

## ARE YOU READY FOR THAT INTERVIEW?

So time is ticking and you are approaching the 'D' day-the Interview Day! Do you break out in a cold sweat at the thought or are you totally blasé about what's ahead? If you are in the former category, there are a few important things to note that will help you build the confidence to excel on the day.



First of all, interviewers, both in corporates and consultancies alike, tend to exhibit largely the same tendencies, no matter what part of the world they come. Some exhibit annoying traits like not keeping to time, not focusing on the interview (some actually use their mobile phones and answer calls), and unnecessary

intimidation of candidates. These, fortunately, are the exception not the rule and it is the task of the interviewee to shine like a shooting star, irrespective of the character and disposition of the interviewer. The tips below therefore apply to candidates everywhere, irrespective of the country where the interview is taking place. The world is now truly a global village thanks to technology platforms, ease of travel, globalization of business, etc.

The second important point for the interviewee to note that interviewing is not an exact science. In spite of concerted efforts by human resource theory and practice to make interview results and outcomes more systematic and predictable, the element of human judgment still remains a key factor. I applaud the impact of competency based models of interviewing in systematizing the process, but I stand by the interviewer's judgment as the key determinant. Interviews are therefore subjective. Armed with this knowledge, the best way to improve your chances of succeeding in the usually highly competitive process, is by thorough preparation to face this 'almighty' interviewer! Our focus in this article will be on the interviewee and what he or she needs to get right on the day.

### **So what do you need to do to impress your 'destiny' on the other side of the table?**

1. **Research:** Do not come to the interview without researching the company. In fact, do not go to any business meeting without researching the company. Check their website, read them up on LinkedIn, and check the profiles of key staff, read articles on the internet about their current activities, find out which bar they drink in and where they buy their groceries (just kidding!). In addition, find out what their employee value-proposition is. What kind of people do they typically hire? What character traits and values are important to them? This information not only prepares you for potential questions, but gives you confidence-knowledge is power as the saying goes. We will talk more about that recurring word-confidence as we go along.

2. Practice: I recommend that the interviewee practices answering interview questions in advance of the interview date i.e. some kind of mock interview process. Part of the research should be finding the typical job interview questions and the answers that employers want to hear. Find a family member or friend and do this 'dry run' with them. You can even do it in front of a mirror. This mock interview creates a familiarity with potential questions and helps you not to be fazed by the questions as they come on the day.
3. Arriving on Time: Always be on time for an interview. By 'on-time' I mean at least ten to fifteen minutes early, maybe even a little earlier. Factor in the traffic if you live in a city like Lagos, Nigeria and set out on time. If need be, take some time to drive to the interview location a day before so you know exactly where you are going and how long it will take to get there. Tardiness on the interview day sends a very loud signal of unseriousness or lack of focus to the employer.
4. Dressing: As the saying by Mark Twain goes "Clothes maketh the man. Naked people have little or no influence on society". How you look in an interview really does matter, contrary to what anyone may tell you! I have seen many people with impeccable credentials loose out to those who dressed well and communicated well. The 'rule of thumb' is for men to wear a decent dark suit and a tie, while the women should endeavor to wear a trouser or skirt suit or a jacket over a dress, if that is their preferred choice. The key principles for dressing for an interview are decency and formality. Closely related to dressing is the personal hygiene - personal grooming if you like. Hair should be tidy – not wild and colorful especially for the women. Body odor and mouth odor should be eliminated and it is wise to ask someone to inspect what you are preparing to wear to the interview. This is important because character traits can be deduced from personal grooming or the lack of it. I have seen corporate interviewers make hiring decisions based on how a candidate looked on the day. Interviewers search for job-fit characteristics in the candidate and focus on the small details that they observe during the interviews.
5. Confidence; not over confidence: I love the quotation attributed to Henry Ford which says "whether you think you can or think you can't, you are right!" so choose to think you can and walk into that interview with the confidence that the job is yours. In Nigeria, my local environment, people tend to be loud and over-confident and this tends to be carried over into the interview domain. Unfortunately, over-confidence often rubs the employer/interviewer the wrong way and can cause them to mentally shut out the candidate who feels he or she is 'too much'. I recommend "quiet confidence". Quiet confidence has presence and self-assurance, but is not loud and brash. Quiet confidence is built from substance and is not made for show. It is focused getting things done and does not focus on the ephemeral. Those with this disposition are true to their quality and set about quietly delivering value wherever they are—usually behind the scenes. As a matter of fact, over-confidence is usually a pointer to some form of insecurity. If you do not have confidence in yourself as you approach the D-day, **I recommend three (3) tips.**

- Thorough preparation: This will give you some measure of assurance that you have done all that you can do. It is literally no longer in your hands. As we say in Nigeria, it is now in God's hands.
- Self-talk: This may sound a bit radical but it works. Talk to yourself remind yourself who you are and why the job is yours. If you are a spiritual person, it gets even easier to self-talk. Convince yourself that you will perform well at the interview.
- Positive outlook: Have a positive mindset going into the interview. Cast away negative thoughts that remind you of your inadequacies and focus on your strengths. Remember that you are special to have come through the screening process to the interview stage. Be in a 'good place' in your thoughts and do not allow fear to enter or win.



6. Answering Questions: You are allowed to think for a few moments before you respond to a question. I actually consider it wise to pause for a few seconds to gather your thoughts before you embark on the answer. It is wise to decline to answer a question if you do not know it at all, you can look quite foolish when you confidently talk 'off-point'. Do not ramble, go straight to the point. This cannot be emphasized enough! You are probably on a fixed time slot at the interview. Do not get the entire panel looking at their watches! Keep it short and sharp by going straight to the 'meat' of the matter. One strategy to use when you do not know an answer is to speak on whatever aspect of the answer that you do know but stick to that aspect alone and keep it brief. It's okay to admit that you do not know the rest of the answer. Keep your voice well modulated and ensure that all your interviewers can hear you. Do not shout especially if you are in a closed space.
7. Asking Questions: The interviewee is allowed to ask a few questions usually towards the end of the interview. This is an opportunity for the interviewee to display intelligence, to shine with the research conducted earlier on the company and to fully understand the vision and the mission of the business. I recommend that the usual 'Do you have any questions' section of the interview be very well utilized.
8. Follow Up: Always follow-up with a thank you note reiterating your interest in the position. If you interviewed with a panel, send each one a personal thank you note if possible. Send your thank you note (email is fine) within 24 hours of your interview if you can.

Finally, remember that the interviewer or interview panels are human beings, not ogres! They are typically busy people and are looking to maximize the time they spend interviewing. They want the best possible person who will add value to their organization or their client's business. They are, deep down, rooting for you to impress them and desiring that you succeed.

The ball is therefore in your court! Happy Hunting!