

The Ultimate Guide to the Interview

Introduction

Unless you have been living in a cave over the last year or more, you won't have failed to notice that things are rather good for job seekers right now. With employment levels at their highest for over 40 years and the rise in demand for skilled Candidates showing no sign of slowing down anytime soon, you would be forgiven for thinking that finding and being offered that all-important job of your dreams is easier than it has ever been. However, you would be wrong.

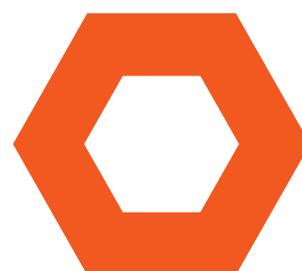
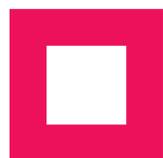
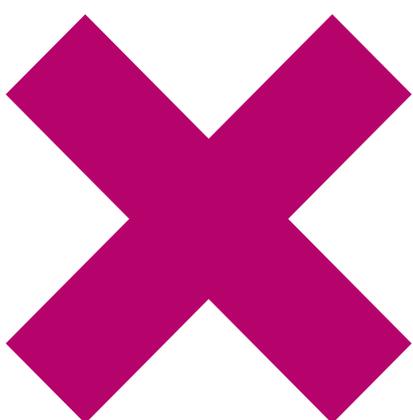
While Employer demand is on the up and more jobs are being created than there are people to fill them, that doesn't mean that hiring managers will bend over backwards to make an offer to the first person they interview who matches the criteria of what they are looking for. Rather, the opposite is the case.

Indeed, Employers can see that there are fewer people actively seeking a new career opportunity. However, they will hold out for the right hire to come along. After all, the wrong appointment can cost businesses thousands of pounds in lost revenues spent on salaries, training, equipment and of course,

time. This places the onus on you, the Candidate. It is your job to ensure that you position yourself as the best person for the position during the interview stage. Easier said than done, right? Actually, no.

The secret to interview success is down to the strategy you take, from the planning and preparation you undertake before you even set foot inside the Employer's premises, to what you do both during and immediately after the interview itself.

Over the next few pages, we will share with you the insights that we have gained after 20 years of supporting Candidates like you to secure the right role with the right Employer at the right time. Everything that follows is based on real-world practical experiences that you can adopt and adapt to empower you. By taking these onboard, you will be able to approach your career search with confidence and a renewed sense of optimism that will improve your chances of job success.



It's all in the preparation

It is a cliché, but like many clichés it is also true: if you don't plan for your interview then you are effectively committing career sabotage. This may sound dramatic, but having worked with hundreds of major Employers since 1998 they always tell us that one of the greatest frustrations is finding someone who is seemingly a great Candidate on paper but turns out to be the complete opposite when it comes to the interview. Worse still, the interviewee is so nervous they simply fall apart the second they enter the interview room.

In a 2008 documentary following the casting process for the Broadway musical A Chorus Line, one of those who auditioned said that "Sometimes nerves take over and you don't show who you are." This sentiment can very easily be applied to many job seekers, some of whom may even draw a blank when asked basic questions such as "What attracted you to this role?" or "Where do you see yourself in five years time?" Stage fright can have a crippling effect and scupper your chances of interview success, but by preparing in the right way you will ace the audition. Here's how.

Do your homework

This might be an obvious one, but if you don't know enough about the company you're going to interview with, your application is going to stand out... for the wrong reasons. Go through the Employer's website to get a good feel for what they do, who their customers are, how they like to describe and position themselves and what the culture is like.

Find out who the key people in the business are, and if you have the details of the people interviewing you, check out their profiles either on the website or on LinkedIn. Not only will this give you an insight into their

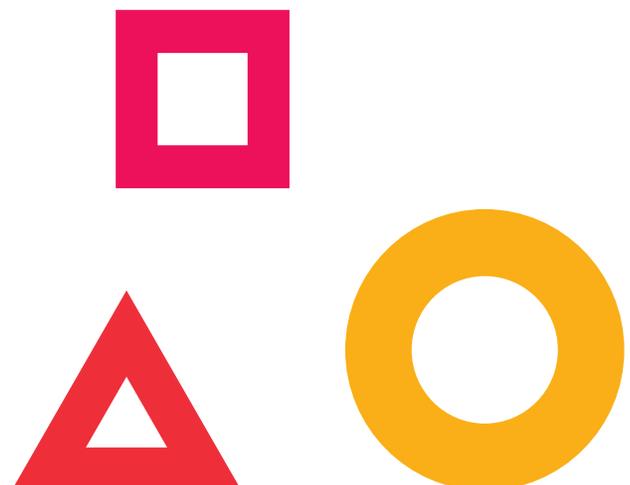
backgrounds, it will help you prepare some questions of your own.

The interview is a two-way process and it is just as important for you to see if the Employer is someone you'd like to work with as it is for them to determine if you're the right fit for them. Employers will be looking for the signs you know who they are, so make sure you don't miss them. The last thing you want is to be flustered because you have been tested on a question about the company and you don't know the answer.

Be prepared to interview the interviewer!

Having done the research above, you could ask the people interviewing you about their careers too. For example: "How long have you worked here and what do you enjoy most about the role you do" Or, "What attracted you to the company and what makes you want to stay?"

Don't forget to prepare answers to those questions that always come up at interview – the "Tell me about a time when you...", "How would your previous boss describe you", or "What is your greatest career achievement to date – the one thing you are most proud of?" The list goes on. But while you know what questions are likely to be asked, don't wing them on the day – prepare strong answers in advance. This shows the interviewer that you have thought about these things.



Show your enthusiasm for the role

Make sure you plan questions that are specific to the job itself. What type of projects will you be involved with? Who will be your immediate line manager? How big is the team? What support will you be provided with when you start? Are there career training and development opportunities? What will success for this role look like to you?

Don't forget, you have applied for this job because you think it could be a place for you to progress and develop your skills. This means that the interview isn't just for the Employer to assess whether you are what they're looking for, it's also for you to see whether they are the right fit for you.

The fact you have questions demonstrates your confidence, your ability to challenge situations and it shows that you are keen to learn. This will tick the boxes of every Employer you interview with, and give them an idea of what it will be like to work with you in the future. It'll also tell you what you need to know, and what it'll be like for you to work with them.

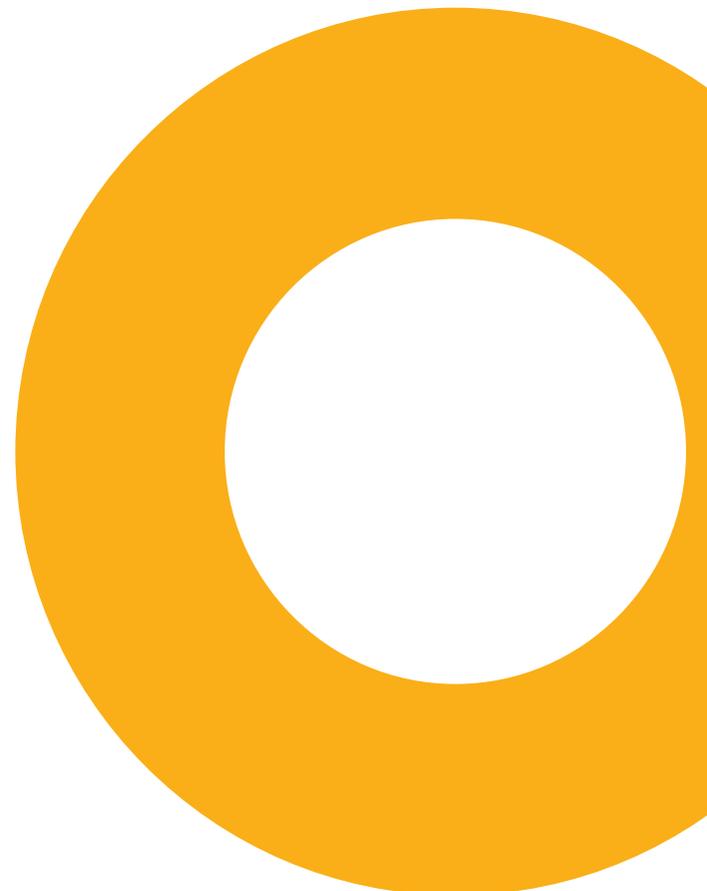
Curveballs are also welcome here. You need to be able to surprise an interviewer, make them think, and ultimately, remember you. Trust us when we say that you don't want to be the Candidate who doesn't have anything to add at the end of an interview.

Remember, you're not just there to make up the numbers – the job will come with its own set of expectations and it is important that you understand how your role plays a part in the rest of the business.

Dress for the job you want, not the one you already have

In Shakespeare's Hamlet, Polonius says "For the apparel oft proclaims the man." In other words, the way you present yourself is a reflection of how you wish to be perceived by a prospective Employer. Wearing clothing that is appropriate for the job you are applying for not only makes you look good, it gives a confidence that can positively influence your body language, too.

Indeed, if you 'look the part', the way in which you walk in and out of the room, your posture as you sit, your facial expressions and tone of voice are all affected. So, wear clothes that you feel comfortable with, invest in a new suit or dress if your current one is over four or five years old (fashions date, sorry), and choose something that is reflective of you. At the end of the day, this is part of your personal brand and the right outfit can make a longer lasting first impression.



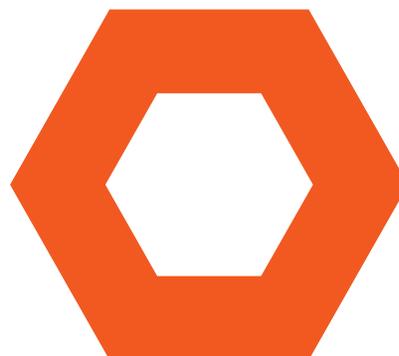
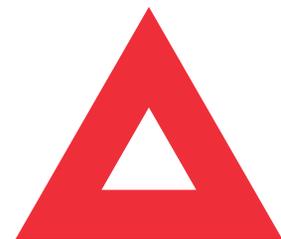
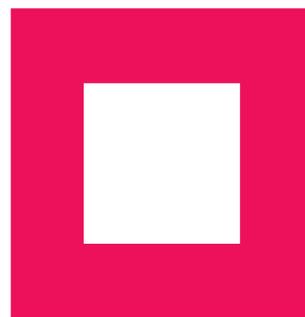
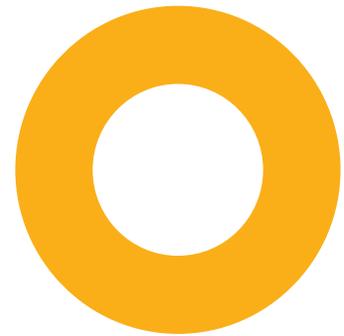
Know how to ‘sell’ yourself with an elevator pitch

Suppose you walked into a networking event and you were asked on the spot to give a brief summary of who you are, what you do and what your purpose is in attending, would you be able to answer easily and quickly?

Research shows that Employers form an impression of Candidates by the way they dress within seven seconds of meeting them. We’ve addressed this point in the last section, but that leaves you with just 53 seconds to influence their hiring decision. That’s right, various studies agree that Employers make up their mind on the suitability of an applicant within one minute of meeting them. That means you need to make a good impression... fast.

So, if the employer says, “Tell me about yourself”, you need to have your patter mastered. Focus on your current role and your key strengths and achievements in that role. Also, include something personal that you are passionate about such as an interest or hobby that you have (Tip: Only include activities that could add value to the role you are applying for, such as team-based sports).

Write it down and rehearse it out loud several times – the more familiar you are with it, the greater the confidence you will exude which in turn makes the Employer gravitate more towards you. And that can only be a good thing!



Be yourself

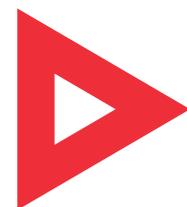
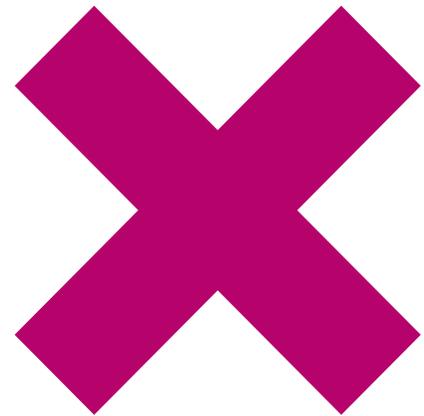
From the moment you enter the interview room, you need to be mindful that you're not showing your interviewer how good you are at your job. Rather, you're selling your potential to be great in that role should they hire you. But unlike an actor auditioning for a part in a play, the only character you need to get into is your own.

People work with people they like and Employers will be put off by a Candidate who is trying too hard to portray themselves as a 'type' of person who they think the company is looking for. So, don't be intimidated by those sat across the table from you, and let them see what makes you the unique Candidate you are.

Of course, that can be hard to do when the interview throws in a few curveball questions that can take you off guard. Their intention is not to trip you up, though. In fact, the reason they ask these things is because they want to see how you react and respond to certain challenges: Can you think on your feet? Will you cope under pressure? How do you find the solutions to unexpected events?

There may be times when you simply don't have all the answers, and this is when you can take on the role of an actor. If they fluff their lines, the show goes on regardless. So, an actor will improvise (think on the spot) rather than clam up and walk off stage (or leave the interview room).

If you find yourself in a similar situation, be calm and confident – you'll gain the respect of the interviewer if you simply say. "I'm not too sure what the answer is to that, but if I am given time to consider the options I am sure a solution will be found."



The follow up

A survey of marketing and advertising executives in the United States sought to find out how confident people were in how they judged situations. They found that while 90% of respondents claimed they were accurate, the reality was they were actually wrong 61% of the time. The point is this: don't assume that you know how well the interview has gone.

In the UK, we can be a negative bunch at times. When people ask, "How did the interview go?" the likely response is one of either "It went OK, I think" or "I'm not sure, it's too hard to tell." Either way, try to avoid thinking too much about it until you know the outcome. Now comes the worst part: the wait.

Waiting for news on a role can feel like waiting for rain in a drought, and the temptation to reach for the phone to call your recruitment contact can be overbearing. However, fear not. There are ways to follow up without being too persistent.

Send an email the same day

It is perfectly acceptable to send a simple follow up email when you get home after the interview. Not only is it courteous and polite, it also shows the Employer that you are still keen on the role and for working with the company – they like feedback too.

Keep the email sort and simple, let them know that you enjoyed meeting them and are looking forward to hearing from them soon. Don't try to re-sell yourself at this stage. Instead, think about some of the things that may have come up during the interview that are worth following up on.

For instance, if you talked about an article that you read then share the link with the interviewer. Or perhaps you had gone for a Senior PR role and the interviewer requires you to provide a portfolio of previous campaigns you have worked on - send examples and leave the door

open for them to ask further questions about the role you played in that project, the outcomes achieved and the lessons you have taken away from the experience.

In other words, keep the conversation going. Even if you aren't required to send anything additional, it's proactive to do so and demonstrates an enthusiasm for the role you were interviewed for. Remember, interviews are an exercise in marketing where each party is positioning themselves as the Employer or Employee of choice.

But the hiring process is an investment in the business itself and interviewers are under pressure to ensure they recruit those people who can be an asset to the organisation. By showing evidence of your success in previous roles, you are effectively providing them with peace of mind that any risk in hiring you is mitigated.

Follow up with a call a week later

If you haven't heard back by this point, it is highly likely your email has fallen into the jam-packed inbox, been opened and subsequently forgotten about. Sometimes then, a real conversation can go a long way. Remember, you have met this person, so they are not a total stranger. A phone call will allow you to get your personality across, engage with the Employer and ask any questions you wish. answers in advance. This shows the interviewer that you have thought about these things.

Keep in contact with your recruiter

Recruitment is a fast-paced industry, so if you have used a recruitment agency to help in your search, lean on them for support in following up on the progress of your application. A recruitment partner will do all the hard work for you, so allow them to use the strong relationships they have built up with Clients to help you here. If by chance you are unsuccessful in your application, they will also be able to obtain useful feedback, which will be valuable guidance that you can use in the future.

Conclusion

For over 20 years, we have helped thousands of Candidates at every stage of their careers to find the right role that matches their requirements and expectations. And we can help you, too.

Henry Ford once said: “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” By planning and preparing for your interview, many of the obstacles that stand between you and your ideal job will be shifted. It will take time, but like any venture that is worthwhile the investment you make in yourself now will pay dividends later on and you don’t need to do it alone.

Contact the teams in Oxford or London today and let’s work together to get you to where you want to be.

Click [here](#) for more information or contact us on:

Oxford: **01865 335 600**

London: **0203 800 1920**

Email: **jobs@allen-associates.co.uk**