



Successful Interviewing *By Melissa Wall*

Camera. Lights. Action. Preparing for a film career? No, just going on an interview. Interviewing is a nerve-wracking process and maybe it's been a long time since you last did this.

You want to create a good impression and be considered for the job, but what are interviewers looking for today? Simply stated, employers are looking for people who have the right skills, demonstrated capabilities to hit the ground running and, importantly, flexibility.

Today's Hiring Philosophy

Increasingly, companies are looking for people that can make a contribution quickly and have the flexibility to roll with a variety of situations that occur in business today. It's not about loyalty, it's about competition. Technology has fostered a faster moving business environment that doesn't stop while we are having lunch. While we can argue that things should be slower, the reality is that competition both globally and locally continually forces companies to maximize resources and minimize costs and keep pushing productivity levels.

What does that mean for employees? First it means that while companies may offer some training, they are not responsible for your career – you are. Second, jobs for life are gone. So only think about how a job and/or company fits into your three to five year career plan. Third, you will be working more hours than you would like to.

That said, here's some advice on interviewing etiquette to facilitate the process and to help you get the job you want.

Dress Appropriately. You only have one chance to make a first impression and appearances do count. Unless you are looking for a position in a design studio or a place where the business is run by twenty-somethings, dress conservatively, even if the hiring company says they are "business casual".

This means wearing a suit and tie for men and a suit for women (smart pant suits are acceptable...no capris or otherwise casual looking pants). Be sure the clothes you wear fit you properly. If the last time you wore the interview suit or blouse/shirt you were 10 pounds lighter and the buttons are popping open, buy a new outfit.



Make sure you are looking your best with shoes shined, hair tidy, beards trimmed for men and no chipped polish or runs in stockings for ladies. For the under 30-year olds, take out the extra jewelry from your ears and other visible body parts. (Sorry – this is not about freedom of expression, it’s about landing a job with people who may not approve of your eyebrow piercing and may make the wrong assumptions about you. Save the body art for your personal time.)

Be Prepared. So many people come to an interview having not even looked up the firm on the Web. It shows a lack of interest. So check out what the company does, where it is located and what products or services it offers. If the company has a news site, read their recent press releases so you can see what’s new at the firm. Do a Google search and see what other information you can find out about the company. If they are a public firm, check out www.hoovers.com and see what has been written about them and who their key competitors are.

Be ready to ask questions. What do you want to know about them? If they have asked you to bring samples of your work, don’t forget them. Always bring a copy of your resume.

Know your own Facts. Know when you worked for a specific company, and what you did there. Memorize a few of your accomplishments so you can talk about them easily.

Don’t Lie. If you don’t have specific experience, then say so. But follow it up with either an example of a similar experience or how you got up-to-speed in one of your prior positions without knowing anything about that work.

Don’t lie on your resume either. Most companies will check dates of employment and if they can’t corroborate the dates, you will not get an offer. It will either be seen as deception or a lack of attention to detail – neither is good.

Don’t Apologize for your Age or Experience or Lack of it. The strange thing about having a career is that at some point you move from having insufficient experience (translated usually means too young) to having too much experience (translated usually means too expensive).

You can’t change the clock, or your experience level, so emphasize your strengths. If you feel you are inexperienced or may appear too youthful, show how you have learned and contributed quickly. Demonstrate your maturity in your attitude and work ethic.

If you have more gray hair, focus on how your experience adds value, saves time and money, is good for directing others. Demonstrate high energy and how in touch you are with technology, popular culture etc. It’s more about attitude than age.



Don't be afraid to ask about Next Steps. In sales parlance, this is called the trial close. Ask the interviewer how you stack up against their ideal and against the other candidates. Ask them about the next steps and when will you likely hear from them. Is there any other information you can provide them to help them make their decision?

Send a Follow-up Note. Either send an email or a short note to all the people you meet during an interview, and make each note different, highlighting some aspect of your meeting with that person. Most people forget this point of etiquette so if you do it, you will stand out from the pack. Be sure to check for grammatical errors and don't be too colloquial – especially via email. It's still a formal communication and many people have lost a job opportunity because a typo shows a lack of attention to detail.

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