

CSP E-Lesson 8, Fall 2008

Words of Wisdom: "Preparing for my job interview took more time than the actual interview. But it was worth it. I was more confident, and the interviewer seemed impressed with my answers to questions and my knowledge of the company."



Jesse Nichols, 22, Medical assistant, Beaufort, SC

Best Foot Forward

"How do I look?" Jason turns around in a full circle for his friends Alyson and Steve. He's modeling the clothes he plans to wear for his first job interview.

"Not bad! I hardly recognize you!" Alyson says in an admiring tone of voice. "I didn't know you owned a dress shirt and tie."

"I'd lose the sneakers if I were you," Steve laughs as he points to Jason's feet where the black-and-white toes of sports shoes poke out from beneath his neatly creased pants.

"Darn! I knew I'd mess up something." Jason starts kicking off his shoes.

"That's no attitude to take," Alyson smiles, "Now that you've landed an interview with Mr. Murphy's office manager, you have to show you're confident."

"Okay, I need you two to go over with me everything we learned in class about job interviews." Jason sits down and looks to his friends for advice.

Imagine you are one of Jason's friends. Give him pointers on the following topics about job interviewing.

Appearance and grooming _____

Body language _____

Tone of voice _____

Get Ready, Get Set, Go

You can gain an important advantage over your competitors for a job by preparing well for your interview. The better prepared you are, the more confident you will be and the more likely you are to impress your interviewer. The best prepared candidate is the person who probably will receive a call back for a second interview or, even, a job offer.

Three important steps in preparing for an interview:

- Research the company
- Match your skills to the job description
- Form intelligent questions to ask the interviewer

Research the company. Make sure you are knowledgeable about the companies that interview you. Know their products, services and goals. You can learn about a company in several ways. First, enter the company's name in a search engine on the Internet. You'll find that most companies have a Web site, and they also may be mentioned in news articles and blogs. You may be able to read a short biography and view a picture of the person you'll be talking with. If you know anyone who works for the company, get advice from that individual also.

Here are two things you should learn about every company that interviews you. List three more items.

1. The size of the company

2. Who the customers are

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Review the job description. What skills and qualifications are needed for the job you want? Does the job description specify the need for team players and problem solvers? Pick out your best qualifications and use them to sell yourself during the interview.

Get Ready, Get Set, Go (Continued)

To prepare for an interview, think of experiences you've had that demonstrate skills and qualities that match the job description. You can use previous job experiences or other activities as a member of a sports team, school committee, or a volunteer group.

Review the list below of skills and qualities that often appear in job descriptions. Select three and describe an experience in your life that demonstrates that skill or quality. Identify your role in the experience, what action you took, and the outcome. An example is given.

Relationship building	Team player	Leadership	Meeting deadlines
Persuading others	Self-starter	Integrity	Problem investigation
Resolving conflicts	Goal setting	Adaptability	Positive attitude

1. Skill/Quality: Leadership
Experience: Coordinator of the school Halloween party for little kids
Your role: Working with several people on a committee
The actions you took: Scheduling meetings, organizing the tasks, assigning tasks, following up
The outcome: The kids had a great time, and so did the committee and students who helped. We decided to have the party again next year.

2. Skill/Quality: _____
Experience: _____
Your role: _____
The actions you took: _____
The outcome: _____

3. Skill/Quality: _____
Experience: _____
Your role: _____
The actions you took: _____
The outcome: _____

Get Ready, Get Set, Go (Continued)

Prepare questions to ask the interviewer. At some point in most interviews, the interviewer will ask if you have any questions. You should always answer, "Yes," and ask one or two questions that you've prepared in advance to show your interest in the job. Memorize your questions or put them on a small note card.

In the first interview, don't ask questions about salary, vacations or benefits. Questions like those sound way too selfish to the interviewer. Instead, concentrate on matters related to the company or the job. Here are some questions you might want to ask. Continue the list with three more questions.

1. Who would be my direct supervisor and what is the person's job title?
2. What are the opportunities for advancement? What are the other positions in this career ladder?
3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

Tip: Prepare a question using the research you've done on the company. For example, "I read on the Internet that your company is expanding its training programs for employees. Can you tell me about the opportunities this provides? How does an employee become involved? Is there a waiting period before a new employee is allowed to participate?"

The Big Show

Up until the interview, you've been preparing, getting ready to sell yourself face to face with an employer. With the interview, you're headed for the main event—the one that can land you the job or eliminate you from the competition. From the moment you enter a prospective employer's building until you leave, you're on stage. Everything—from the way you look to the way you sound and the way you act—will be evaluated.

Your job interview will consist mostly of questions from the interviewer. Sometimes the questions will be straightforward; other times, you may feel like you are having a conversation. Different interviewers use different styles. Here are some of the questions you may be asked.

Open questions. These questions cannot be answered with a "yes," or "no," but they give you an opportunity to highlight your skills that match those listed in the job description.

Write a strong answer to the following open questions and practice them with a friend.

1. Tell me a little about yourself.

2. Why are you interested in this job?

3. How do you measure success? How do you know when you've been successful?

4. What are you looking for in your next job?

The Big Show (Continued)

Hypothetical questions. These are “what would you do if” questions. They are used to find out how well you think on your feet. They ask you to solve a problem or describe how you would use your skills in a specific situation.

Practice answering the following hypothetical questions.

1. How will you handle the parts of the job that you like least?

2. What would you do if your supervisor asked you to do something unethical or illegal?

3. What would you do if you were asked to perform a task you had never done before?

Behavioral questions. This popular type of question is based on the idea that how you behaved in the past predicts how you will behave in the future. You may be asked how you used your skills in past experiences.

Tip: Use the same process you used in *Get Ready, Get Set, Go*. Describe the experience, identify your role in the experience, the action you took and the outcome. Do not volunteer weaknesses or other negative information about yourself. You'll look insecure, and the interviewer may not see the issue as a weakness. Further, the interviewer will remember the negative part of your history.

The Big Show (Continued)

Practice answering.

1. Tell me about a time you had to work with someone whom you disliked. How did you handle it? (Be careful about this question. This is not the time to complain about a former supervisor or company.)

2. Describe the most challenging situation you've dealt with in the past year. How did you handle it?

3. Tell me about a time when you were overwhelmed with tasks. How did you prioritize them?

Tip: Behavioral questions require special handling. You should turn a negatively phrased question into a positive one. For example, a question such as, "What are your major weaknesses?" can be turned into, "I tend to be a perfectionist" or "I sometimes try to do more than is possible in the time available." These comments are positive because they make you look like a conscientious worker.

The Brainteaser. Chances are you won't be asked a brainteaser. But some interviewers use them to judge an applicant's thinking and problem solving abilities. One brainteaser used in interviews is "Why are manholes round?" The interviewer isn't interested in the answer but how the applicant arrives at an answer.

Practice answering a brainteaser. Remember, all that counts is how you find your answer.

How many nickels will there be in Yankee stadium during a baseball game?

Oops! That's a No-No

Employers are not allowed to ask you questions that imply discrimination because of federal and state laws that protect you from discrimination in the work place. Questions about the following are discriminatory.

- Age, gender, or sexual orientation
- Marital or parental status
- Physical attributes such as height or weight
- Disabilities or medical history
- Race, religion or national origin

Sometimes employers need to know specific personal information that affects your ability to perform a certain job. In that case, questions that could be discriminatory have to be worded in such a way that you aren't required to give unnecessary personal information. Here's an example of a question regarding an applicant's ability to perform a task because of health. It could be legal or illegal depending on wording.

Illegal: "When was your last physical exam?"

Legal: "Can you lift 50-pound packages and place them on a conveyor belt as part of your job?"

Place an "L" beside the questions that you believe are legal and an "I" by those you think are illegal.

1. ____ Who takes care of your children while you work?
2. ____ How much do you weigh?
3. ____ What languages do you speak, read or write fluently?
4. ____ Travel is an important part of the job. Are you able to travel frequently?
5. ____ Are you married or do you have a life partner?
6. ____ Do you smoke?
7. ____ Are you planning to have children?
8. ____ How is your health?
9. ____ What religious holidays do you observe?
10. ____ Usually we hire a man for this job. Can you handle it?

Oops! That's a No-No (Continued)

What do I do if I'm asked illegal questions?

Sometimes an interviewer unintentionally asks illegal questions, but, on occasion, interviewers deliberately overstep the legal bounds. Some ask illegal questions openly, others make the questions seem like small talk. No matter how or why an illegal question is asked, you have to decide what to do.

Here are your real options if you are asked illegal questions in a job interview:

1. Answer the question briefly and move on to another topic.

You may answer the question. The fact that it's asked should be a warning about the company's behavior.

2. Try to avoid the question without pointing out its illegality and move on to another topic.

That's an interesting question. I'm not usually asked that."

3. Answer the "intent" of the question.

Answer the question strictly as it relates to the job. "My health status will not interfere with my work."

4. Diplomatically tell the interviewer that the question is illegal.

This may be held against you, but at least you found out more about the company. "I don't believe that question is allowed to be asked in interviews."

5. Turn the company in! You can report the company to your local Equal Employment Opportunity office.

Some interviewers don't realize they are asking illegal questions. Make sure the intent was to discriminate before you take formal action.

The best option regarding illegal questions is to answer the "intent" of the question. You have to think about why the interviewer is asking the question and provide an answer that is appropriate. For example, it is illegal to ask "Are you a U. S. citizen?" because your nationality and ethnic background are your own business. However, employers need to know if you are allowed to work in the U.S., so they may legally ask "Are you authorized to work in the U.S.?" If someone asks you, "Are you a citizen?" you may answer, "I am authorized to work in the U.S." You have appropriately answered the "intent" of the question.

Oops! That's a No-No (Continued)

How would you answer the following illegal questions?

1. "Who will take care of your children when they are sick?"

Intent: The employer is concerned about absenteeism.

Answer the intent: _____

2. "Do you take any medications?"

Intent: The employer wants to know if you can physically fulfill your responsibilities.

Answer the intent: _____

3. "How old are you?"

Intent: The employer wants to know if you're over 18, the only legal requirement for any job.

Answer the intent: _____

The Follow-Up

The interview is over, but your work isn't! After your job interview you have another opportunity to stand out from your competitors. Follow up your interview with a thank you note showing appreciation for your interviewer's time and expressing your continued interest in the job. Make sure you get your interviewer's business card so you know the correct title and name of the person to contact and thank.

In paragraph one, remind the interviewer of the date you interviewed and the job for which you applied. Express appreciation for your interviewer's time. In paragraph two, show your continued interest in the job and remind the interviewer of how you can contribute to the company. In paragraph three, close by mentioning future contact with the interviewer, "I will call next week to follow up with you."

The Follow-Up (Continued)

Imagine that today you completed an interview with Robin Shay, Assistant director of the Lambert County Helicopter Museum. She interviewed you for the position of tour guide. Ms. Shay spoke with you for a half hour, gave you a tour of the center, and introduced you to members of the staff. After completing your note, exchange it with a classmate for proof reading.

Your name, address, telephone number and e-mail address

Date

Name of person you are writing
Title of person you are writing
Lambert County Cultural Center
10 Lambert Way
Lamberts Town, PA 19000

Dear

Paragraph One

Paragraph Two

Paragraph Three

Sincerely,

Sign Your Name

A Successful Interview

If you have taken the necessary time to prepare yourself well, then you can rely on the three big “C” words to guide you through a successful interview. Be *Confident*, be *Courteous*, and use *Common sense*.

Keep these in mind as you review the six keys to a successful interview:

1. Arrive at your interview at least ten minutes early. You may be expected to fill out forms, especially if you haven't already submitted an application.
2. Observe what goes on around you while you are waiting to be interviewed. Try to get a feel for the company. Notice the faces and behavior of the employees. Do they look content and energetic? Or do they appear stressed and anxious?
3. Introduce yourself. Show your confidence by smiling, walking up to the interviewer and shaking hands firmly. “Hello, Ms. Watkins. I'm Mitch Lundgren.” Don't sit until invited.
4. Let the interviewer lead the conversation. Answer the questions fully when asked and save your questions until the end.
5. Project an air of confidence. Speak clearly. Act as if you want and deserve the job. You'll gain confidence just by pretending you are confident.
6. Maintain eye contact. Dropping or shifting your eyes betrays insecurity. Look directly at the interviewer and answer questions in a professional manner.

Making a good impression during a job interview can be as simple as learning more about yourself so you can change the behaviors that are self-defeating. Brook does not realize his actions communicated a bad message. Read about Brook's interview and tell him how he needs to change his behavior for his next job interview.

Brook's Interview

Brook is at least twenty years younger than the two other applicants sitting in the waiting room of the human resource office of Advanced Technologies; but from looking at the man and woman, he has decided that he is probably better educated. He believes that any company would prefer to hire a youthful

A Successful Interview

person with lots of energy over someone who, he guesses, is burned out. He also notices the conservative clothes the others wear and is glad that he wore his new European cut jacket and added a fancy scarf in the top pocket. He knows how important appearance is during an interview.

Brook is interviewing for an opening as supervisor in a specialty steel company, and he's prepared to grab the job. He's had two years of college, more than most steel company supervisors, and he's worked in a steel mill for five years, learning the ropes as he goes. He's a smooth talker, and he figures what he doesn't know about supervising he can learn quickly from the other supervisors.

When Brook is called into Mrs. DeMaso's office, he calls her by her first name, Kathy, which he reads from the nameplate on her door. To show confidence, he adds a bit of a swagger to his walk. During the interview, Mrs. DeMaso asks Brook why he wants to leave his current job, and he tells her the truth. Most of the people he works with aren't as smart as he is, and they resent his intelligence. He figures it's time to look for another job where he's appreciated more.

Mrs. DeMaso is impressed with Brook's knowledge of the steel industry and tells him so. He's sure he has clinched the job; but when he calls back a week later to ask why he hasn't heard anything further about the position, Mrs. DeMaso tells him that the job has been filled by another person. Brook is stunned at the news.

Recommend to Brook what he should change during his next job interview.
