Interviews: Strategies for Overcoming Barriers

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Some of the major obstacles to overcome in the interview process include:

· Anxiety, nervousness
· Lack of confidence
· Lack of practice in interviewing
· Intimidation
· Untrained or unskilled recruiters
· Lack of information and inadequate preparation

To overcome these barriers, you should try to focus on your message instead of on your nerves. Remember, you would not be approaching this meeting at all if you were not qualified for the position. Interviewing is akin to developing an oral argument; present your qualifications based on the evidence you uncovered during the process of self-assessment.

The first four minutes of the interview are crucial. Employers make up their mind about candidates very early. Your handshake must be firm and confident, your gaze steady, your appearance impeccable and your confidence apparent.

Your thorough preparation will make you aware of both your strengths and your weaknesses. But remember, the interviewer is there to see what you have to offer, not to hear explanations about what you don’t have. When you practice answering interview questions, eliminate all "no's:" "not's," "didn’t's," "although," "but's," and "howevers" from your speech. Rephrase your answers using positive speech forms. This will prepare you to speak about yourself in a positive light.

Think of at least three main points you want to make. Use concrete and clear examples that demonstrate these strengths. Focus on these identified strengths during the interview and present them with conviction and enthusiasm. Remember that the interviewer must be able to see and hear the enthusiasm that you wish to convey.

Try to anticipate the types of questions you will be asked and prepare multi-level responses. Write out your answers. Review and edit them. First, give a brief summary, akin to a verbal outline, covering all salient points. Second, pause and give a more detailed description if the interviewer seems interested or asks you to go on. Be certain that your responses highlight your skills and abilities; demonstrate your knowledge and expertise and reflect your motivation and personality.

There can be many goals and objectives in the interview process. Some of these include:

· to relate successes and achievements, to inform, to represent yourself and to convey an image of intelligence, integrity, responsiveness, responsibility and achievement-orientation
· to convey conscientiousness, reliability, and a capacity for hard work
· to develop rapport, to be liked, to have a pleasant conversation, to make a favorable impression
· to distinguish yourself from the competition
· to investigate employment opportunities and other important factors (i.e., amount of responsibility, training, exposure to clients, nature of tasks, supervision, advancement, pro bono support, satisfaction level of coworkers, method of work assignment, specialty areas, prospects
for firm growth and development). You want to learn if this will be a good fit.

To meet these goals you must:

1. Establish rapport—In addition to tangible things such as a good, firm handshake and appropriate eye contact, there are additional items which develop rapport between people. These include friendliness and sincere interest in the interviewer, as well as warmth and responsiveness to the interviewer. You must become aware of body language. Be sensitive to cues of boredom. If the interviewer keeps looking down at your resume or out the window, bring the statement you are making to a close.

2. Listen carefully—Try to hear the question behind the question and respond to the interviewer's concerns. Get the interviewer to talk about the position to uncover exactly what is being sought. This will enable you to illustrate how you can fill these needs.

3. Ask questions—Remember, this is a conversation; there should be interaction. Ask technical questions to demonstrate your knowledge of the field and to show that you are already looking for solutions to the employer's problems. Do not ask about benefits, vacations, pensions and hours until you know you have an offer.

4. Get feedback—Before the end of the interview, ask if you have the qualifications they are seeking. If not, now is the best time to find out so you can adjust your approach.

5. Take control of the follow-up process—When interviewers indicate they will "let you know," imply that because you will be out networking and interviewing, you might be difficult to contact. Ask if you can call on a specific day. This will help to accelerate the decision-making process.

The most effective follow-up is initiated by telephone, however, a letter is also acceptable. The purpose of your follow-up is to reinforce the employer's understanding of your value. You will want to:

- provide new information that was not available at the time of the interview
- clarify any confusing information with which you may have left the employer
- convey a sense of urgency. Let the employer know you are moving quickly, considering other job offers and wanting to proceed with other prospects.

6. Most importantly, have a positive attitude! Adopt a "have done-can do-will do" attitude. It is not always what you say that counts but how you say it. View anything negative as a challenge, an opportunity, and something exciting. Do not be apologetic about anything; handle your "Achilles' Heel" factually and non-defensively.

You can help an inexperienced interviewer feel more comfortable by asking questions. Your prepared questions can demonstrate your knowledge of the field and your interest in the employer and provide the interviewer with an opportunity to relax by talking about something with which he/she is familiar. You can ask things like:

- "From my research I discovered that you are involved in the (i.e., Labor) area. How did you get interested in this area?"
- "What do you see as the growth areas of the firm?"
- "What departments are likely to do well in the next few years?"

By offering questions that allow the interviewer to relax and think about the answers, the interview
becomes a freer exchange of information, which benefits all the parties involved. The interviewer will feel more comfortable in your presence and will be more likely to recommend you to the hiring committee.

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