UofA UNIVERSITY OF ARKANSAS
DIVISION OF AGRICULTURE
Cooperative Extension Service

Family and Consumer Sciences

FSHEC105

Going to Work Series

The Job Interview

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Identifying basic and transferable skills, setting up a job search, writing a resumé and filling out a job application are all part of getting a job. However, your ultimate goal is to meet and talk with an employer in a face-to-face interview. Together you will talk about your qualifications and interests, as well as the job and the company at which you hope to work. The interview is your opportunity to really shine and show an employer why you are the right person for the job. It is also an opportunity for you to find out about the company. The interview is an important step in landing a job. You should take this opportunity seriously. You must be prepared.

Purpose of the Job Interview

The purpose of the job interview is to help you and the employer learn as much as possible about each other. From an employer's point of view, the interview provides a personal opportunity to get to know an applicant. He or she can only learn so much about an applicant from a resumé or a job application. References won't tell the whole story of an applicant's abilities. The employer needs to know how you will fit in with the company. There is no substitute for the face-to-face meeting. The employer uses the interview to evaluate the applicant's personality and qualifications for a job. Most employers or personnel managers have experience and training in interview techniques to help them learn more about an applicant. Subtle things, such as the way you handle certain questions, can tell a trained interviewer something about your attitude and work habits. The interview should always be treated as a two-way street; each side needs to ask questions and supply answers. You are choosing an employer as much as an employer is choosing you.

Your first goal in the interview is to stand out in a positive way in the employer's mind. You want to be seen as an individual with personal strengths as well as one with qualifications for the specific job. Instead of just someone with skills and education, you want to be seen as a whole person. There will be many people who are qualified for a job, but only one will get hired. The personal touch can

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convince an employer that you are the right applicant for the job. Your second goal in an interview is to be sure the job you are applying for is the right one for you. You should ask questions of the employer concerning the company, its products, the hours of the job, work expectations and benefits.

Preparing for the Interview

Many people dread the interview. They may get sweaty palms and knots in their stomachs before the interview. Nervousness is unavoidable, given the importance of an interview to your chances of getting a job. However, a large part of the fear of an interview comes from lack of experience. Being prepared has several advantages. Preparation gives you confidence in your ability to cover most of the important information the employer wants to know. Another advantage of being prepared is that it will tend to calm you down. The more you know about what's involved in an interview, what the company is all about and answers to questions you expect to get, the more confident you will be. We tend to be most afraid of what we don't know. Being prepared can take the mystery out of the interview and put you back in control.

What do we mean by being prepared? It starts with having a good understanding about yourself and your abilities. If you have read the publication on skill identification (FSHEC102, *Skills for Employment Series: Assessing Job Skills*), you have already made a good start. Your plan should be to know what you can do and express it so other people understand your abilities.

The next step in being prepared is doing homework about the company to which you are applying. This includes knowledge about:

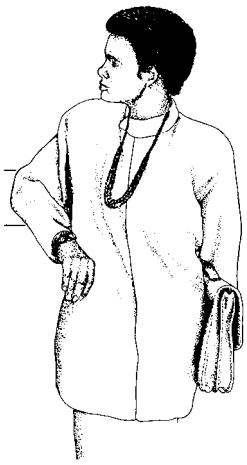
- the company in general (how large, how old)
- the products the company makes
- the job title and responsibilities of the job for which you are applying
- company policies

You can't expect to know everything about the company, but anything you can learn will be helpful. Interviewers definitely pick up on the applicant's knowledge about the company. It's a sign of your interest. Even if you only know a few facts, they might help you ask intelligent questions. For example, you might know that the company is in the printing business but not know specific details about their work. A reasonable question to ask is what products do they print? This type of question indicates your interest in and willingness to learn about the company. If you can, try to talk to someone already working at the company. Current workers will be your best source of information.

A third step in being prepared is having a good understanding of the whole interview process. This includes knowing how to dress, getting off to a good start, don'ts for the interview, common interview questions and the follow-up to an interview.

Your Appearance at the Interview

A neat appearance is important to the overall success of the interview. You want to feel comfortable with your appearance but do not want your clothes to draw attention away from what you are trying to say about yourself. Interviewers do react to your appearance, even before you speak or shake hands. As hard as they may try not to, an interviewer often can't help forming an opinion about you within the first 15 seconds. Looking as if you have not given thought to your appearance can leave a negative impression that will be hard to overcome. The key is to be neat and not let your appearance draw attention away from more important matters.



Don't overdress as for a party or dress too casually in cut-offs and a T-shirt. In general, dress for the interview as you would be expected to dress for the job. For example, if you are applying for a job as a delivery person, you do not need to wear a suit. However, you would want to wear a sports jacket and slacks if you are a man, or a blouse and skirt or pants if you are a woman.

Getting Off to a Good Start

Getting off to a good start can go a long way toward making your interview a success. Here are a few ideas to think about as you prepare for your interview.

- **Recognize you are selling something – yourself.** The whole process of getting a job involves selling yourself.
- **Learn the interviewer's name and use it.** We all like to be remembered and called by our name.
- **Come alone. Don't join forces with a friend.** Most of us would like someone to come along for support, but coming alone shows maturity.
- **Have all needed materials with you when you arrive.** Bring a copy of your resumé, reference list and a list of questions you want to ask an employer.
- **Shake hands with the interviewer.** Don't hesitate, offer your hand first. Give a firm handshake, but avoid too firm of a grip.
- **Follow cues from the interviewer.** In general, let the interviewer control the flow of the interview.
- **Speak up, look the interviewer in the eye.**
- **Relax!** If you can relax, the interview will go much better for you.

Some Don'ts for the Interview

- **Don't be late. Always try to arrive 10 to 15 minutes early**. If you are late for the interview, the employer might expect you to be late for work as well. At all costs, be on time. If you can, try to be early so you have time to calm down and review what you know about the company.
- **Don't sound desperate**. Sometimes we feel desperate for a job, any job. However, it doesn't help much in an interview to sound like you are begging for a job. Never say you'll "take anything."
- **Don't apologize for lack of experience**. You will not always have direct on-the-job experience. However, that does not mean you do not have any meaningful experiences that can apply to the job. Talk about related activities and experiences that have some bearing on the job.
- **Don't downgrade your former employer, school or training.** People who complain or talk about others generally leave a bad impression. If you downgrade a former employer during an interview, the interviewer may feel you will tend to downgrade a new employer. If you did have a bad experience with a previous employer, try to be professional in the way you discuss it. Be honest about what happened, but try not to sound bitter.
- **Don't wander from the subject at hand.** Try to keep the interview focused on your talents and abilities or on the job and company. Although the conversation may stray at times, the main point of the interview should be on you and the job. When the interviewer strays, just be polite but stay with the subject of you seeking employment.
- **Don't hang around after the interview is over.** Look for a cue from the employer that the interview is over. Don't linger or prolong it. Simply thank the employer and leave. Trying to make the interview last and last will not help your chances of getting the job.

Common Interview Questions

Below is a list of common interview questions. Some are straightforward, while others can be tricky or make it difficult to understand what the employer is driving at.

- Tell me about yourself.
- Have you ever done this kind of work before?
- Why do you want to work here?
- What are your strengths?
- What are your weaknesses?
- What do you expect as a starting salary?
- How long did it take to get here today?
- What is your educational level?

Below is a list of other interview questions that are often asked. Try to practice how you would respond to each of these questions.

- Why do you think you would be good at this job?
- How do you feel about working under pressure?
- What job would you like to have five years from now?
- What type of position are you interested in?
- How do you feel about traveling for the company?

The Follow-Up to an Interview

After an interview, we are often excited and anxious. Did I get the job? Did I make a good impression? Unfortunately, we have to wait. There is little we can do after an interview, since the decision is in the hands of an employer. However, one thing we can do is to send a follow-up letter. The follow-up letter is simply a letter sent to the interviewer thanking him or her for the opportunity given in the interview. The letter should be short and to the point. You may, however, make one or two points in your favor to remind the interviewer of who you are and of your interest in the position. A sample follow-up letter can be found on page 5 of this publication.

Some Questions You Answer – Some You Don't Have to Answer

The following is a partial list of questions that are and are not allowed to be asked during a job interview, on a job application or as a condition for hiring, firing or promoting an employee.

- **Age.** It is lawful to require proof of age only from a minor in the form of a work permit or certificate.
- **Religion.** It is unlawful to inquire about an applicant's religious preference.
- **Sex.** Any inquiry regarding sex is unlawful, except where mandatory occupational requirements exist.
- **Marital status.** Questions about marital status, number of children and pregnancy are unlawful.
- **Race.** Questions relating directly or indirectly to an applicant's race or color are unlawful. Height and weight inquiries are unlawful **unless** that information is relevant to the job being sought.
- **Ethnic background.** It is unlawful to inquire about an applicant's national origin or that of his or her parents or spouse.
- **Arrest record.** Inquiries related to arrests and convictions that are not specifically related to job performance are unlawful.
- **Credit rating.** All questions about charge accounts or credit ratings are unlawful.
- **Ancestry.** Inquiries about one's name, for the purpose of determining an applicant's ancestry, lineage or national origin are unlawful.

These conditions were established in the Equal Opportunity Act of 1974. The Act applies to the following:

- State and local governments
- All public and private educational institutions
- Private employers of 15 or more persons
- Labor unions with 15 or more members
- Joint labor/management committees for apprenticeship and training

Sample Follow-Up Letter

Route 5
Crab Orchard, AR 71556

January 31, 2006

Mr. Charles D. Hammer, Manager
Smith Farms
1515 Hwy. 420
Crab Orchard, AR 71556

Dear Mr. Hammer:

Thank you for an informative and helpful interview. After our discussion, I am more convinced than ever that I would like to work for Smith Farms.

As we discussed, my previous work experience has given me the opportunity to work on large and small farms. From this experience, I realize that I have the basic skills of a farm manger and have the ability to learn new things quickly. I feel both of these skills make me qualified to work for your farm.

I am looking forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,

George A. Wilson

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