

Recruitment help for candidates

17 tips to help you make the most of your interview

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recruitment
solutions”

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What is your dream job? Whatever it is, there is at least one obstacle to getting it – the interview! You might be absolutely perfect for the job, but, just like all the other candidates, you only have a short time to make the right impression.

It's easy to feel that there isn't much you can do to control the recruitment process – but entering an interview ready and well prepared gives you a huge edge over many of the other candidates. Simply by arriving in the right frame of mind and primed for the process you will have a head start over much of the competition. Despite the increasing popularity of techniques such as psychometric testing and psychological profiling in recruitment, it is still the interview which frequently determines the outcome. With this in mind, it makes sense to ensure that you maximise the time restricted window of opportunity that the interview offers.

Inevitably, the better paid and the more interesting the position, the more competition it will attract. So before the interview process can begin, you have a few hurdles to clear. The first of these is a submitting a relevant and interesting CV – which is a whole tips booklet in itself.

At Vanilla Recruitment we aim to get to know our candidates so we only put you forward for positions that we think you are suitable for. We are also happy to offer advice and support throughout the recruitment process. This booklet has been written to help you make the most of the opportunities presented to you with suggestions and tips to help you have a successful interview – so you can get the job that you really want. Good luck!

Eloise Shelton

Vanilla Recruitment

Before the interview

Preparation is crucial to performance for most things in life, and this certainly holds true for the interview process. Don't assume that once you receive an interview offer that it is a case of looking smart, turning up and answering a set of questions as best you can. If you really want that job, be proactive and ensure that you are as well prepared as possible.

1. Do your homework. Find out as much as you can about the company. When were they established, what products or services do they offer, who are their clients? etc. Request a company brochure, look on the website and gather as much information as you can. Not only will this help you answer questions more competently, but a candidate who demonstrates that they know something about the organisation they are interviewing for will be far more impressive than an ill informed candidate.

2. Role and responsibility. Similarly, learn all you can about the position itself: what your specific duties will be, who you will report to, how much responsibility you will be expected to have etc. A good job specification should give you plenty of information, but the clearer an insight you can gain into the role, the better prepared you will be. Your Vanilla consultant will also give you as much information as they can about the role. We will only put you forward for interview if we feel that you have the right qualities and experience.

3. An eye for detail. Ensure that you double check the small print: what time the interview will start, where it will take place, how long it will take to get there, is there anything that you have been requested to take along? It's so easy to make a small mistake with times and dates which can have massive impact on your chances.

4. Refresh your memory. Reread your CV, letter of application and the job specification prior to interview so you have all the information that you need at your fingertips. You may be asked questions about what you have written or be asked to elaborate about something on your CV, so be prepared.

5. Question time. It's impossible to anticipate everything that you will be asked, but some questions are asked more frequently than others. Brainstorm a list of possible questions and prepare some sample answers. All too often in an interview, people get nervous and forget to mention the obvious or sell themselves short. If you have anticipated the sort of questions you could be asked and thought through your answers, you are far more likely to speak fluently and demonstrate what you know. However, it's important not to over prepare and sound stilted and rehearsed. A list of possible generic questions is included at the end of this tips booklet.

6. Show an interest. Prepare a list of questions that you can ask about the

company - plans for development, operation or internal reporting structures are good starting points. Having two or three intelligent questions will show the interview panel that you are interested in the company and the position.

7. Know yourself. Think about all the good qualities and experiences that you have to offer. Write them down so that when you are in the interview itself you are better able to communicate what you have to offer. It's also important to really think and be clear about why you want the position as this is a question that you are likely to be asked.

At the interview

Even if you are strong on paper, eminently qualified and confident, never sit back and assume that your experience and qualities will guarantee you the position. You need to sell yourself - to show the interviewer what you can bring to the position, and company. This is where thorough preparation can pay huge dividends.

8. First impressions count. Although the interview doesn't officially start until you enter the room, the interviewer will inevitably have an impression of you from your application – presumably a positive one as you have been invited to interview. It is important to continue this favourable impression and the first few minutes of an interview are crucial in setting the tone of the interview.

9. Dress the part. It may sound obvious, but it is important to dress appropriately for interview. Whether you are applying for a manual position, a creative role or a management position, you should be clean, well groomed and smart. For men, it may or may not be necessary to wear a suit and tie, but jeans rarely create a suitably professional impression. For ladies, short skirts and low cut tops are to be avoided. When selecting your outfit for interview, try sitting in a chair in front of a mirror – this way you can see what the interviewer will see and you can also ensure that you feel comfortable in what you are wearing. Appearance speaks volumes about self image and also has an impact on your self confidence and the impression you create, so don't underestimate its importance.

10. Make an entrance. Ensure that you know the name and role of the person/people who will be interviewing you so you can greet them by name (whether you use first name terms may depend upon the situation – if in doubt, use a more formal greeting). You should also shake hands, smile and make eye contact on entering the room. This will help create a positive interview and rapport between yourself and the other people in the room. At Vanilla, we have a good relationship with our clients and so will be able to advise you on the best approach to take.

11. Body language. How we express ourselves is sometimes as important as what we actually say. Whilst a job interview is an artificial situation which most people find nerve wracking, it's important to try and be relaxed and aim to appear positive and approachable. Your tone of voice and body language is important so

sit up straight, leaning slightly forward (to imply interest), nodding in acknowledgement, smiling and making eye contact. Not only will this help convey a confident, positive image, it will also help establish a rapport with the interviewer(s).

12. Honesty is the best policy. If you really want the position, it's tempting to exaggerate your experience or qualifications, especially if this is your first job, or you lack experience. However, most interviewers can detect when someone is being less than honest and inevitably your lies will be found out. If you don't have the relevant experience or knowledge, it is best to acknowledge that and express a willingness to learn rather than pretend that you do. If you succeed in gaining the position because of dishonesty, you may well find yourself in a job that you are not qualified to do.

13. Pause for thought. If you are asked a question that you don't understand or haven't heard clearly, don't be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase the question. Give yourself time to consider your answer – a pause of a few seconds to gather your thoughts is perfectly acceptable and shows that you are giving serious thought to your answers.

14. Strengths and weaknesses. A popular question with interviewers is enquiring about strengths and weaknesses, so it is worth thinking about this in advance. If asked about weaknesses, don't say 'none' but try to give them a positive slant e.g. in your enthusiasm for a project you sometimes try to take on too much so you are learning to prioritise. Also, think carefully about which strengths you will bring to the fore – it is worth considering the talents you have that will be most relevant to position you are applying for. Identify your key strengths and ideally support them with examples of how they have helped you in your current position.

15. Money, money, money. You may also be asked about your salary expectations at interview. This can be a sensitive issue so it is best to discuss this beforehand with your Vanilla consultant who can give you the best advice. If asked, give a figure not a salary range as if successful, you will almost certainly be offered the lowest end.

16. Show curiosity. As mentioned earlier, it is important that you show an interest in the position and the company by asking your own questions, usually at the end of the interview. These should relate to the role you are applying for, not the remuneration you can expect. If you want to know about your salary, benefits or holidays, it is best to ask your consultant, NOT the interviewer.

Questions you could ask include:

- What will my main responsibilities be?
- How will you assess my performance?
- How does my role fit into the structure of the department/company?

- What plans do you have for expansion in the future?
- What is the scope for training and promotion in the future?
- Who are your customers?
- Do you have any form of induction/ mentoring programme to support new members of staff?
- Who will I report to/be managing?
- What is your management structure?
- How would you describe your company ethos and values?

17. Drawing conclusions. Just as first impressions are important, the way that you conclude your interview can leave a lasting impression. You will most likely be asked if you are interested in the position which you should always answer in the affirmative unless you are certain that you really don't want the position. You should conclude the interview by thanking the interviewer(s) for their time, shaking hands and expressing an interest in working together in the future and/or hearing from them shortly.

Common interview questions

Whilst this list could go on for ever, there are certain questions that are likely to be asked at most interviews so it makes sense to give them some thought and prepare possible answers to these key questions. You should also expect questions that relate specifically to the position that you are applying for.

Some generic questions which are commonly asked at interview:

- Tell me about yourself (Your answer include both personal and professional aspects of your life. Be careful not to ramble too much and include the most pertinent information.)
- Why do you want this position?
- What do you know about our company and why do you want to work for us?
- Where do you see yourself on 5 years' time? (This requires tact: you want to give the impression of being a dynamic person but not one who will move onto something better six months after appointment.)
- What are your main strengths and weaknesses?

- What experiences and qualities do you have that make you suitable for this position? (Again, this can be on both a personal and a professional level.)
- What would you bring to our company?
- Why are you leaving your present position? (Do not use this as an opportunity to denigrate your current employer; try to give your answer a positive spin e.g. 'I have really enjoyed my time at Smith & Sons and feel that I have learned so much. I now feel ready to take on a greater responsibility/want to work at a larger company.)
- What do you like most about your current job? (Try to include aspects that are relevant to the post that you are applying for.)
- What kind of person do you think we are looking for (Your answer helps the interviewer to gauge your level of understanding of the position and the company.)
- How would other people/your boss/colleagues describe you?
- Tell me about your personal/professional achievements?

Ultimately, you should aim for your true personality to come through and remember that the interviewer is not trying to trick you: they are on your side and are simply trying to get to know as much about you as they can within a limited period of time. If you feel well prepared this will help your confidence levels which in turn should enable you to behave more naturally in an artificial situation. So, do your homework, take a deep breath and off you go!

Are you stuck in a job that you don't enjoy?

Do you feel that your career has stalled?

Are you unsure about how to get the job you really want?

Vanilla Recruitment can help!

About Vanilla Recruitment

Vanilla Recruitment (www.vanillarecruitment.co.uk) is based in Market Harborough on the Leicestershire/Northamptonshire border. Established in 2005 by owner manager Eloise Shelton, Vanilla's dedicated team of recruitment experts specialise in recruiting in the following areas –

Office

HR & Training

Sales & Marketing

Accountancy & Finance

Industrial & Technical

POS & POP

Contact Vanilla

If you would like to find out how Vanilla Recruitment can help you, visit www.vanillarecruitment.co.uk, email eshelton@vanillarecruitment.co.uk or call 01858 898 058