

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION – RESEARCH

You need to do a lot of spadework before you show up for an interview. In some cases, you need to have this work done before you even apply for the job – because some of the other candidates will have done extensive research and will refer to it in their CV and cover letter.

Why all this effort? Very simply, organisations use interviews to see how hard you are willing to work on your own behalf. We *know* that you care about yourself, so if you are careless and sloppy in preparing for the interview on your own behalf, why would we expect you to behave any differently on our behalf once we hire you? So, start digging:

- First port of call – the organisation’s website. Download and read press releases, earnings statements, company reports, Executive biographies, anything remotely pertinent.
- Then you should look the organisation up on Google internationally and locally (.com and .ie) to see what the wider world thinks of them.
- You can also Google any names you know of people who work in the organisation. Put them in quotes and put the organisation name beside them (E.G. **“joe bloggs” widgets incorporated ireland**).
- If you want to get really serious about checking up on them, go to the Companies Office ([www.cro.ie](http://www.cro.ie)) and look them up on that. (You can also run credit check on them ...)
- Public libraries often maintain clippings files on organisations. Get in there and read them – new products, expansion of facilities, advertisements, pending legal cases, union issues – they’ll all be there.
- If you can’t find a clippings library, the *Irish Times* maintain an excellent searchable archive at [www.irishtimes.com](http://www.irishtimes.com) It’s not free, but it is well worth the price if you are coming up dry using other resources. The Independent’s archive is quite good too at [www.independent.ie](http://www.independent.ie).
- Public libraries usually have a journals section where you can read three year’s worth of the trade magazine(s) for the sector you are entering. There will be lots of mentions of the organisation(s) that you are interested in. There may be articles by or about the person you end up working for ...
- Is there a representative or trade body for the sector you are about to enter? Look up their website, talk to the Chairman, read their publications (buy them if you have to) – this will give you a big picture on the sector and allow you to talk much more forcefully and knowledgeably at the interview.

The organisation you want to work for does not exist in isolation. Even if you don’t know anyone (who knows anyone, who knows anyone, who knows anyone ...) who works there, your target organisation has suppliers, distributors, wholesalers, competitors (find them in *The Golden Pages*) and customers. And *someone* in your network knows someone on that supply and competitive chain ...

So talk to them. Really – take the time and trouble to make a phone call, pay a visit, or buy a coffee for someone who can give you a teeny little chunk of information. As always, you run the risk of coming up dry in your search – but at least you can talk to the interviewer(s) about the efforts that you have made and the opinions that you have heard expressed.

# THE PERFECT INTERVIEW

(FROM AN INTERVIEWER'S PERSPECTIVE)

As far as any interviewer is concerned, the entire selection process can be condensed down to these three questions:

1. Is this candidate capable of doing this job? *(Competency / Track record)*
2. Will this candidate actually *do* the job? *(Motivation)*
3. Can I work with this person? *(Manageability / Team fit)*

Competent interviewers will examine the following five areas to tease out as much information as they can to answer those three questions. On that basis, you can anticipate a significant percentage of the questions that you will be asked and prepare your answers accordingly.

## **1. EXPERIENCE**

Questions 1 and 2. Have you a track record in the area you are applying for, or if it is a step up, does your track record demonstrate an ability to take on greater responsibility and succeed? Do you really have ten year's experience or do you have one year's experience repeated ten times? Has anyone ever taken a risk (that paid off) by hiring you? Have you learnt from your mistakes? To what extent is your approach governed by your upbringing or your current corporate culture?

## **2. QUALIFICATIONS / TRAINING**

Question 1 – vitally important when you are starting out; less so once you have amassed some worthwhile and relevant experience, but it can also be of interest if you are changing direction later in your career. The key areas are your self-discipline and learning curve. The other significant factor about training is that it represents an investment made by someone else in you. Sharp recruiters will closely examine the Training section on your CV to see if you have been 'groomed' by your current or previous employers. It can also reveal weaknesses – if you joined an organisation and a year later, you were sent on Time Management or Assertiveness training, it is a strong indicator that a problem was identified in your first annual review. Careful!

## **3. ENTHUSIASM / PROFESSIONALISM**

Question 2. It is very difficult to fire someone (even a slacker) these days, so interviewers will be looking for a professional, enthusiastic demeanour, which they presume will be carried through into your daily work. Research is the key here. If you have really done your homework on the company or industry, it displays both enthusiasm and professionalism. Interviewers will use industry-specific terminology or discuss hot issues to determine how well you have prepared. Another big indicator as to the quality of your preparation are the questions that *you* ask during the interview.

## **4. PERSONALITY**

This is key in answering question 3. The interviewer will also examine whether or not you will 'fit in' with the company's culture. Many organisations now use assessment centres to probe this area.

## **5. BACKGROUND**

Partially answers all three questions. Your upbringing is perceived by some interviewers as having a bearing on your work ethic and can obviously have impact on your interaction with your manager and co-workers. Again, assessment centres may probe into this area.

## COUNTDOWN TO THE INTERVIEW

You need to be as calm and perfectly-groomed as possible when you step through the door of the interview room. You have very little control once you are into the interview proper, so make sure everything that you *can* control goes smoothly.

### **IN ADVANCE**

- Do **deep** research on the company/industry – use the Companies Office or the IDA, for example. Check the Internet. Get hold of recent market research or annual reports if you can. Talk to people who have gone for jobs with the company or who used to work there, or for a competitor or supplier. Check with friends and family. Someone will know something or someone useful.
- Do your research on the people you will be working for or with. It's too late to discover that your boss is a slave-driving dictator after your first week in a new job, or that the corporate culture is stifling. Again, use friends, family and people on the supply chain.
- Find out how many people will be interviewing you and what their names, titles and ages are.
- If you have never been to the area or the specific building where the interview will be taking place before, check it out a day or two ahead of time.
- Practice your answers to the key interview questions over and over. Do it **out loud**, so you get the terminology and phrasing into your vocal memory.
- Lay your clothing out the night before – run it by someone you trust for approval.

### **ON THE DAY**

- Telephone to confirm that you will be attending and that you are looking forward to meeting the interviewer (do this the day before if it your interview is in the morning).
- No strong-smelling foods in advance of the interview.
- Arrive five to ten minutes early. Allow plenty of time for traffic and parking. Sit and wait in your car or in a nearby café with a book or newspaper if necessary.
- If at all possible, get rid of your coat, umbrella and briefcase in reception.
- Ask to use the facilities. Then: check your hair and tie; clean your glasses; make sure that your shoes are immaculate; and do a final head to toe check.
- Wash your hands in warm water and dry them thoroughly.
- Button your suit jacket.
- Sit up straight facing the door in the waiting room – do not pace around and **do not** read magazines, newspapers or company literature.
- Don't accept tea, coffee or a cigarette once you are in the interview, no matter how badly you might want it.
- If you are prone to sweaty palms, try and keep your right hand warm and dry for the initial handshake – long, slow deep breathing will help here.
- Smile, firm handshake and off you go .....

Finally, remember that the interview is not over until you leave the building. Many interviewers (or an administrator / receptionist) will chat with you or stay with you right to the front door, so **do not relax** just because you've been told the interview is over. Everyone you meet in the building may be forming an opinion of you, so watch what you say and do until you are out of the building, out of sight and out of ear-shot. (Remember Rowan's young friend Gavin on the DART!)