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Introduction

Researching the organisation with whom you are attending an interview is fundamental to being successful, yet all too often, interviewers complain about the lack of preparation from candidates at the first meeting stage.

Lack of preparation portrays an impression of disinterest, complaisance, and poor attitude towards the role and the organisation itself. First impressions are made within the first few minutes of a meeting, and it is very difficult to change an opinion once it has been formed.

Lack of preparation usually creates a state of anxiety and nervousness in a candidate, which instantly means you are not performing to the best of your ability. Conversely, good, thorough preparation ensures a calm confidence, which allows you to enter the meeting in the best possible state of mind.

The interview is a sales process, and should therefore be treated as such.

A successful and professional salesperson would not enter into a meeting with a customer, without all the facts at their fingertips. The interview needs to be approached with the same diligence and preparation, the only difference is, it is you yourself that you are selling!

Research

The Company

Research the company values and history, their turnover and number of employees. Have key facts at your fingertips, do not rely on rifling through pages of website print-outs in the meeting. Their website will be an excellent source of knowledge, but contacting the company itself and asking if they have any corporate information they can send you, shows initiative and planning.

The Role

Your consultant will tell you as much as possible about the role. You should have a good understanding of the environment into which you would be selling, the products you would be responsible for, and whom your customers would be.

The Product Range

Have a brief overview of the product range you would be responsible for. Don't get bogged down in the detail, you can ask questions relating to this.

Interview Techniques

Competency based interviews (see separate guide)

Behavioural interviews are based on the idea that past behaviour is the best predictor of future behaviour and the interviewer will want specific examples of how you have demonstrated these. To prepare for this type of interview, identify the skills and traits likely to be assessed and then identify situations and experiences you can refer to demonstrate these skills. Competency focused, well-structured answers are extremely powerful, the STAR model will provide a structure to your answers.

Situation: describe the situation or problem you have encountered

Task: describe the task that the situation required or your ideas for resolving the problem

Action: describe the action you took, obstacles that you have overcome

Results: highlight outcomes achieved.

Suggested Questions

Your questions can say as much about you as your answers, so spend as much time preparing these as for the rest of your interview

- Who is your best salesperson and why?
- What are the key qualities that make someone successful with this organisation ?
- What are your main unique selling points and how would your customers view you?
- What would be a typical / model day?
- What are the short, medium and long term strategies for the organisation?
- How much account management versus new business is there on this territory?
- Are you known for developing new technologies?
- What made you join / stay with the company?

When talking about career progression, show that you are ambitious; however, make it very clear you are looking to join the organisation for this role, not the next one!

Illustrate that you are keen to be considered successful in this job, before rushing off up the ladder to get theirs.

The Close

If you want the job, ask for it!

It is often presumed, that interview etiquette dictates a candidate should not be bold enough to come right out with it and ask for the job at the end of the meeting.

However, the interview is ultimately a typical sales situation; not closing for the job is exactly the same as not asking a customer for the order.

This is your opportunity to show that you have excellent closing skills, and are not afraid to ask for your order (job) at the end of the meeting. It is important that this is done in a way that is comfortable to yourself, as this is often feels very much against the grain. It is also important not to appear too aggressive or pushy, but confident, enthusiastic, determined and able to offer them exactly what they seem to be looking for.

Even with a strong close, interviewers may seem to discourage you in order to test your reaction; remain enthusiastic and positive, even if you don't feel you will be able to leave the meeting with the answers you want.

Always remain clam, keep eye contact and remain pleasant and interested in everything that is mentioned.

Don't be discouraged if an offer isn't made then and there, quite often, the interviewer will have other candidates to see before they can make their final decision.

However, be very assured that your close for the order will have been noted, and will set you apart from your competition.

Negative Factors Listed by Interviewers

Your Interviewer will be assessing you and making notes on both your positive and negative factors. Here is a list of negative factors to be aware of:

- Poor personal appearance
- Limp handshake
- Poor eye contact
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of conviction
- Lack of research / preparation
- Lack of interest / enthusiasm
- Disrespectful of previous employers
- Being over confident or pushy
- Inability to express thought properly (inarticulate, hesitant, rambling)
- Lack of career progression / goals / achievements
- Inability to precisely explain reasons for changing roles previously
- Failure to ask relevant and insightful questions
- Lack of closure