

# GAINING THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

## Tips for Career Success

Compiled By: Thomas R. Stowell, EdS, MA, GCDF

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### *The Job Search:*

Searching for employment can be a full-time job in itself! The following are traditional steps in the job search process:

- ✓ Search for open positions. This can be done by *NETWORKING*, scouring the *CLASSIFIED ADS*, searching *ONLINE JOB DATABASES*, or by *COLD CALLING* an organization that you would like to work for.
- ✓ Send in an application packet (résumé, cover letter, reference list).
- ✓ Be called in for an interview OR receive notification that the position has been filled.
- ✓ Be offered the position and negotiate the terms OR be told that you were not chosen for the position.

### *Your Résumé:*

Creating a résumé takes time. Your résumé, cover letter, and reference sheet are an expression of you and all of the things that you have accomplished to date. Keep in mind that the main purpose of your résumé and cover letter is to *get you an interview*. Once you are in front of the employer, you will have an opportunity to sell the hiring committee or manager on why you are the right person for the job.

Below are some general rules to utilize when creating a résumé:

- ❑ Use 1 inch margins all around.
- ❑ Consider using Garamond, Times New Roman, or another readable font.
- ❑ Utilize lots of white space – never cram too much onto your résumé.
- ❑ Font size should be no smaller than 11 point – 12 point is the standard.
- ❑ Make sure that your headings, text, and other components of your résumé use the same font. Varying the sizes (for headings, etc.) is fine as long as they are in proportion.
- ❑ **Bold**, underline and CAPS are powerful tools – use them wisely.
- ❑ Maximize your space by listing items in bulleted columns when appropriate.
- ❑ Use ACTION words when describing skills, experience, etc.

Your résumé is individual to your experiences and should always be tailored to each position you are applying for. No two résumés look the same. Below is a list of possible sections that you might utilize when developing your template.

- ❑ Objective (states your career or job objective)
- ❑ Summary of Qualifications
- ❑ Experience, Relevant Experience, Related Experience, Work Experience, Work History
- ❑ Education, Education and Training
- ❑ Licenses and Certifications, Licenses, Certifications
- ❑ Associations, Professional Affiliations
- ❑ Skills and Abilities
- ❑ Awards and Honors
- ❑ Co-Curricular Involvement, Co-Curricular Activities
- ❑ Courses Taken
- ❑ Specific Skills Sections – e.g. Computer Skills, Retail Skills, Customer Service Skills
- ❑ Community Service, Community Activities, Community Activism
- ❑ Academic Goal (used when sending a résumé to a college/university)
- ❑ Leadership Activities, Leadership Abilities, Leadership

### ***The Interview:***

Interviews can be daunting. You are meeting with people that you probably do not know in an environment that is likely not familiar to you. It's natural to feel out of your element – the key is to avoid being intimidated. Remember, interviews serve two purposes:

1. To allow the company to get to know you better. They will want to determine if you have the skills, talents, background, etc. to do the job and if you have the personality and work ethic to fit into the organization.
2. To allow you time to get to know your prospective co-workers and the organization that you may work for.

### ***Types of Interviews:***

Did you know that there are many different kinds of interviews? Depending on the hiring needs of a company, a variety of interview methods could be utilized. Below are descriptions of some of the most common types of interview situations:

*Tip: When someone calls to invite you to an interview – ask them “how many people will I be interviewing with?” This simple question tells you a great deal about the potential interview methods that may be utilized.*

### Screening Interview

This type of interview is meant to help the employer narrow the field of applications to a reasonable number. You must make a good impression and a firm connection with the interviewer(s) in order to be called back for the second round of interviews. This type of interview could be conducted by one person, a group of people, or by telephone.

### Initial Interview

If a company has been able to narrow the field of applicants to a manageable number by just reviewing résumés, you may be called in for an initial interview. Usually initial interviews are not conducted by the person who would be your eventual boss. In an initial interview, you may be screened by members of a committee or a middle-level manager within the company or organization.

### Follow-up Interview

A follow-up interview occurs when a hiring manager or committee needs more information about you as a candidate. You may have interviewed well, but the hiring manager/committee may not have received all of the answers that they needed. A follow-up interview is your opportunity to drive home to the manager/committee that you are the one for the job. This type of interview may occur either in person or via telephone/conference call.

### Committee/Board Interview

You will be interviewed by a group of individuals and may be seated around a table or directly in front of a panel who will each ask you questions. It is important that you determine who is “in charge” of the committee as they are your contact person after the interview is over. Try also to memorize the names of each member of the committee. This will be helpful in two ways: You can address the interviewers by name when you answer their question and you can also have names to refer back to when writing thank you notes or calling for additional information.

### Group Interview

This type of interview puts you in a room with OTHER candidates for the job. The interviewer(s) will ask each candidate the same question. Each candidate will have the opportunity to answer the question and may be given time after everyone has interviewed to provide follow-up information or a closing statement. This type of interview is very stressful, because oftentimes you don't know that you will be in direct competition with other candidates during the actual interview. There also is the issue of having to go first or last when answering questions.

### Video Conference Interview

This interview is conducted over a video teleconference. You will be able to see the interviewers and they will be able to see you. This interview is a bit awkward because you are not speaking to a person in the room but to a camera that transmits your answers to another location.

You should arrive early at the interview site to become familiar with how the equipment works. Should you be successful in this interview, you will most likely be invited in for an in-person interview – normally at the expense of the company you are interviewing with.

### Telephone Interview

This interview is carried out over the telephone. You are at a definite disadvantage during this interview because the interviewer(s) can't see you. Remember that much of the impression you make is based on your total presentation. In this type of interview, it is important to remember that your answers to interview questions need to be well crafted and actually provide an answer to the question – don't sidestep.

### Stress Interview

The purpose of a stress interview is to see how well you work under pressure. During this interview you may be asked to develop a strategy for addressing a particular case. Usually the activity is related to a task or project you may be working on if hired. Usually there is a time component to this type of interview. Should you pass this interview you may be called in for a follow-up interview or for a selection interview.

### Lunch/Dinner Interviews

These types of interviews can appear more casual than other types but are actually substantially more complex. Over lunch or dinner you will be asked questions about your experience, what you could do for the company/organization, and how your skills and abilities fit the job description. This interview is usually conducted by between one to four interviewers and most often takes place at a sit-down restaurant. You will need to be mindful of manners specific to formal dining during this interview. Body language and eating habits count just as much in this interview as your actual answers.

### Selection Interview

A selection interview occurs when a company intends to offer someone a position. Selection interviews are usually the final round of interviews where an organization or hiring manager must choose between one, two, or three final candidates. In some cases, a selection interview may only be offered to the person that the company plans to extend an offer of employment to. This may or may not be known by the interviewee before the interview.

### Academic/Admissions Interview

This type of interview is reserved for individuals applying to degree programs (conducted by admissions staff or faculty) and are usually offered after an initial review of your credentials through an application process.

## ***Preparing For An Interview:***

Follow these basic steps to ensure that you are ready for an interview:

- ✓ Research the company you are interviewing with. You need to know a bit about what they do, the company's mission, and how you might fit. You may also be able to uncover warning signs that the company is unstable or not a good fit for your personality, ethics, or values. For example, if the company has filed for bankruptcy, you may want to think about how stable the company's finances are before considering applying.
- ✓ Form answers to some of the common interview questions in your head. You will want to at least know how to describe your strengths and weaknesses.
- ✓ Practice, practice, practice. Stand in front of a mirror and answer questions. Be aware of your body language as well as how you hold yourself. Be sure to speak clearly and stay positive in your answers.

## ***Dressing For Success:***

Aside from the answers you give, one of the most important factors in making hiring decisions is how you are dressed for the interview. The way you look to potential employers plays a large part in the impression you make. The way you look says a lot about your work ethic, how seriously you take your chosen profession, and how much you want the job. Use the following tips to ensure that you are dressed appropriately for any interview.

### Basic Tips for Men and Women:

- ✓ Your shoes should be clean and well shined.
- ✓ Hair should be clean and conservatively styled.
- ✓ Clean and trim your fingernails before your interview.
- ✓ If you must use cologne or perfume, use it in moderation.
- ✓ Empty your pockets of change or other items that could make noise during an interview.
- ✓ Do not chew gum, suck on a candy, or bite your nails.

### Tips for Men:

- ✓ Wear a coordinated suit (black, gray, navy) with a white, light blue, or pastel shirt.
- ✓ In some cases, casual dress might be appropriate. In this instance, khakis are appropriate. Good quality sweaters or vest may also work in fall, winter, and spring.
- ✓ Your necktie should be understated.
- ✓ Wear dark colored shoes (burgundy, black) that are well shined.
- ✓ Your belt should match your shoes and your socks should coordinate with your pants.
- ✓ Cut down on the jewelry – wedding, high school, or college rings are fine.
- ✓ Be aware that facial hair may be a turn-off to some employers. Be sure it is well groomed if you do have it.

### Specific to Women:

- ✓ Wear a coordinated suit (knee-length skirts and coordinating jackets with a white or off white blouse). Pantsuits are also acceptable and should be worn with a coordinating top.
- ✓ Wear “flats” rather than heels for comfort.
- ✓ Beware of excessive jewelry that may distract an interviewer.
- ✓ If you must wear makeup, use it sparingly.
- ✓ If you wear nail polish, make sure that you wear a neutral color.
- ✓ Carry a briefcase instead of a purse.
- ✓ Use perfume sparingly.

### ***Common Interview Questions:***

Below are some common interview questions that you might encounter in an interview:

1. Tell me/us about you.
2. What did you most enjoy about your last job?
3. How would your friends/colleagues/boss describe you?
4. Why are you leaving your present job?
5. How long do you see yourself working for us?
6. How would you describe your ideal working environment?
7. What can you offer to our company that other candidates cannot?
8. What responsibilities do you have in your current position?
9. What is your most significant accomplishment?
10. Talk about a major obstacle you have overcome either in your personal or professional life?
11. What was a recent book that you read?
12. What area of this job would you find most difficult?
13. What do you know about the company?
14. What leadership or supervisory roles have you held?
15. What is a weakness that you have?
16. What is a strength that you have?
17. What person has had the greatest influence on you and why?
18. What frustrates you?
19. What are your long-range career objectives?
20. What are your salary requirements?
21. Describe your ideal job?
22. What kind of supervisor do you feel most comfortable working for?
23. What skills do you feel that you need to improve if you get this job?
24. Where would you like to be in five/ten years?
25. What are your interests outside of work/school?

### ***Important Interview Tips:***

1. Look the part – DRESS FOR SUCCESS.
2. Be on time – arrive up to 15 minutes early – but never late.
3. Maintain eye contact.
4. Showcase maturity, respect, and intelligence.
5. Be sure you answer the questions asked – don't sidestep!
6. Be prepared – practice, practice, practice.
7. Research the position and the company before you interview.
8. Know what sets you apart from your competition and be sure to highlight these strengths.
9. Be honest – don't ever lie during an interview.
10. Be positive – never speak negatively about a previous employer or an experience you had.
11. Whenever possible, address interviewers by name.
12. Always thank the interviewers for their time.
13. Follow up your interview with a thank you letter.
14. Don't be afraid to ask for the job – you might just be the only one who does!

### ***Biggest Interview Mistakes:***

- ✓ Arriving late or very early.
- ✓ Failing to dress appropriately for the open position.
- ✓ Smoking, drinking coffee, or eating spicy food just before an interview.
- ✓ Bringing along a friend or relative.
- ✓ Not being prepared - stumbling in your answers.
- ✓ Failing to research the company.
- ✓ Asking too many questions.
- ✓ Bringing up salary or benefits too early.
- ✓ Badmouthing your current/former boss.
- ✓ Not having a strong handshake.
- ✓ Getting angry or frustrated during the interview.