



Your Job Interview Part 1

by Alan A. Malinchak (1984-2004)

(Editor's note: This month's Your Second Career column focuses on the importance of preparation for a job interview. Next month's column will provide tips for success in the actual interview.)

If you are asked to come to a job interview it means you are GENERALLY qualified for that position. Through the interview process, the company will then determine which candidate is MOST qualified for the position. Companies use the interview process to drill down into the depth and breadth of your experience compared to other candidates. This is a weeding-out process and there are tricks to stay on the shortlist and make it to the finish line.

Typically a company will interview multiple people for a position. Each applicant can probably expect three or more interviews before the company makes a decision. Bottom line? The interview process may take as short as two weeks or as long as a year — recall the length of time from when you applied to the FBI to when you entered on duty. Also some companies conduct personality or skills assessments to ensure a deeper look into whether you are going to have an organizational and cultural fit. During your FBI career you may have taken various personality diagnostics (e.g.-DiSC) to learn more about yourself — information that you could use to help understand how you communicate when you were interviewing or interrogating others. Unless you are applying for an investigative or security related position, interrogation is out. But, the need to understand how to communicate with the hiring manager conducting the interview is essential. Bring all your knowledge and experience to the interview process as you traverse the pre-interview, the interview and the post-interview phases in the very competitive interview process.

Pre-Interview Preparation

Once invited for an interview, you need to prepare and conduct as much research about the organization — your future employer — as possible. Many Web sites can provide both formal and informal information about the company, and possibly about the hiring manager who will be conducting the interview.

First, determine if the hiring manager has a LinkedIn account and consume every detail about that person. Data-mine the hiring manager's connections to learn more about

who he or she is as a person and a professional. You should know more about the hiring manager than the hiring manager knows about you. Prepare a list of questions for the hiring manager. Ask about:

- The company.
- The position for which you are applying.
- The peers, subordinates and superiors for the position.
- How long the hiring manager has been with the company.
- What drew the hiring manager to the company?

Let the hiring manager talk, you LISTEN and respond accordingly.

Next, use various Web sites to research the company, its culture and its current employees (who may be posting what they love or dislike about the company). Some Web sites to use include www.glassdoor.com and www.vault.com. Incorporate this information into possible responses to questions you may be asked or into questions you may have the opportunity to ask. If you know someone employed at the company, reach out and engage them in a conversation — first-hand information is always the best.

Finally, review the company's Web site — dissect every page. Read its annual report, read the *Wall Street* analyst reviews, read the biographies of key executives and highlight reasons why you want to work for this company. You will impress the hiring manager if you can speak to why you are attracted to working at that company.

Practice, Practice, Practice

Prepare for the interview by practicing your verbal skills and improving your body language. Although you are the one being interviewed, you can impress the hiring manager with your confidence and knowledge of the company. After you have developed a list of practice questions regarding the company and the job, write out your responses. Concentrate on HOW and WHAT in your anticipated questions and answers, and anticipate a behavioral-based interview.

Self-practice the interview. Practice your verbal reply, noting your voice control, confident tone, and whether or when your voice cracks (a good indication that you are not confident in your response).

Practice sitting and leaning in — mirroring

the behavior of the hiring manager. We all dressed professionally during our FBI careers — and it is as important now as then. If necessary, update your wardrobe — you are not dressing for this position, but for the next position beyond. Of course, if the hiring manager advises you to dress casually, do so — it may be a hint to the cultural environment of the organization. Verify it through your research.

There is a great article written by Alison Green titled “The 10 Most Common Job Interview Questions,” which is a great start to assist you in anticipating and preparing questions for the interview. To see Green’s article and her 10 questions, go to <http://money.usnews.com/money/blogs/outside-voices-career/2011/01/24/the-10-most-common-job-interview-questions>

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Part 2

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The Interview

The interview process can vary widely and take days, weeks or months — depending on how many candidates the hiring manager wants to evaluate and the scheduling of associated travel. If you are the first candidate interviewed, this could mean a long wait until the hiring manager has interviewed enough people to get a good representation of the talent available.

Most companies will ask that a candidate meet with several people within the organization, beyond the hiring manager. Those interviews could be done in one day, either back to back or as a panel interview, or one at a time over the course of a week or more. Initially, you can expect a phone interview prior to an in-person interview — both may last between 30 and 60 minutes.

Always bring a hard copy of your resume to the in-person interview.

After cordial greetings, if the hiring manager asks whether you have any questions before the interview begins, ask the interviewer to articulate the key criteria they are looking for in the ideal candidate. This will provide you with an immediate opportunity to verify the research you conducted in the pre-interview phase and bolster your confidence that you have those characteristics and capabilities.

When the interviewer asks a question — **BE CONCISE AND ANSWER THE QUESTION** — do not provide a monologue. Remember, it is always about what **YOU** can do for that company, not what that company can do for you. At the conclusion of all interviews, the hiring manager will ask if you have any questions. Always have one or two key questions that are well thought out to ask the interviewer — this is very important. And before you finish the interview, there is a final set of questions you need to confirm with the hiring manager:

- Am I missing any key criteria or competency for the role that I could expand on now?
- Do you have any concerns regarding my candidacy?
- How many people are you interviewing for this position?

- How do I compare with other candidates in consideration for this position?
- Where are you in the interviewing process?
- When do you want/need this person in place?

Finally, ask the interviewer for his or her business card and/or contact information — and ask whether it is acceptable to stay in touch for follow-up.

- Avoid these common mistakes during the interview:
- DO NOT answer your cell phone or accept a text. Shut off your cell phone before the interview.
 - DO NOT appear disinterested, overconfident or arrogant.
 - DO NOT dress inappropriately.
 - DO NOT talk negatively about previous or current employers.
 - DO NOT chew gum or tobacco.
 - DO NOT smoke — make sure you freshen your breath.

- And finally, don't be the person who:
- Brings a book, magazine or laptop to the interview.
 - Asks the interviewer which position you are interviewing for.
 - Cites promptness as a trait in your application or during the interview, especially if you show up late.
 - Refers to yourself in the third person.
 - Takes your shoes, belt or tie off during the interview.
 - Says stupid things — this is why you need to practice!

Post-Interview

Immediately after the interview, write down all the information about the interview and what you believe was most important. Dissect your comments — where you were strong and where you fell short — and learn from the experience.

Within 24 hours, send an email to the hiring manager and all those who interviewed you. If you are comfortable doing so, send a handwritten “thank you” note within 72 hours — it's rare for potential candidates to go that extra mile and it will be noticed. Lastly, follow up every two to four weeks with the internal recruiter and/or the hiring manager to reiterate your interest and obtain a status on

your candidacy. Remember, you asked them if it was appropriate to follow-up during the interview.

Companies like to interview several candidates before making a decision so if you are one of the first candidates it can often be weeks or months before you know whether you are a finalist. While you are waiting, prepare for the finalist interview by dissecting all the comments made by the interviewer and determining what are the most important traits, characteristics and capabilities they desire in the ideal candidate.

Good luck!

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