

# Successful Interviewing

Don't leave anything to chance. Use this section to learn more on the latest in resume preparation, engaging interviewing techniques, the importance of research, winning the job offer and more.

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## **the preparation.**

Rest assured that your Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search consultant has the skills, contacts, experience and desire to help you find the new career opportunity that's perfect for you. Our client companies expect their search assignments to be filled as quickly as possible, and they depend on Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search to meet their executive search and staffing needs. When your Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search consultant locates a position that matches your goals, skills and cultural fit, you will receive our critical data and special services.

### **Keys to Successful Interview Include:**

- A complete analysis and overview of the interviewing company.
- A comprehensive description of the specific position available.
- An understanding of how the position will benefit your career.
- A professional presentation of yourself and your background.

Also, avoid negotiating your own salary objectives. Instead, persuade the management at the interview that you are the ideal candidate for their need with one of the following statements:

“Money is indeed an important factor, however, my objective is more about finding the right company fit where my skills and focused commitment will allow me to contribute significantly for the long run.”

And/Or

“If you agree it makes sense to go to the next step, I would seriously consider your best salary offer, whatever that may be.”

Finally, do not leave the interview without closing for the next step in the process. Never exit the interview while leaving any stones unturned. Don't be afraid to ask the tough question:

“Based on our brief discussion here today and your new understanding of my skills and background, are there any reasons in your mind why I would not be the perfect fit?”

If you do not ask this hard question, you may never know if any yellow flags exist. The initial interview may be your only window to uncovering these lingering concerns or hesitations on the part of the interviewer. Address these issues while face-to-face. Otherwise, you may lose the opportunity for the second interview.

### **The Self-Evaluation Process**

Before engaging in the search for an even stronger position than the one you currently enjoy, conduct an objective self-evaluation. This is vital in making the most effective presentation possible during your first interview. Beyond needing your professional skills, companies have differing corporate cultures and look for employees with personality types that fit best.

Ask yourself: What is your work attitude?

Am I a self-starter? A team player? Assertive? Ambitious? Do I take directions well? Do I listen and communicate effectively? Am I a natural born leader? Do I prefer others to take charge? What direction do I want for my career? What drives me?

Next, make a list of your strengths and skills. After studying it carefully you will feel at ease in describing both the experience you bring and the contribution you will make to the organization. This attribute list is also a powerful tool in helping you to write your resume.

### **Advanced Interview Preparation Skills**

Once your Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search Consultant schedules an interview for you with a prospective employer, it is critical you be well prepared. Extensive preparation instills superior confidence, elevating your ability to conduct an impressive interview, and to receive an offer.

This brings you back to the strategy of “Selling Yourself.” You may have mastered the skills in your chosen profession, however, in a competitive situation, your interview style is paramount. More often than not, the job offer is extended to the candidate with the stronger interviewing skills.

Research the Facts. By thoroughly analyzing the company, you will be better prepared for a more in-depth interview. Read financial statements, recent news releases and recognize historical economic trends for both the company and industry. Know the nature of their business, office locations, their divisions and number of employees. Learn about their competitors, study their corporate leadership (you may find a name you know from a prior experience) and learn as much as you can about their corporate philosophy.

If the company is publicly traded, useful information is readily available. Check online for a Dun & Bradstreet listing or a Moody's summary. Also, Hoover's, Yahoo Finance and other public databases contain valuable information. Most importantly, read the company's website. Try dropping their name into one of your favorite search engines and see what pops up. These resources will provide comprehensive background information that will be invaluable to you in the interview process.

Interviewing managers expect for you to be familiar with who they are and what they do. Be conversant about their industry.

Make a list of 10 specific questions to ask during the interview. Remember, the interview should be an exchange of information between you and the interviewer. Be prepared to answer and ask pertinent questions. Practice these responses. Through this interrogatory process, you will discover whether the position is right for you.

Some probing questions could include:

How would you describe the corporate culture and what is your department like?

What are this position's primary responsibilities? (compare this information with what was provided to us and given to you by your Lighthouse Placement Services Search consultant.)

If you don't mind me asking, why is the position available? (Newly created? Vacated? Termination?)

What skills, personality and other attributes are you looking for in the person you hire for this position? (take notes and explain later in the interview how you fit these!)

If you agree it makes sense to proceed further with these discussions, whom else might I be interviewing with prior to the final decision?

How soon do you expect to make this decision?

How do my skills and experience match your ideal candidate?

Do you have any concerns or hesitations about recommending me for further consideration for this position?

### The Right Answers

During your interview, you will likely be asked a wide variety of questions. Be prepared for some surprises and, maybe, some curve balls. Anticipate the following:

- What are your professional goals?
- What do you know about our company?
- What is your major weakness?
- What has been your favorite responsibility in previous positions?
- Tell me about your last managers, what were they like to work for?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Why should we hire you?
- How did you handle a recent difficult work situation?

### Tricky Questions

If your resume reflects a lot of “job-hopping,” be prepared to answer questions about this. Remember that a positive explanation is both plausible and appropriate. Perhaps a prior employer relocated or went out of business. If you were asked to relocate and stay on, this is worth mentioning. Try to stress the beneficial aspects of each move but be

careful not to justify short tenure as a “better opportunity, higher salary or shorter commute.” Employers do not want to be next on your list of brief stays for any reason. Keep the focus on seizing an opportunity, without appearing to lack loyalty and dedication. This can be indeed tough to balance, but it can be done and we can show you how.

You may be asked about your “worst” position or supervisor. Phrase your answer carefully. For instance, if a previous manager tended not to follow through or delegate well, you should emphasize that you learned to get the information you needed to accomplish the task for yourself.

You may also be asked about your ability to deal with stress and conflict. Try using this statement:

“Although conflicts will inevitably occur in a dynamic work environment, good communications can quickly resolve most problems due to stress.”

When it comes to interviewing, the fewer negatives the better. If you have had an unpleasant manager in the past, or the company’s work environment was especially difficult, it is always best left unsaid or neutralized.

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## **the interview.**

Once your Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search consultant has secured you an interview, it’s up to you to sell yourself to the prospective employer. As a result of your diligent preparation and rehearsal, you should feel totally confident and prepared. The following are just a few things to keep in mind before and during the interview:

Make a winning first impression at the interview. Be prompt, make eye contact and give a firm handshake. Making eye contact establishes your confidence. Dress one notch above what is expected.

Look for some common ground between you and the interviewer to help establish a positive rapport. You may have the same alma mater or past mutual experiences.

Your physical appearance is initially as important as your interviewing skills and credentials. You only get one chance to make a first impression, so dress attractively, but conservatively.

Men should wear a well-tailored, solid colored suit (preferably dark blue or gray), a solid, neutral shirt, a striped or solid tie, and dark well-polished shoes. They should also get a good haircut.

Women should wear a business suit or a tailored dress with a jacket, medium-heeled, closed pumps and hose in a neutral color. Avoid frivolous jewelry, and always style hair conservatively.

Be punctual. Arriving ten minutes early is fine, but no earlier. Arrive too early and you can put undue pressure on the interviewer. If it seems you might be late, even if it's only five minutes, you **MUST** call with a credible explanation. Traffic is not an excuse. Also, should you be running late, please call your Lighthouse Placement Services consultant for immediate advice.

If feasible, make a test drive to the interview location before your meeting. Familiarize yourself with the parking facilities, correct entrance to the office, etc. If your interview is during a rush hour, allow generously for extra travel time.

If you complete an application before the interview, remember that salary should NEVER be discussed until after an offer is made or one becomes imminent. Leave that section of the application blank or “negotiable.”

Remember that the interview is your opportunity to expand upon your résumé’s information and sell yourself. Say enough to get your point across without over answering. Do not ever inquire about benefits (vacation time, benefit plans, bonuses, etc.) directly with the company. Your Lighthouse Placement Services consultant will negotiate these details. Instead, concentrate your discussion on the position’s responsibilities and future growth potential. The interviewer will mention benefits when he/she feels it is appropriate.

When you are offered the position and it meets your expectations, ask to sleep on it anyway. Accepting too quickly can leave negotiating points on the table and this may be the only time to determine whether you start with one or two weeks vacation for example.

Allow your Lighthouse Placement Services consultant to extract their best and final offer on your behalf. If you’re ambivalent, don’t refuse the offer outright either. Thank them enthusiastically and ask for some time to consider. Your consultant can often negotiate in your favor on conditions that might prevent you from accepting the offer or we may be able to open other doors you may prefer at this company, but only if the “turndown” is handled with class and respect.

If you’re not offered the position at the interview, be realistic. Frequently, other key people must be consulted before the offer is extended. The hiring official may also want to discuss your candidacy further with your Lighthouse Placement Services consultant.

Other candidates may be scheduled for interviews, and the hiring official may want to complete that process before making a decision.

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## **following up.**

After your interview, follow up immediately with an email or letters to the interviewer (or interviewers). Whether you have been offered the position or are still under consideration, this serves to strengthen your position in terms of professionalism.

Also allow us to discuss your approach and content BEFORE sending as we oftentimes have the advantage of prior dealings with this manager. We know what they look for in this regard.

The letter should thank the company for the opportunity to interview and emphasize your enthusiasm for the position. Include any thoughts about the position's responsibilities and what additional contributions you can make to the organization that may not have been discussed in the interview. Close your correspondence by stating that you look forward to further discussion about the opportunity. Get your letter in the mail the same day or the day following your interview.

If a second interview was mentioned, indicate how pleased you are to schedule that meeting and that you will review your calendar with your search consultant.

Immediately following the interview, call your Lighthouse Placement Services Professional Search consultant to provide comprehensive feedback on how the interview went. This will give your consultant an accurate recap to help plan a follow-up approach with the hiring manager.

Your consultant will then coordinate the hiring process by arranging any subsequent interviews, salary negotiation and relocation requirements, establishing a starting date, and resolving any open points in terms of questions on either side of the process.

Before the “marriage” takes place, we will stay in the middle of these discussions so that neither side has any negative feelings associated with negotiations. This makes for a much better “honeymoon.”

In the end, these strategies can be your key to a more successful and satisfying professional future.