Maria Everding. Copies of her book "Panache That Pays" are available in the Career Center for \$8.00 a copy.

- **The Telephone Interview**

Employers typically use the Telephone Interview as a screening interview before deciding who to interview in person. This can be a very simple interview but the interviewee must be careful to speak clearly, listen attentively and communicate sincerely on the telephone since the interviewer does not have the ability to read body language on the telephone. Be careful to eliminate speak ticks such as "um," "and," "ok," "ya know," etc.

TIME OUT

- ★ **Telephone Interview Notes**

When participating in a telephone interview, lay your reference materials on a table in front of you. These materials could include a copy of your resume with relevant information highlighted. Also, if you anticipate being asked some "typical" interview questions, you can prepare answers. Having responses written down can increase your interview comfort level so you can focus on your telephone communication skills.

- **The Follow-up Interview/On-Site Visit**

If an employer is interested in continuing the employment process with you after the first interview, you may be invited for a second interview or on-site visit. A tour of the facilities, staff introductions, and multiple interviews typically characterize this type of interview. During tours,

TIME OUT

- ★ **Thank-you Letters and Notes**

Note the names and positions of everyone you meet during an interview. Thank-you letters (typed) should be mailed to every person who interviewed you within 24 hours of your interview. Consider sending handwritten thank-you notes to people you met throughout the day but who did not interview you (i.e. support staff members and tour guides)

■ ANSWERING QUESTIONS

The way you respond to interview questions tells the interviewer whether or not you are qualified and can handle the position. Therefore, it is important to know what types of questions may be asked and what responses are appropriate. Before formulating an answer to an interview question, consider applying the following four P's to your response:

- **Ponder**

Ask yourself why the employer has asked a question. This will help you determine what skill, trait, value or ability is being measured. Try to respond to the question by highlighting the criteria that is being evaluated.

- **Prove**

Prove every statement you make. If you say that you have developed excellent communication skills give examples of situations where you utilized these skills. If you claim that Millikin University has provided you with an outstanding, well-rounded education, discuss the curriculum requirements.

- **Practice**

Practice interviewing. One good way to get started is to obtain a list of sample interview questions and write your responses to these questions on paper. Edit your responses until you are comfortable with them. Call our office to schedule a mock (practice) interview with a staff member.

- **Project**

Project a positive image even when the questioning gets negative. If you are asked to state one of your weaknesses, do so. However, explain what you are doing to eliminate that weakness and what you have learned in the process.

TIME OUT

- 📖 **Behavioral Interviewing.**

This type of interview is becoming more and more popular as employers seek to determine whether or not you can actually demonstrate the skills needed for the position. In a Behavioral Interview you may be asked to give specific examples of instances when you have demonstrated a particular

skill. The premise behind the Behavioral Interview is that past performance is an indicator of future performance (if you did it before, you should be able to do it again). To be successful in the behavioral interview, relax and think quickly drawing upon specific examples from your education and experiences.

HANDLING INAPPROPRIATE QUESTIONS

You may be asked questions regarding your marital status, age, race, religious preference, children, sexual orientation or other issues that are not job related. Not all of these questions are always illegal but all are definitely inappropriate or unethical interview questions because they are unrelated to the job qualifications. Handling these questions can pose a personal dilemma as you decide how to respond. There are no strict guidelines to follow in dealing with these questions and many times they are asked by interviewers who are unaware that the questions are inappropriate. However, if you feel uncomfortable about a question ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do I really want this job?
2. How badly do I want this job?
3. Do I really want to work for an organization that asks inappropriate questions?
4. Does the interviewer realize that this question is inappropriate?

Based on your responses to some of these questions you may wish to:

1. End the interview.
2. Ask the interviewer what relevance the question has to the position or why the question is being asked.
3. Refuse to answer the question.
4. Answer the question with or without regret.

Keep in mind, the way you handle this situation says a lot about your professionalism and maturity. Avoid being rude and argumentative while remaining positive, polite and assertive.

ASKING QUESTIONS

While questions regarding salary and benefits are considered inappropriate in a first interview, here are some good examples of questions to ask during the interview:


1. How long have you been with this organization?
2. Describe your career path within this organization.
3. What do you enjoy most about working for this organization?
4. Is there a formal orientation program?
5. How soon are you looking to fill this position?
6. What is the typical career path for this position?
7. What are some of the biggest challenges facing this position, this department or this organization?

8. Who are your major competitors?
9. What impact has the recent recession had on your organization?
10. Is travel involved with this position?
11. Would I ever be required to relocate?
12. What are the performance expectations for this position?
13. How frequently is performance evaluated?
14. Will I have supervisory responsibilities? If so, how many people will I be supervising?
15. What is the organizational structure of the organization and where does this position fall within that structure?
16. How profitable has the organization been within the last five years?
17. How would you describe your leadership/management style?
18. How would you describe the individuals I will be working with?
19. What kind of training and/or professional development programs do you have?
20. Do you encourage employees to continue working on graduate degrees?
21. Is the department or organization computerized? If so, what hardware and software is utilized?
22. Are any of the employees union members?
23. How many employees work at this facility?

GREAT INTERVIEWEES . . .

- Are on time
- Are dressed professionally
- Are well groomed
- Have a solid hand shake
- Are self-confident and assertive
- Smile and have a great sense of humor
- Possess excellent communication skills
- Demonstrate impeccable interpersonal skills
- Answer questions succinctly
- Are aware of non-verbal cues
- Can talk objectively about their qualifications without appearing boastful
- Show interest
- Have applicable work experience
- Are focused
- Are flexible
- Are polite and conscientious
- Generate excitement and enthusiasm
- Are positive
- Can accept negative feedback
- Carry extra copies of their resumes
- Carry a notepad in a professional portfolio and pen to record important information
- Have documentation and reference information readily available
- Can pass the drug screen
- Follow-up

TIME OUT

 Interview Expenses

If you are invited to interview, in most cases the employer will pay for all related interviewing expenses. They may pre-pay the expenses (travel, lodging, meals, etc.) or they may ask you to submit receipts to be reimbursed. Do not take advantage of the employer paying expenses. Fly coach--not first class. Stay in business class hotels (avoid fancy suites in five-star hotels and don't order room service). Order menu items that are average in cost--stay away from the most expensive item on the menu.

■ MORE ABOUT INTERVIEWING

To learn more about interviewing:

- *Make an appointment to meet with a Career Center professional staff member to discuss interviewing.*
- *Schedule a Mock Interview with a professional staff member.*
- *Read a book on interviewing. Several are available in the Career Library.*

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