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The Interview Series: (1) Interviews Defined

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The art of successful interviewing is knowledge. In this series of nine articles, you will be immersed in the art of the interview, learning the various formats, popular questions, body language messages, effective answering techniques, and more. Greater familiarity of the interview and its components will allow you to avoid the element of surprise and successfully demonstrate the value you can offer the organization.

First, you must understand the basic interview types and formats. What types of interviews might you be involved in? Better educated interviewees can use this knowledge to their advantage and be prepared to use specific techniques to ensure a successful interview and a resulting positive impression.

Informational/Exploratory Interview

Although this is an important type of interview to utilize, the informational or exploratory interview conjures up unnecessary negative connotations with many job seekers. Most wonder who they *are really kidding* when scheduling informational meetings. There is a belief that these interviews are pointless since *everyone* knows that their ultimate goal is a job, not information. The fact is that informational interviews are not exclusively for the unemployed or active job seekers. Savvy professionals recognize that they are a critical part of networking. Knowing that your ultimate goal is a job does not offend potential interviewees. Eighty percent of professionals are willing to meet and help others through these meetings; they recognize the value of networking and receive satisfaction from helping someone. The following are the top three reasons to add informational interviews to your career development tool box.

- **Gain insight.** In an informational interview, the tables are turned. You become the interviewer; you ask the questions. Use this opportunity to learn more about potential career paths, a particular company, hiring trends and more. This is also a great time to gain insight on your resume, discover insightful answers to interview questions, and ask for additional industry referrals.
- **Expand your network.** Informational interviews allow you to enlarge your circle of contacts. Remember it is who you know that often gets you a job. Just because a company doesn't need you now, doesn't mean that they won't in the future. Additionally, informational interviews could possibly lead to a created position.
- **Build confidence.** These low stakes meetings can raise your comfort level for real interviews. If you have been out of the job seeking circuit for awhile, informational interviews serve as an excellent practice run.

Job Interview

The job interview is a much tenser environment. This strategic conversation has a dual purpose: to determine if you are compatible with the job and the organization and to decide if they are compatible with your career objectives. Moreover, you have an ultimate goal to accomplish if this is a position you want: to persuade the interviewer that you have the skills, background, and ability to do the job and that you are compatible with the organization. Recognize that the job interview is not objective; the interviewer does not offer the job to the best candidate based on merit alone. Instead



interviewing is a highly subjective process in which the employer offers the job to the most qualified person whom he/she likes best. Your personality, confidence, enthusiasm, and interpersonal and communication skills do count. Job interviews come in a variety of formats. Being aware of the differences and objectives of these formats will help you be more at ease when placed in these situations.

- **Electronic/Email Interview**

In today's computer age, electronic communications are becoming more commonplace as a method of screening candidates. A series of email messages between the employer and the applicant is considered an electronic interview. Though this correspondence is often used for clarification purposes, the employer is also getting a look at your general manner, writing skills and philosophy. In these exchanges, be concise. You want to give enough detail to answer the question, but not so much that there is no reason to call you in for a face-to-face interview.

- **Telephone "Fuzzy Slipper" Interview**

Unfortunately, most job seekers do not view telephone calls with employers as interviews, but they are. If you initiate a call to a hiring manager and he/she is interested in your background, it becomes an interview. If an HR professional calls you based on your resume or other previous contact, it is an interview. If you have a scheduled call with a company representative, it is an interview. Most preliminary screening interviews are typically by telephone. This allows employers to find the best prospects before investing time and effort in face-to-face meetings. Take advantage of the fact that the caller can not see you; have all of your resources within reach: your resume, scratch paper, company notes, calendar, answers to common interview questions, etc. Remember your only personal impression is your voice: speak clearly; sit up straight to reflect confidence and a positive attitude in your voice; and listen attentively. Don't forget to express an interest in meeting face-to-face with the employer.

- **Face-to-Face Interview**

A face-to-face interview is what most job seekers envision when they think of the job interview. The most nerve-racking of all interviews, the employer not only judges you on your responses, but also on your presentation: appearance, body language, voice, etc. There are a number of common face-to-face interview formats:

- **One-on-One Interview.** The most common format, the one-on-one interview is when you meet with only one employee of the company. Usually the hiring manager, the interviewer makes the decision of compatibility based solely on his/her meeting with you.
- **Round Robin/Serial Interview.** In this series of interviews, you will meet with professionals such as the manager, supervisor, an HR officer, and potential coworkers one at a time. This format is useful when it is tough to coordinate the busy schedules of all individuals who have input in the hiring decision. Interviewees sometimes find the serial interview repetitive because they are being asked numerous questions multiple times. Think of each interview in the series as a new one in order to keep yourself from skimming on answers you already provided to another interviewer. Round robin interviews are an excellent source of objective information about a company, its culture and the position. You will receive answers from all different levels



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and views within the organization. For example, a potential coworker will be able to provide insight about the manager and supervisor and their styles.

- **Panel “Tag Team” Interview.** Like the round robin interview, the panel format also takes a team approach, involving a number of interviewers. In a tag team meeting, all interviewers are questioning you together, allowing them to assess you on the same sample of behavior. This format also allows the company to determine how you interact with different people in a little more stressful situation. Because members of the panel take turns asking you questions often based on their area of expertise, anticipate and prepare for a wide variety of inquiries related to the organization and the occupation. When asked a question, initially respond to the panel interviewer who asked it, but as you proceed to answer acknowledge the rest of the panel. As you wrap up your response, again turn your focus back to the asker.