

Make the Interview Count

Tips to Help You Succeed

Once you have your resume in the hands of your MATRIX Associate, it will be a primary tool in securing job interviews. Proper preparation before an interview can make all the difference in securing the position you want. Good interviewing skills are absolutely critical to getting the offer, but most people have limited experience interviewing. Whether your most recent job interview was last week, last month, or last year, these tips can help you interview successfully.

Goals of the Interview—Making It Count

- ▶ **Your Mission—Secure an Offer:** It is your job to effectively present your skills and experience to the interviewer and to show how they relate to the open position. If anything comes up during the interview that may be an issue, just make a note. You can address any concerns you may have with your Associate after the interview—in most cases, any concerns you have about the opportunity can be resolved.
- ▶ **Get Your Questions Answered:** Make sure you get any questions you may have about the position, responsibilities, or company answered during the interview so that you can determine if this is a good opportunity for you.

Before the Interview—Prepare, Prepare, Prepare


- ▶ **Do Your Homework:** Little things can set you apart from other candidates. Research the company you will be interviewing with. Many companies today have Web sites. Visit their Web site and read up on the company history, structure, products, and services. Talk with your MATRIX Associate about the position so that you have a clear understanding of what the organization is looking for.
- ▶ **Know Your Experience:** Make sure you are able to talk about your roles and responsibilities, the projects you've worked on, and their benefits or results.
- ▶ **Fill Out Your Pre-Interview Worksheet:** Completing the Pre-Interview Worksheet included in this notebook will help you remember important points you want to make about your experience. It can also help you remember with whom, when, and where you're meeting.
- ▶ **Review the Tips on These Pages:** We compiled a "best of" tips for interviewing here. It's a good idea to refresh your memory by re-reading these tips before an interview.
- ▶ **Refer Back to Your CareerCHART Model:** Don't forget to use your CareerCHART Model, and even to amend it from time to time based on any new skills you learn or changes in your preferences.

First Impressions Mean a Lot

- ▶ **Dress Appropriately:** An interview is a professional business meeting; dress conservatively in accordance with the dress code for the company. If the company has a casual dress code, get direction from your MATRIX Associate as to the appropriate dress for the interview. You can always dress down later. Standard conservative dress for men consists of a dark business suit, white shirt, conservative tie, and shined shoes. For women, a dark suit or dress with matching shoes is appropriate.
- ▶ **Be Ten Minutes Early:** Nothing bothers a busy manager more than waiting for a candidate who is late. It also makes for an awkward start to the interview. If the unavoidable happens—a traffic accident or illness for example—call your MATRIX Associate or interview contact immediately.
- ▶ **Greet with Confidence:** Enthusiasm, together with a self-confident smile, will go a long way toward establishing the best first impression. Stand when greeting your interviewer, and give a firm handshake. Make eye contact. Model your posture, intensity, and speech patterns after that of the interviewer. Break the ice with a universal topic; avoid controversial issues. Remember that your interpersonal skills are just as important as your technical skills.

What to Do During the Interview

- ▶ **Play Detective:** If the client does not begin by describing the scope of the project or responsibilities of the assignment and what skills and attributes he or she is looking for, ask! Make sure you understand what is important to the interviewer about the position before you begin discussing your background, skills, and experience.
- ▶ **Ask the Right Questions:** Come with prepared questions, and take notes during the interview. Most interviewers will give you an opportunity to ask questions. Asking informed, open-ended questions shows your interest in the company and in the assignment. Here are several suggestions:
 - Can you tell me more about the projects this department has worked on over the past year?
 - What is your vision for your team/department?
 - What challenges do you face in the next three to six months?
 - What is your management style?
- ▶ **Sell Your Skills:** Match your skills to the client's problems and concerns. Pay close attention. Present a logical, concise description of your experience that matches the client's need. Describe your functional duties, responsibilities, and accomplishments. Discuss hardware and software environments.
- ▶ **It's All in the Attitude:** Managers want to work with people who are interested in working at their companies and on their projects—people who have a positive and upbeat attitude and who ask good questions.

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- ▶ **Keep Responses to the Point:** Be a good listener and be interested. Stay on track, and be direct and concise with each answer. Then stop. Most interviewers have a number of pre-set questions they wish to cover in a limited amount of time. Don't over-explain.
 - ▶ **Gain Agreement:** Answer the client's questions openly and honestly, being positive about yourself and your skills. Translate experiences you have had into benefits the client will gain if he or she selects you for the position. Ensure you have communicated well with the client and that you are able to fulfill the client's expectations by saying, "Based on the description of the opportunity and what's required to be a success, I am very excited about this opportunity and feel I am very qualified to assist you. How do you feel?" You might also ask: "How do you view my role on this team?"

What NOT to Do During the Interview

- ▶ **Don't Ask the Wrong Questions:** Don't ask about vacation or sick time. Don't ask about benefits. This information will be provided to you later and is not appropriate during the first interview. Asking these questions gives the impression that those issues are the most important to you.
- ▶ **Don't Discuss Compensation During an Interview:** Don't get into specifics about compensation—there are many variables involved in achieving compensation that's fair to you and your employer. The proper and appropriate way to answer the question about money is to say, "Mr./Ms. [Interviewer Name], I am currently making [your present compensation]; however, what is most important to me is the opportunity and the company. Based on what you have shared with me so far, I am really interested in this opportunity. If you are interested in me, I would like to entertain your strongest offer." If they insist on discussing it, provide a range, not a specific number.
- ▶ **Avoid Negative Comments:** If you have any negative feelings or concerns, discuss them with your MATRIX Associate after the interview. Keep an open mind during the interview, and wait until after the visit to make a decision about the opportunity.

Wrapping It Up

- ▶ **What's the Next Step?:** Once again, express your interest in the position. Ask the interviewer what will be the next step in the process and when the company expects to make a decision about the position.
- ▶ **Say Thank You in Person:** At the end of the interview, be sure to take time to thank the person who took the time out of his or her day to meet with you. "Thank you for taking the time to meet with me, and I look forward to hearing from you," is a fine way to wrap up.
- ▶ **Call Your MATRIX Associate:** Call your MATRIX Associate immediately following the interview and debrief. It helps to talk through an interview; many times, by discussing what transpired, you can improve for the next one.
- ▶ **Send a Thank-You Note:** Ask the interviewer for a business card and send a personal note repeating your interest in the opportunity and thanking the client for taking the time to interview you. An e-mail note is also appropriate. However, send the e-mail using your personal e-mail address from your home system. Do not use your current employer's e-mail system to send interview thank-you messages. Always double check your spelling and grammar. If you have neat penmanship, you may consider handwriting your note. A sample note is shown below.

J. M. ALLAN
444 TIMBER LANE
ATLANTA, GA 30329

Date

Contact Name
Contact Title
Company
Address

Dear (CONTACT NAME):

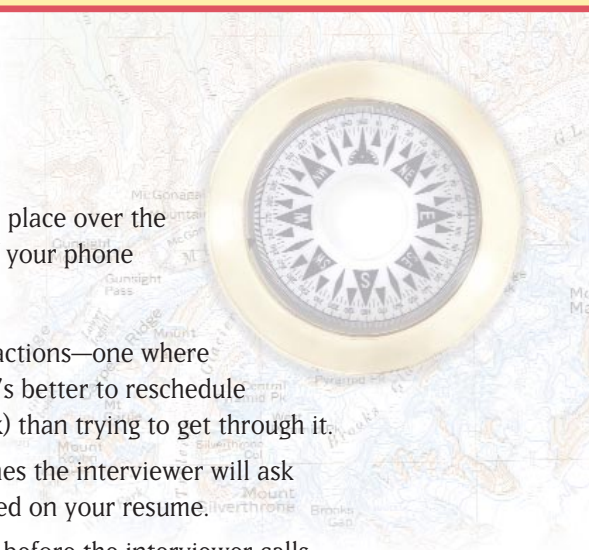
It was a pleasure meeting with you yesterday and learning more about (COMPANY NAME). I was impressed with (DESCRIBE A COMPANY FEATURE OR SOMETHING ABOUT THE JOB POSITION THAT IS UNIQUE AND INTERESTING). My skills and experience, especially in the areas of (BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE SKILLS/EXPERIENCE THAT APPLIES TO THE JOB) make me a good match for the position of (JOB TITLE) we discussed. If I can provide any additional information, please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX. I look forward to your decision.

(SIGNATURE)

(TYPE YOUR NAME)

Tips for Successful Phone Interviewing

In many cases, your first meeting with a potential employer will take place over the phone. The following tips are designed to help you make the most of your phone interview.

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- ▶ Always make sure that you are in a quiet place without distractions—one where you can speak freely. If the interviewer calls at a bad time, it's better to reschedule for five or 10 minutes later (when you can find a place to talk) than trying to get through it.
 - ▶ Always have a copy of your resume in front of you. Many times the interviewer will ask you questions in reference to work history or projects detailed on your resume.
 - ▶ Take 10 to 15 minutes to focus on the upcoming conversation before the interviewer calls. Your MATRIX Associate will supply you with information to review regarding the opportunity you will be discussing. Take a few minutes to review those notes and, if possible, the Web site of the company you are interviewing with.
 - ▶ Always know with whom you will be speaking, as well as that person's title and functional responsibility. Your MATRIX Associate is responsible for letting you know exactly who will be calling.
 - ▶ There are times when your MATRIX Associate may not know exactly who will be calling. This happens more in larger companies when one member of a larger team is assigned to call you to assess your technical skills. Get the interviewer's name and title and ask how he or she fits into the organization.
 - ▶ Use Power Phone Skills! Speak slowly and clearly and always think about your answers before responding. If sitting, sit upright, just as you would in an actual interview. Many people think that if you stand while talking on the phone you are more alert and are better able to project your enthusiasm for the position. Be careful not to go monotone—keep your voice lively.
 - ▶ Make sure your answers are clear and concise. Get to the point; don't ramble. If you don't know the answer to a question, don't fake it—just say so.
 - ▶ Have questions prepared. Ask the interviewer if you may ask a couple of questions. Additionally, always express interest in the position. At the conclusion of the interview, ask the interviewer what the next step will be.
 - ▶ Upon completion of the phone screening, call your MATRIX Associate. Moving quickly in our industry is imperative, and we are very interested in your feedback.