

*Recruitment solutions  
through experience  
delivered with integrity*



## THE SUCCESSFUL CANDIDATE

A Successful  
Interview Process



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## THE INTERVIEW...

...is one of the most important stages in the recruitment process. Having received and studied your CV, the employer is keen to find out more. You have successfully overcome a number of hurdles and this is your chance to prove whether you are the right person for the job.

The purpose of this booklet is to help you get the most from your job interview, whether you are applying for an interim position or a permanent post. By knowing a little of what the employer expects from you, and by making a few simple preparations, you can avoid some of the common interview pitfalls and present your skills and experience in the most favourable light.

An interview is a two-way process and we encourage candidates to focus on their own goals and aspirations when considering career opportunities. As well as demonstrating your ability to meet the demands of the post, you should also use the interview to determine whether the job and the company are right for you.

This booklet, combined with expert guidance and support from the Proxime team, should provide you with all the information you need to conduct a successful interview. The rest is up to you... *Good luck!*

## THE PROXIME PHILOSOPHY

You have been selected as a Proxime candidate on the strength of your abilities and experience and we are committed to providing you with the best possible recruitment advice and service. Similarly, as a Proxime candidate we regard you as an ambassador for the company and the image you present at interview should reflect this.

We expect all of our candidates to attend interviews formally dressed. Although some companies have a relaxed corporate style, it is always advisable to dress conservatively at this early stage. Research has shown that the interviewer often decides within the first few minutes whether the candidate is the right person for the job and that he or she uses the information gathered in the next stages of the interview to reinforce these initial impressions. Therefore your style of greeting, attitude, appearance and grooming are all absorbed in the initial decision-making process. Remember that you will probably encounter other members of staff before and after the interview and that the interview really begins at reception and ends when you leave the building.

At Proxime, we build relationships based on confidence and trust, supported by enthusiastic action with results. This philosophy should be reflected in the way you conduct your interview. You should be well-informed about the company's activities, be able to provide a clear picture of your career to date, and be completely truthful about your skills, education and experience at all times.

By being honest, professional and enthusiastic, you cannot fail to present yourself, and Proxime, in the most favourable light.

*P*eople who have talent  
should always dress  
like stockbrokers.

Noel Coward, Playwright

## YOUR CV: CREATING THE RIGHT IMPRESSION

It is encouraging to know that you can significantly improve your chances of success before you even step into the interviewer's office. Although you may be meeting for the first time, the employer will have formed a mental picture of you from studying your CV or application form. Experience has shown that if an interviewer expects to meet a strong candidate, then this expectation will be self-fulfilling and he or she will create opportunities for the candidate to perform well. In turn, the candidate will sense this approval and be encouraged to excel.

At Proxime, our policy is to forward a copy of your CV to the employer without any addition or modification on our part. This not only eliminates the chance of error or omission in transcription but also allows the employer to acquire a sense of your individual style and personality. Given that the employer will base many of his or her assumptions on the content and presentation of your CV, you should seize this golden opportunity to **'pre-condition'** your interviewer.

### Your CV should:

- be professionally presented
- stress your achievements
- be based around concrete facts
- highlight any special skills
- communicate your unique selling points
- be supported by a well-written application form
- help your Account Manager promote you as a candidate

# PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW

## - working with your Account Manager

The key to a successful interview is thorough preparation. Finding out as much as you can about the post, the company and the industry will place you in a strong position and give you the necessary confidence to handle most situations. Similarly, a careful analysis of your own career history will allow you to highlight the most positive aspects of your application and prepare you for in-depth questioning on any weaker points.

Once you know that an interview has been arranged, you should work closely with your Account Manager to ensure that you have all the relevant details. A number of documents are enclosed with this booklet which you should study carefully.

You will also receive company information which should provide the basis for further research along with a map showing the location of the company premises and/or detailed directions on how to get there. (If there is more than one reception area, you should check in advance where you are expected to report.)

In addition, your Account Manager will brief you on the requirements of the post and provide an overview of what the job entails. If you are unsure of any aspect, you should ask for further information. Your Account Manager will also let you know approximately how long the interview will last and the number of candidates under consideration.

Be clear as to the role of the interviewer as you will want to highlight different aspects of your career depending on whether you are discussing your application with the line manager, director or a representative from Human Resources. If there is to be more than one interviewer, your Account Manager should be able to provide the names of the other members of the panel.

Similarly, if you are expected to participate in a group interview with other candidates, you will be informed beforehand. Some companies ask candidates to sit aptitude tests designed to assess the candidate's psychological profile or technical capabilities. If this is the case, your Account Manager will advise you accordingly.

### Before interview, check that you have :

- a map or directions on how to get there
- the name and job title of the interviewer/s
- a brief company profile
- an idea of the length of the interview
- advice on the number of candidates under consideration
- details of any aptitude or technical tests

*The best preparation  
for good work tomorrow  
is to do good work today.*

Elbert (Green) Hubbard,  
American businessman and writer

# PREPARING FOR INTERVIEW

## - knowing the facts

**A**rmed with the information provided by your Account Manager, you should aim to find out as much as you can about the company, its activities and competitors. In addition to a brief marketing profile, your Account Manager may be able to provide extracts from the company's corporate literature and copies of relevant press cuttings. If there are important gaps in the information please let your Account Manager know. However, you should always be ready to carry out your own independent research.

The Internet is a useful source of information almost all companies have web sites. If you know someone who already works with the company you may be able to gain valuable insight regarding the position on offer and the environment in which you would be working. By learning more about the potential employer, your pre-interview research will help you assess how the post and the company meet your own career objectives.

Although it may appear self-evident, you should be familiar with every detail of your CV. A vague recollection of its contents is insufficient - you must be sure of your facts. (It may be useful to refer to a copy of your CV during the interview.) Aim to develop unique selling points which will distinguish you from other candidates. Highlight the special skills which you have, training courses you have attended, any useful experience which sets you apart. In other words, relate your own experience to the demands of the post.

Examine any areas of weakness which the interviewer may wish to explore, and spend time anticipating your response. (For instance,

you may not have extensive experience of all the areas the company requires but you can demonstrate that you are keen to learn and can absorb information quickly.) Be prepared to explain gaps in your CV and describe the positive gains you have made from a career break, overseas travel or voluntary work. By emphasising the skills and experience which you do have, you can show how these will provide added value.

You may find it useful to compose a short career statement which describes who you are, what you have achieved and what you can offer the employer. This will provide a valuable anchor when responding to open-ended questions especially those inviting you to 'describe yourself'. In addition, you should prepare a list of five or six questions which you would like to ask regarding the post, the company and the prospects for future career development.



Finally, try to keep up-to-date with developments in your chosen industry and the business environment in general by reading industry journals as well as the daily press. By being alert you can learn about developments affecting the company, which may prove invaluable during the course of your interview.

# CARPE DIEM

**S**ieze the day - You are being interviewed because the employer needs to hire someone and wants to find out if you are the right person for the post. Through the interaction which takes place during the interview, the employer will be evaluating your strengths and weaknesses, your qualifications, skills and intellectual qualities. As well as assessing your technical expertise, your interviewer will probably delve deeply to determine your attitudes, aptitudes, stability, motivation and maturity.

It is worth noting that, in certain situations, you may have more experience of the interview process than your interviewer. If this becomes evident during your discussion, it is vital that you maintain a courteous and respectful attitude throughout.

Similarly, whether the position on offer is a short-term contract or an interim role, you should approach the interview with the same professionalism as you would a permanent position. It is unwise to be complacent as competition for the post is often stiff and the interviewer may have future long-term projects in mind when selecting candidates.

## The interview should centre around: -

- You
- Your previous roles and responsibilities
- Your achievements to date
- How you have achieved that success
- Why you are successful
- The benefits that you can bring to the company
- Your future hopes and career aspirations

It is important to remember that you are in complete control of the information you present. You can respond to the interviewer's questions in a number of ways and release as much or as little information as you feel appropriate. The interviewer is also under pressure to find the right candidate and he or she wants to be reassured that you can do the job. Therefore you need to inspire confidence and prove that you are motivated, reliable and committed.

Essentially, the interviewer wants to cover three basic points. By bearing these in mind, you will be able to focus on the main objectives of the interview.

### Are you capable of doing the job?

- do you have the relevant skills and experience?

### Will you do the job successfully?

- are you motivated, hard working, able to handle job responsibilities?

### Will you fit in?

- do your values and personality suit the culture of the organisation?

## INTERVIEW DO'S & DON'TS

**Do** plan to arrive at least 15 minutes early. This will give you the time to take stock of your surroundings, study any company literature on display and focus your thoughts.

**Do** let your Account Manager know if you are unavoidably delayed and expect to be late. (We prefer to pass the message on to the employer.) If you have a reasonable explanation your courtesy can help counteract any negative impression. This should only happen in extreme circumstances as late arrival for a job interview is rarely, if ever, excusable.

**Do** complete any application forms you are presented with, fully and neatly. DON'T relax and rely on your application or CV to do your selling for you. Most employers will want you to speak for yourself.

**Do** bring extra copies of your CV to the interview as you may be invited to discuss your application with other key members of staff.

**Do** offer a warm, firm handshake. Give the appearance of energy as you walk. Smile. Create a positive first impression.

**Do** greet the employer by his or her surname if you are sure of the pronunciation. If you are not sure of the name, check at reception or, as a last resort, ask him or her to repeat it.

**Do** wait until you are offered a chair before sitting. Sit well back in the chair and lean forward slightly. Look alert and interested at all times. Be a good listener as well as a good talker.

**DON'T** make derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies.

**DON'T** smoke even if the employer smokes and offers you a cigarette. DON'T chew gum and DON'T be tempted to eat the biscuits offered with a tea or coffee.

**DON'T** answer questions with a simple 'yes' or 'no'. Explain wherever possible. Tell those things about yourself which relate to the situation.

**DON'T** be tempted to over-answer a question even if a long pause develops. Be succinct and have the confidence to conclude at the right moment.

**DON'T** get involved in conversations about politics, economics or religion. Since this is a potentially delicate situation it is best to say no more than is necessary.

**DON'T** let your discouragement show if you get the impression that the interview is not going well. Occasionally, an employer who is genuinely interested in your possibilities may appear to discourage you in order to test your reaction.

**DON'T** argue with your interviewer. There is often a reason for posing a deliberately provocative question. Respond calmly and tactfully and show that you are able to cope well in stressful situations.

**DON'T** enquire about salary, holidays and other pay-related issues at the initial interview, unless you are positive the employer is interested. If the interviewer asks what salary expectations you have, indicate what you are currently earning and explain that you are more interested in opportunity than in a specific salary amount at present.

**Do** express interest and enthusiasm in the post and use positive body language to convey this.

**Do** look a prospective employer in the eye while you talk to him/her.

**Do** follow the employer's leads, but try to get the employer to describe the position and duties to you early in the interview so that you can relate your background, skills and accomplishments appropriately.

**Do** make sure that your good points come across to the interviewer in a factual, logical and sincere manner. Stress your achievements and use concrete examples for instance of the systems you have installed, processes you have developed, savings you have achieved.

**Do** answer questions truthfully, frankly and as much 'to the point' as possible. Don't lie or bluff.

**Do** use concrete examples from the past to illustrate how you would tackle tasks in the future.

**Do** reflect carefully, but quickly, when asked a potentially difficult question. Try to understand the interviewer's motive and avoid giving a reflex response. Repeating the essential points of the questions may provide the necessary 'breathing space'. This technique also helps when you are responding to multiple queries within the same question.

**Do** always conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing. Never close the door on an opportunity. It is better to be in a position where you can choose from a number of positions, rather than just one.

*Always do your best.  
What you plant now,  
you will harvest later.*

© G. Mandino

## 50 COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

**B**elow you will find some of the common questions posed at interviews and you should be prepared to answer these with confidence. The list is far from exhaustive and you should anticipate questions relating specifically to your own career history and industry skills.

- ❓ What do you know about our company?
- ❓ Why do you think you might like to work for our company?
- ❓ Why did you choose to work in your chosen field?
- ❓ Tell me about yourself.
- ❓ Why do you wish to leave your current job?
- ❓ What are your particular areas of expertise?
- ❓ What do you think determines a person's progress in a successful company?
- ❓ What job in our company do you want to work towards?
- ❓ Which jobs have you enjoyed the most? Why?
- ❓ Which jobs have you enjoyed the least? Why?
- ❓ Describe a difficult situation and how you handled it.
- ❓ For what reasons did you leave your previous jobs?
- ❓ Why you were not working between ... and ...?
- ❓ What did you do during the time you were out of work?
- ❓ How would you describe yourself?
- ❓ Give examples of your major achievements to date.
- ❓ Have you experienced failure?
- ❓ How do you get the best out of people?
- ❓ Do you have management experience?
- ❓ What is your style of management?
- ❓ What types of people rub you up the wrong way?
- ❓ How do you manage your time?

- ❓ How do you approach a new project?
- ❓ What do you enjoy most about your work?
- ❓ What do you enjoy least about your work?
- ❓ How do you react to stress?
- ❓ Do you like regular hours?
- ❓ What have you done which shows initiative and willingness to work?
- ❓ Do you prefer working alone or as part of a team?
- ❓ What kind of person do you like to work for? Describe your ideal boss.
- ❓ Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
- ❓ Will your previous employers be happy to provide references?
- ❓ If we asked for a reference from your current employer what would it say?
- ❓ What contributions have you made in your previous jobs to justify your salary there?
- ❓ Can you take instructions without feeling upset?
- ❓ What are your strengths?
- ❓ What are your weaknesses?
- ❓ Do you enjoy making decisions?
- ❓ How do you adapt to change?
- ❓ Describe the training courses you have attended.
- ❓ Are you willing to relocate?
- ❓ If you are successful today, how long would you plan to stay with this company?
- ❓ What level of salary are you expecting?
- ❓ How do you spend your spare time? What are your hobbies?
- ❓ What types of books do you read? What was the last book you read?
- ❓ How do you manage your personal finances? Do you have any debts?
- ❓ How do you keep your knowledge of the industry up-to-date?
- ❓ Which trade magazines do you read?
- ❓ Are you applying for jobs in other companies?
- ❓ Do you have any questions for us?

## CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

Just as it is important to create a favourable impression at the beginning of your interview, it is equally important to leave the interview on a positive note. The employer will usually ask if there is anything further you would like to know and this gives you the opportunity to pose any relevant questions which have not been answered in the course of the interview. Restate briefly why you think you can make an exceptionally strong contribution to the job.

Do not leave the interview without knowing what happens next. Find out when you can expect to know the outcome of your discussion. Will short-listed candidates be asked to attend a further interview or sit an aptitude test? If you are definitely interested in the position and are confident that it matches your requirements, confirm your enthusiasm and ask for the next interview if the situation demands.

Don't be discouraged if a definite offer isn't made or specific salary discussed. The employer may want to confer with colleagues or interview more candidates before arriving at a decision. Be alert for signals and do not prolong the interview unnecessarily.

As the meeting comes to a close, thank the employer for his or her time and for having considered your application. If you have answered the three questions uppermost in the employer's mind, ie. are you capable of doing the job?, will you do the job successfully?, will you fit in?, then you have done all you can.

# CONFIDENCE AT INTERVIEW COMES FROM BEING IN CONTROL

## Find out about

The job and the responsibilities  
The company and its competitors  
What the company expects from you

## Demonstrate

Relate the demands of the job to your own experience  
Show what contributions you can make

## Uncover any concerns

Find out if the employer has any reservations about you or your ability to do the job

## Dispel these concerns

Overcome these reservations  
Concentrate on the benefits you can offer

## Conclusion

Express your enthusiasm and convey confidence in your ability to do the job  
Go over reservations again if necessary and overcome them  
Confirm your interest and leave the employer with a positive impression

# WHAT TO DO NEXT...

**C**all your Proxime Manager as soon as possible after the interview to discuss your thoughts and feelings. He or she will want to talk with you directly before the employer gets in touch! If you are interested in the position, Proxime is there to help you get it!

Take time to review your interview and make a brief written summary. These notes could provide useful reference material should you win the position. They could also provide groundwork material for a second or perhaps even a third interview. Interview notes could also help you prepare for interviews with other companies.

It is advisable to approach second and third interviews with the same professionalism as the first. On these occasions, you will be generally invited to meet other key members of staff, often from different departments within the company. You should aim to build on the information gathered in the first interview and be able to demonstrate the results of further research carried out on the position and company since your last meeting.

Whatever the outcome, it is wise to regard each interview as a learning experience which provides an opportunity for personal development and future success.



*he golden opportunity you are seeking is in yourself. It is not in your environment; it is not in luck or chance, or the help of others; it is in yourself alone.*

Orison Swett Marden,  
former editor of *Success*