

13 Ways to Prepare for Your Next Interview

Rita's Career Corner ...With Rita B. Allen

February 2014

Preparing for an interview takes much thought, time, diligence and strategy. We only get one shot to make a good impression and to put our best foot forward. So much of our career success relies on our ability to seize opportunities that are presented to us. Whether you are pursuing a new position in a different organization or a growth opportunity within your current organization, taking the time to prepare for the interview is crucial. That means doing a lot of homework on the organization, position for which you are interviewing, as well as people with whom you are interviewing. In addition, start with your own self-exploration and be fully prepared to discuss **why you are the ideal candidate for the job!**

Practice the following **13 Ways to Prepare for Your Next Interview:**

- 1 – Know what you are offering:** take the time to reflect on all your skills, knowledge, abilities, competencies, values, interests, experiences and aspirations; know yourself very well and be prepared to discuss all that you have to offer, your value and your contributions
- 2 – Talk accomplishments:** what difference did you make in every position you have held, what did you achieve and how; discuss results and outcomes not just responsibilities; be ready to showcase how you set yourself apart from other candidates; your resume gets you the interview and then the interview is about marketing your accomplishments; discuss your career decisions along the way, what you did and why, how you made a difference and your progression from each role to the next
- 3 – Be goal-oriented:** establish short-term and long-term goals for yourself and be prepared to share them; have a mission and vision for your career with an execution strategy planned out; be ready to discuss that vision including your short-term expectations and long-term aspirations; this also enables you to identify what's important to you in achieving your goals and determining your 'must-haves'
- 4 – Strong Communication and Presentation:** practice your delivery; clearly articulate what you are looking for as well as your worth; be concise, crisp and confident; hone your communications by exercising strong verbal and non-verbal skills paying close attention to body language as well as tone and enthusiasm; maintain appropriate eye contact, have a firm handshake and hold good posture; take good

care and focus on your presentation with professional attire and grooming; put your best self forward; be confident and up-beat with a positive attitude

5 – Research the company: do your homework on the organization through various sources such as visiting their website, reading trade journals and news stories, talking to people in your network, investigating industry trends; be informed on the company's achievements; be knowledgeable of the position learning as much as you can prior to your interview; be prepared to talk about your skills and experiences that are specifically relevant to the position; and lastly, learn about the individuals you will be meeting by looking on the company website as well as finding their LinkedIn profiles

6 – Active listening: be an attentive listener; speak as appropriate, listen as appropriate, probe as appropriate, reflect and respond as appropriate; focus on the other person rather than your own thoughts to accurately understand their needs allowing you to formulate your responses most effectively

7 – Share examples and stories: illustrate your accomplishments and experiences by sharing stories of real examples from your past; behavioral, situational or skills-based type interview questions where you describe specific situations and examples from your past experiences are very common and are based on the premise that the single best predictor of a candidate's future job performance is past performance; prepare by thinking of examples that demonstrate your range of skills and abilities

8 – Create a list of questions: show up for the interview with a list of good, thoughtful questions you want to ask about the company, position, organizational culture, people, team members, leadership, expectations, opportunities for advancement as well as a host of other important information; spend time thinking about the key factors you need to know to make an informed decision as well as to communicate your intelligence

9 – Hold off compensation/benefits discussions: initial interviews should be focused on learning about the company, position and people as well as for determining right match/fit; do not discuss salary or benefits in the initial round(s) unless the question is posed to you; show your interest in the organization and the role you are interviewing for rather than how many vacation days you will be earning; once you progress to further rounds, that is the time to have the discussion and negotiation around compensation and benefits package

10 – Practice your 'must-tells': always be ready to highlight 3-5 major points you want a prospective employer to know about you before you leave the interview; keeping your message short and sweet is always the best strategy so practice your message several times, never wing it, remember you only get one shot so make it your best; this enables you to be confident and empowers you to ensure you are heard

11 – Get comfortable talking about yourself: many people hold back in interviews due to a fear of appearing too aggressive, conceited, not-humble as well as a variety of other reasons; one way to alleviate this is to be ready to answer the typical questions asked and to practice delivering your answers; typical questions include much of what was mentioned earlier as well as questions around preferred management style, project management skills, reason for interest in position, strengths and weaknesses, career choices and decisions made, ideal team member characteristics, why they should hire YOU, etc. etc.; be ready, study, prepare and get comfortable answering these questions as well as many others with confidence

12 – Exercise professional etiquette: practice good manners, be courteous, respectful and professional in all of your encounters; honesty and sincerity is always appropriate and the best policy; never bad mouth past employers or managers remaining upbeat and neutral; if you prefer to bring or take notes, do so by carrying a neat and orderly portfolio or binder; always send a thank you note keeping it short, crisp and positive; make a point of following up on a regular basis to stay close and to continue to show your enthusiasm and interest in the company and position

13 – Ask for the job: if you are interested in the position, tell them; let them know you want the job; it is amazing how often people are reluctant to express their enthusiasm because they worry about appearing too anxious; on the contrary, employers want to see that level of interest to a point where it can be a make or break decision maker; don't hold back or assume they know you want the job, be sure to communicate and display an appropriate level of emotion and language to indicate as such; when you have found that right opportunity, done your homework and prepared in these 13 ways for the interview process, you are ready to ask for the job!

Ask Rita...

Question: I have been interviewing a lot for new positions but don't seem to make it past the first round of interviews to the next round often enough. During the interview, I try to allow the interviewer to lead the interview but I'm wondering if I'm missing something. How do I ensure I am nailing the interview so I get invited back for another round?

Answer: It sounds like you have marketable skills and experience as well as a well written resume if you are being invited for interviews. It is also wise to allow the interviewer to lead the interview as you have said, however, there are ways to empower yourself within the interview to ensure success. For starters, be sure to research the organization, the position and the individuals you are meeting with prior to the interview. It is important to learn as much as you can so you can tailor your experiences to best meet the needs of the company, department and people with whom you would be working. Second, know exactly what you want them to know about yourself and how you could add value. Don't leave that room until they know the 'must tells' that you need them to hear. Know what those 'must tells' are and be sure to share them which is how you will be empowered to put your best foot forth. Third, be prepared to ask good questions and be prepared to answer questions that tell stories of your success. It's always better to illustrate your experiences with examples in the form of stories as opposed to just reciting what you can do. Sharing your accomplishments through results is the most effective way to gain attention and stand apart from other candidates.

Last but not least, show enthusiasm and interest in the job...and make sure you tell them you WANT the job! Ask for what you want and don't be timid in doing so! Be confident and let your confidence shine through. When all things are equal between candidates, the one with the most enthusiasm and confidence is likely to get asked back. Sometimes it is about chemistry and rapport which is also an important part of finding the right match for ourselves. Understand what kind of organizational culture and environment would be ideal for you and look for those types of fits for yourself. It is a very competitive market and highly specialized at this time. The more you interview, the more practice you gain and will continue to refine your interviewing skills and better identify the right opportunities for yourself. Happy Hunting!

Send your questions to: [Rita B. Allen](mailto:rita@ritaballenassociates.com)

Rita Balian Allen is the president of Rita B. Allen Associates, www.ritaballenassociates.com, a provider of career management/talent management consulting and executive coaching services located in Waltham, Mass., with specialty areas in leadership development, management training and career development. She is also a Lecturer at Northeastern University and Bentley University.