

Image is Everything

Frank Newberry continues his guide into job hunting, this month concentrating on the all important interview stage.

Last month I described to readers how to go about finding their ideal job. In this second of three articles I consider what employers look for in the ideal candidate and outline how to:

- Prepare for difficult questions.
- Make a good first impression.
- Gain a rapport with the interviewers.
- Present yourself as the ideal candidate.

Ability, Visibility and Image

Recent research has uncovered three main factors that affect your career progression. First, is your ability, second is your 'visibility', this is the extent to which your ability is already known to your prospective employers.

You can influence your visibility by visiting your prospective employer for 'a chat and a look around the place' before you even apply for a job.

Third, and the most significant factor, is your 'image', i.e. whether you look the part when you turn up at the premises. It is perhaps regarding your personal presentation that the 'plus one' rule might apply.

You should dress up as if you were holding or applying for a job that was one higher than the one you have now. The statistics are sobering, in a world where you only get one chance to make a first impression:

- Your ability is important to 10% of prospective employers.
- Your visibility is important to 25% of prospective employers.
- Your image is important to 65% of prospective employers.

Preparing for interview questions

First, you should prepare yourself thoroughly to answer any interview questions that arise from statements you have made in your CV.

Next, even though you may not be asked them all, you should rehearse concise answers – until they sound confident and natural – to the following ten questions:

1. Tell me about yourself ...
2. Why did you apply for this job?
3. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
4. Why do you want to leave your current job?
5. What makes you think you are qualified for this job?
6. What did you learn at college that could be used in this job?
7. What have you done that shows you are resilient and punctual?
8. What sort of difficult problems have you faced at work?
9. What do you know about our club?
10. Do you have any questions?

While some of these questions may seem intimidating, you will find, as you start to ponder and rehearse answers, that they will seem less fearsome.

An experienced interviewer will probe you to answer some of the questions in more depth, or in greater detail, e.g. 'How did you handle that particular problem?' or 'What happened then?'

Aggressive interview questions

Some inexperienced and unprofessional interviewers may ask you questions that are designed to unsettle you. You should try and prepare answers to questions (if asked) like:

1. Why should I employ you?

2. Tell me about something you are not very proud of?
3. What are some things your last boss did that you did not like?
4. What did you like and dislike about your last job?
5. What sort of money were you thinking of?

This 'money' question is a tricky one because it implies that the selection may be being made largely on the grounds of cost.

It may be best to say that you would 'be happy to talk about your salary after an offer, subject to agreement, has been made'.

Nerves, body language and rapport

Upon entering the premises and the interview room you should stride purposely forward, make direct eye contact and give your name clearly e.g. 'Good morning (smiling), I'm John Smith, how do you do?'

Listen carefully to the names people give you and try to use them occasionally when you answer questions, this will help build a rapport, as will nodding at the interviewers as they speak or explain things to you.

Sit in an upright position and lean forward slightly to show that you are keen to answer their questions. Be prepared to use paper and a pen to draw diagrams etc to help you give more meaningful answers.

Good interviewers will understand that you may be nervous at the beginning of the interview and will make allowances. Before getting into your reasons for applying, they may start with an easy question like 'How was your journey?'

The ideal candidate

The ideal candidate for the job will have specific skills and personality traits that are listed on a document called the 'employee specification'. You should ask for a copy of it before you apply for the job because you 'don't want to waste their time'.

If the employer does not have the document then ask the employer in advance, preferably on a visit, 'What sort of person are you looking for?'

Their specific answers can then inform all of your answers at the interview and you will be able to present yourself as the ideal candidate.

A positive attitude and a cheerful disposition

In general, most employers offer jobs to people with a positive attitude and a cheerful disposition. You must reflect these qualities in all your dealings with your prospective employers.

In summary then you will need to:

- Do some research, preferably by visiting your prospective employer.
- Prepare for a wide range of good questions, and some bad ones, and expect to be probed.
- Rehearse concise answers until you start to sound confident and natural.
- 'Look the part' and present yourself as cheerful and positive.

Careers Fair

You can do a practice interview and get help with all aspects of being interviewed, at the Careers Fair which runs at BTME 2005 on 18 - 20 January 2005 in Harrogate.

In the meantime if you have an interview before then or a job application coming up soon and you have a question I might be able to help you with, please visit my website, www.franknewberry.com, and follow the 'Contact' link to the 'Request Information' page.