



## **The Interview Series: (4) Preparation, a Key Interview Strategy**

*By Martin E. Murphy, CPCU, Senior Vice President, The Jacobson Group*

The past three articles have given you more information regarding the types and purposes of interviews. Now that you have a better idea of the anatomy of an interview, you can better prepare for them. The very idea of interview preparation seems cumbersome to most candidates and often brings up questions such as why prepare in advance, isn't there a danger that I'll sound too rehearsed, why can't I just be myself, and who has the time? However, if you seriously prepare for interviews, you will be better able to respond to questions and remain calm during them leading to a much more successful presentation. Furthermore, preparation demonstrates your seriousness about the opportunity and will help you stand out from other candidates.

- **Research.** Prior to an interview, research the organization, position, current industry events and the interviewer, if possible. Remember that knowledge alone does not guarantee a great interview; you must be able to successfully use this information during the interview to demonstrate that you did your homework.
  - **Organization:** Study your prospective employer; interviewers view those with a lack of knowledge about the organization as uninterested candidates. Be familiar with their products, services, training programs, geographical locations, management philosophies, new developments and current business affairs. Visit their website; research them in journals, magazines, and on the internet; and if possible, obtain a copy of their annual report or other company literature. You should be able to succinctly answer, "What do you know about our organization?" or "Why do you want to be part of our team?"
  - **Position:** Learn as much as possible about the position you are interviewing for and how it fits into the company's overall structure. Request a copy of the position profile or expectations. This will help you better prepare for specific job-related questions, as well as more thoroughly assess the role's compatibility with your career plan.
  - **Current Industry Events:** During an active job search, it is important to keep up on your reading. Be aware of what is going on in the industry and how companies and your potential role are being affected. Be able to thoughtfully answer the question, "What do you think is the biggest issue facing the industry today?" Additionally, weaving such knowledge into the questions that you ask at the close of an interview will show that you are in touch with the industry.
  - **Interviewer:** If you know who is interviewing you, use it to your advantage. First of all, make sure you can properly pronounce the name. Conduct a search on the company's website and the internet to drum up information about the interviewer. You may have something in common and can casually bring it up to make an immediate connection; plus, it will impress the interviewer that you took the time to research him/her.
- **Analyze yourself.** A key component of the career management process is completing a personal inventory; you should have already conducted a self-assessment. Prior to an interview, review it. If you have not completed one, this is a good time to do so. You need to have a clear idea of your strengths, weaknesses, motivations, accomplishments, and goals; moreover, you should be able to articulate how they can add value to the prospective employer and how they align with the position's requirements. Create a list of questions to ask about the company or position. As you know, an interview is also your opportunity to evaluate how the company and the position align with your career goals and ideal job. At the close of an interview, you will be



asked if you have any questions; always ask questions. If you don't, the interviewer may wrongfully assume that you are not interested in the job. As you prepare these questions, think about what you need to know to make a more informed decision about the opportunity. For instance, are there any aspects of the role that are unclear? Review your research and try to incorporate some of this information into your questions to demonstrate that you did your homework. Sample questions include how does the organization measure performance; how will I be trained; and what is the next step in the recruitment process?

- **Practice! Practice! Practice!** If possible, ask a friend to role-play. If no one is available to help you, rather than just thinking about them, practice answering interview questions out loud and in front of a mirror. The more you practice the more comfortable you will be the day of the interview.
- **Make final preparations.** A few days before, choose your interview clothing and ensure everything is cleaned and pressed. Polish your shoes. Make sure your briefcase and portfolio are prepared. Always take a few extra copies of your resume. It is also a good idea to make a practice drive to the interview location to ensure that you know how to get there and that you have an accurate estimated travel time. Go to bed early; getting a good night's rest will allow you to naturally portray enthusiasm and think more clearly during the interview. Plan on arriving to the interview ten minutes before your scheduled time. And, don't forget to have fun!