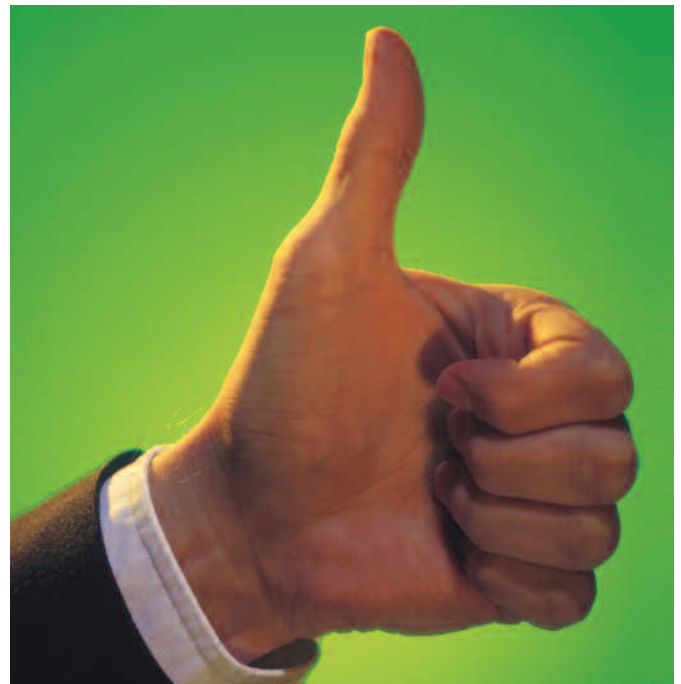


Acing the Interview

By Barbara Kofman & Kaitlin Eckler

This is the sixth article in our Career Zone job search series. “Know Yourself” (September), “Digging for Data-Narrowing Your Options” (October) and “Goal Setting” (November).

The purpose of the interview is to develop rapport with the interviewer(s), learn more about the needs of the employer, leave the door open no matter what, and impress upon the decision makers you are the right candidate for the job. How do you accomplish this? To be selected for a position you must be thoroughly prepared. To achieve this you must have a well thought out and effective presentation. Your preparation falls into three areas: Research, Application, and Practice (RAP).



R: The foundation is careful research, to find out as much as you can about the company: its offerings - services or products, what distinguishes it within the industry, the corporate culture, the key competencies for success as an employee, the job requirements and profile of the ideal candidate.

A: Next, apply what you’ve learned to facilitate your understanding of the employer to analyze and identify the key qualifications, experiences and necessary skills to be selected for the job. e.g., initiative, teamwork, leadership potential, communication skills, creativity....

P: From this, extrapolate what questions are likely to be asked and practice your interview answers. Write out responses to generic/traditional interview questions (see our website) and practice preparing responses to behavioural interview questions.

Behavioural questions are the most common types asked by interviewers. They are based on the premise that past performance is the best indicator of future performance and probe into experiences that relate to the job requirements. For example, “Tell me about the busiest time you faced in the past year and how you handled it?” or

“Give an example of a time you solved one problem and created another?”

To be really prepared for your interview, develop as many Success Anecdotes as you can (at least eight). This process was described in the first article in this series titled “Knowing Yourself” and refers to examples of problems successfully solved

in the past that demonstrate your ability to manage a variety of situations resulting in positive results. Success Anecdotes state the problem or opportunity faced, describe the actions taken to solve the problem, and the results achieved. Well thought through Success Anecdotes are the keys to providing effective responses to complex behavioural questions.

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Not all employers are professional interviewers. There will be situations when you need to guide the interviewer to ensure all your attributes for the position are covered. This is best accomplished by making as many connections as you can for and with the interviewer.

Essential areas to emphasize to impress interviewers are that you:

- UNDERSTAND the job
- CAN do the job
- WILL do the job
- are the best FIT for this employer,
- are here to SOLVE their PROBLEMS!

After the interview send a thank you note acknowledging the time they spent with you summarize what you have to offer with an emphasis on how you meet their requirements, correct any perceived weaknesses, and express your continued interest in the role. If you don't hear back within the stated time frame, follow up. Monitor and manage your feelings and continue to pursue other opportunities to generate interviews. Many things can happen outside your control that affect whether or not you get the job but if you are well prepared, have done your research, evaluated the needs of the organization and practiced for the interview you will greatly enhance your interview effectiveness and improve your chances of being the chosen candidate. jD

Some Additional Tips to help you Ace the Interview:

- Organize your clothes the day before, know where the interview is, how long it takes to get there, and plan to arrive 10-15 minutes beforehand.
- Bring materials - pen, pad, your resume, and examples of your work and/or a portfolio.
- Be aware of how you say things as this frequently has a greater impact than what you say - delivery, confidence, and intonation all play a role.
- Be pleasant to everyone you meet as they might be asked what they think of you.
- First impressions are critical.
- Know about any cultural nuances, particularly if you are after international work. Develop a firm handshake and make eye contact with your listener if appropriate.
- Make as many connections as you can between your competencies and their requirements.
- Whenever possible, talk in concrete terms - offer an anecdotal description of how you achieved something and the results attained. This leaves a lasting impression with the interviewer.
- Listen carefully, don't be modest, but don't exaggerate.
- Avoid criticizing anyone, including yourself.
- Be prepared for different types of interviews such as panel (2 or more interviewers), situational (based on real job incidents) or case (emphasizes process more than the answer) - ask what kind of interview is going to be used and learn more about managing different interview methodologies (see the jobpostings website).
- Prepare good questions to ask that showcase your research. Do not ask "me" questions, such as compensation, until the offer stage.
- Enquire about next steps and follow up.

Kaitlin Eckler of KE&A Consulting and Barbara Kofman of CareerTrails are career management professionals with extensive experience in the youth and employment marketplace. Kaitlin can be reached at career@sympatico.ca or 416 579-1508 and Barbara can be contacted at www.careertrails.com or 416 708-2880.