

## TOP 10 INTERVIEW TIPS

In this hyper-competitive job market, you must stand out at every opportunity. Use these tips to elevate yourself above your competition and prove to employers that you are the right person for the job.

### 1. PREPARE P-A-R STORIES

By the end of an interview, you should have articulated 3-4 well prepared P-A-R stories (P=Problem A=Actions R=Result), which outline your most significant accomplishments and worth. The trick is to know these stories so well that no matter what someone asks, you can modify the way you tell the story to answer the question.

Before an interview, take the time to literally write out all the details you can remember about your accomplishments. In the pressure of an interview, these details will not be easily retrieved. But the details make the story much more impactful and create the visualization that is so important.

*Use this simple format:*

**PROBLEM** – clearly outline what was going on in the company that needed to be addressed

**ACTIONS** – step by step, what did you do to affect the problem? Talk about time frame, systems and software you used, specific clients or vendors involved, internal teams you worked with, budgets, and challenges along the way.

**RESULTS** – ultimately, how did your actions impact the company? Talk about how you increased revenues, reduced costs, saved time, increased efficiency, etc. These quantifiable results will ultimately be the reason you win the job over someone else.

**SAMPLE QUESTION:** So, tell me about your work at XYZ Company.

**ANSWER:** Well, at XYZ Company, my main responsibility was to manage the product development of our new widget. We were given six months and a budget of \$50,000. My first step was to map out the milestone dates utilizing MSProject, then we began concept development with the creative and marketing teams. Then...(next steps.) We ended up launching the product within 5 1/2 months and came in under budget by \$7,500 through some strong negotiations with our packaging and filling vendors. We sold \$750K of widgets the first year on the market.

The answer you give should be about 2 minutes. And you could use this same P-A-R STORY to answer a question about your project management skills, how you work with a team, your negotiation experience, or your product development background simply by framing the story a bit differently and highlighting different parts of the story.

## 2. CREATE AND USE A PORTFOLIO

A great interview is all about visualization, and a well-crafted portfolio with examples of projects and/or products you've worked on will truly enhance the interviewer's ability to "see" your work. "Before and After" shots are a great way to express what something looked like or how it worked before you got your hands on it and how much better it is now.

Please know that no matter what your role, you can come up with creative ways to actually show someone your work. You can use spreadsheet of formulas, a comparative list of vendors and costs, creative inspirations, technical drawings, marketing pieces, actual completed product, mentions in articles...the possibilities are endless.

The P-A-R STORIES you created should have something to do with your portfolio pieces, and as you tell the story, use the portfolio as a tool to help with the explanation and visualization.

You wouldn't present information at a Board Meeting without visuals, and an interview should be taken just as seriously. Plus it's FUN and helps the interviewer get a much better idea of you and your work.

## 3. RESEARCH, RESEARCH, RESEARCH

With companies running lean these days, everyone's time is compressed. You may only have a 30 minute interview instead of an hour, so it's vitally important that you go well prepared. You will instantly show your respect for the interviewer's time by not asking basic questions about the company that you could already know the answers to through your research.

Use tools like LinkedIn to research the backgrounds of your interviewers and key management. Find out where they went to school and where they worked previously. You may find some commonalities with your own background, which could be valuable. Review the company website thoroughly to understand their history, products or services, clients, Executive team, mission, charities, etc. Read through their press releases. Ask your network what they know about the company, read industry specific magazines...anything you can do to walk into the interview armed with information.

## 4. ASK PROBING QUESTIONS

A few strategic questions can clearly demonstrate your understanding of the competitive landscape, your analytical skills, and simply how well you prepared for the interview. You should write down these questions in your notes for the meeting.

One of the number one complaints we hear from interviewers is that the candidate didn't ask enough questions. Here's a few general probing questions, but you should tailor your questions to the company and position you're interviewing for:

1. What are the top priorities for the first 30-60 days and first 6 months on the job?
2. How does this role support the overall company goals?
3. How will my performance be measured?
4. How does my background compare with the other candidates you're evaluating?
5. What concerns do you have about my background or fit for the role?

#### 5. COME PREPARED WITH NOTES

Having a written plan for the interview shows that you care about the opportunity and the interviewer's time. It's also a subtle cue about your work style. Your plan should include brief outlines of 3 or 4 P-A-R STORIES with the details you don't want to forget, i.e. the ones most pertinent to the job. You should also write down the questions that you want and need answered about the company and the position. Write down the names of key Executives, team members and clients, which you've already researched.

This interview outline will help you stay on point and focused. At the end of the interview when you're asked for any last questions, you can scan the information to make sure that you've covered everything. You will also walk out of the interview feeling in control, because you accomplished your agenda.

#### 6. HAVE A GOAL & CLOSE ON IT

Write down what you hope to get out of the interview, like a second interview or an offer. Make sure you ask for it, and if you haven't achieved it, ask: "How do you think my background fits your needs?" This gets to the point and, at worst reveals other objections to overcome.

#### 7. STATE YOUR INTEREST

Throughout the interview, clearly articulate your interest in the position. Make sure you ask about next steps, and indicate that you want to move forward in the process. Over the years, employers have confided in me that candidates won't be asked back for a second interview or receive an offer if they do not express sincere interest in the position.

#### 8. PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

How well you speak will have a bigger impact than what you say. "Winging it" in an interview shows, so practice your responses to all typical questions: "Tell me about yourself".... "Why are you looking?"... etc.

#### 9. BE 5 TO 10 MINUTES EARLY

Punctuality is a subtle clue to attitude and behavior style. Lateness, no matter what the excuse is a major "faux pas."

#### 10. WRITE HANDWRITTEN THANK YOU NOTES

Call me old fashioned, but there's no better marker of a consummate professional than sending handwritten thank you notes to everyone you met. Email is cheap and easy, and your interviewers probably get 50-100+ emails per day. An email thank you is not very meaningful, regardless of how well written. BUT, how special is it to get a piece of personal mail at the office, especially one thanking you for your time? Extremely.

You should have high quality cards and stamps ready to go, so that you can put the Thank You in the mail the same day as your interview. The interviewer will likely receive it within one business day.