



Interview success – securing the job you want

The past few months have fundamentally altered the recruitment landscape in Ireland. Where once a qualified and experienced individual had no problem in finding a job and changed job

relatively frequently, the pendulum has now swung in the other direction, writes Caroline O'Reilly.

We have recently seen a wave of redundancies and with redundancy can come a range of emotions, such as loss of confidence, depression or resentment, but the job search must continue despite any negative feelings. Once your application has led to a call for interview, negative emotions must be set aside in order to present the best possible impression of yourself to an employer. The aim of interview preparation is, not only to impress the employer, but also to give you both confidence and a certain comfort level. Interviewing can be nerve-wracking, but the more structure and preparation you can create, the easier it gets.

When the invitation arrives to an interview, clear up as many of the practicalities as possible. You will need to know the location of the interview. Find out where the meeting will take place and who you need to ask for. If the interview is happening offsite ask for a telephone number of one of the interviewers. If you are unfamiliar with the location, do a dry run to their premises in advance, so that you know how long it might take you to get there and where the bus stop or parking is. The aim of this practical preparation is to give you a sense of familiarity with your surroundings on the day of the interview. This also gives you a sense of control, which is empowering.

Research

You can further empower yourself by finding out who you are meeting and what their interview styles are. Once you have the names and job titles of your interviewers, you can do some research on them. One thing to establish is their link to the job you are interviewing for – are they your future bosses or colleagues? If you are meeting with Human Resources, they will ask general questions; if you are meeting line managers, prepare for a more technical 'grilling'.

The company itself is often overlooked in interview preparation, yet this knowledge helps you prepare answers that allow you to tailor your experience to the company's needs. Equally, find out if you know of anyone who is working there or has worked there in the past. They can prove a valuable source of inside information and can give you details of what the company culture is like. Not all preparation might be professionally relevant, but it gives you a sense of familiarity, as well as picking up on specific information which you can use in your own questions or answers.

Once you have the framework of who, where and when assembled, it is time to turn your attention to the job. If you had applied speculatively, clarify the nature of the position you are being interviewed for and ask if a job description might be available. If going through a recruitment company, ask the recruitment consultant for as much information about the company, the role and the interviewers as you can get. Once you have your research and this information, study the job description and all of the information you have. Be positive in your approach to this – the fact that the company are meeting with you is a sign that they see you as a potential fit. Your role now is to identify and put into words the reasons why you are a fit and how your skills can translate to their needs.

Competency

Interview questions are often competency based. This means that the interviewer will ask you for concrete examples of how you have managed or responded to a particular situation in the past. In responding to such questions, the challenge is to give enough information without giving too much context. Preparation is key to creating a synopsis of the events, your responsibilities and your achievements.

Look at the role specification – what are they looking for? Can you do this? If so, put together a description of responsibilities you had before and how they will transfer. Do not assume that you will be able to spontaneously do this during the interview. In the interview your focus is on understanding the questions and selecting the most appropriate of your 'prepared' answers. While you do not want to sound rehearsed, you do want to have plenty of positive attributes and experience to highlight.

Your preparation should also include drafting questions to ask them. These should be focused both on their existing work and on their future plans. In this, you may also have the chance to point out how your contribution might positively influence their future.

The day of the interview

On the day of the interview, you should feel prepared and in control. You have spent time preparing for all aspects of the interview. While an arrogant attitude will not endear you to your interviewers, a quietly confident, clear and articulate presentation will impress. Dress well, but conservatively. Upon arrival, always be pleasant and friendly to the receptionist or whoever greets you. A firm handshake also helps.

At the outset, you will meet the interviewers. You may be meeting a single individual or a panel. With larger groups, while directing your answers primarily to the person asking the question, remember to include all of the panellists.

The interview may be structured or informal, but the goal is ultimately the same. You need to show that you will add value to the business. Always leave the interview on a positive note, reiterating your interest in the role and desire to meet with them again.

A second round interview can be a direct rehash of the first, only with different stakeholders. All of your previous preparation is still absolutely valid. Added to this are your impressions and what you have learned from the first interview. This puts you in a stronger and more empowered