

# The Guru Mantras For A Successful Job Interview

By Ms. Mekhla Sinha, VP (Operations), Global HRD Centre

Congratulations! Spending days, weeks, or possibly months of looking for the right job has finally paid off and you've been asked to come in for an interview. Then comes the biggest question of all, "now what?" You will only have 15 to 20 minutes to "sell" your experiences, attitude, and skills to the employer - most likely without knowing what the employer wants to hear from you. There are articles upon articles of advice on interviewing, from how to answer certain questions to how to dress - right down to the colour of your socks! It can seem overwhelming, but remembering a few key points can help make your interview successful. Successful interviewing will be essential in order for you to lock in an offer. Job interviews in many organisations are getting sophisticated these days. Psychological tests, role plays, and challenges to one's "quick intelligence" and street smarts are often part of the package. While it's impossible to anticipate everything you may encounter,

## 1. Learn all you can about the company or organization

Learn as much as you can so that your questions are sophisticated and knowledgeable during the interview. Employers expect you to arrive knowing background information about the organisation. If you don't, you look like you're not really interested in the job. You have to be able to answer the critical question of why you would like to work for that employer — and not sound like you would take any job. Research helps you formulate intelligent and appropriate answers to questions to be asked in your interview.

## 2. Prepare and over-prepare.

It is assumed that you don't go in with egg on your tie, spinach in your teeth, or without a thorough knowledge of the organisation and position for which you are interviewing. Beyond that, there's an important principle that will enable you to be much more confident. It's called, "over-preparing." It goes like this: Plan your strategy—your answers to all the possible questions you may be asked or the challenges that may be thrown at you—and then practice, practice, practice. Role plays and repeats your best responses until they are entirely natural, until they simply roll off your tongue with the apparent spontaneity that comes

only with successive repetition. Given below is a list of some very commonly asked questions by the employer?

- a) Tell me about yourself
- b) Your educational background
- c) Your family background.
- d) Subject background and update general knowledge
- e) Ability to learn foremost traits for a potential Manager.
- f) Extracurricular activities and hobbies

Some of the behavioural and physical attributes/ traits which contribute to a successful interview are:

- Dress formally
- Walk gently and lightly tap the door before entering the room for the interview
- Sit when asked to do so
- Be at ease
- Look pleasant without any sign of nervousness
- Smile and greet
- Do not get stressed if not answered.
- Listen to questions completely. Do not rush into answer.
- Weigh the question in your mind and make sure you have understood before answering.
- Politely ask the panel to repeat the question.
- Make sure your voice is heard
- Always address to the entire panel / committee
- Make sure that you leave the chair in proper position before leaving room.
- Thank the panel and leave gently.

## 3. Be particularly clear on what you know and what you want to achieve.

If your interview is resume-based, have the facts of your stated objective, relevant experience, education, etc. thoroughly memorized and mentally supported. As to your job objective, be clear on what you want, as well as what you don't want. There's little room in the job market for the applicant who's willing to take anything; he or she will usually get nothing!

## 4. Make sure your responses match your claims.

If, for example, you've taken extra coursework to qualify for a particular position, license, or certification, tie it into your narrative, e.g., "When I took



Ms. Mekhla Sinha

my coursework for my CPA, I learned that ..." Build on your resume, but don't refer directly to it (assuming the interviewer has it in his or her possession); make sure the connections are there, but do it subtly.

## 5. Be clear about your strengths.

You're almost certain to be hit with questions pertaining to your strengths and weaknesses. Know your strengths and emphasise those that relate specifically to the position for which you're being considered. If, for example, you're applying for a sales position, you might describe one of your strengths in the following words: "I've made a study of personality types and I've learned to quickly type people in terms of the kinds of approaches that might best attract them." Be prepared, in this case, to back up your claim if the interviewer suddenly asks: "What type would you say I am?"

## 6. Describe your weaknesses as strengths.

The interviewer probably wants to learn several things about you with this question. Here are two ways to answer this question so that you leave a positive impression in the mind of the interviewer: (a) Show that, in overcoming a weakness, you've learned. If, for example, there's a period in your chronology that just doesn't fit (say that you took a job selling cars between jobs as an accountant ... it happens!), you might tell the interviewer: "One weakness, which it took me some time to overcome, was that I really wasn't sure that I wanted to be an accountant. For example, in 1988-90, I worked as a car salesman. I did so because I couldn't decide if I wanted to make accounting my career. That experience taught me that I really didn't want to sell products, and that I was much more challenged by the opportunity to solve client

problems. (b) Pick a weakness that is really a strength. If, for example, you're being interviewed for a job in an organisation you know is hard-charging and unforgiving of average performance, you might say, "One of my weaknesses is that I tend to be impatient with people who aren't willing to give 100% to their work. In this case, your "weakness" may help you get the job.

**7. Be clear where you want to go.**

A standard question which has all manner of variations is: "Where do you want to be five years from today?" The economy and nearly every industry are changing so fast that specificity with respect to the distant future is extremely difficult. So, instead of responding to the question with, "I plan to be in a position of senior leadership in this company," you might want to say: "I plan to become qualified in every phase of this industry." The exact response depends upon the specifics of your job hunting campaign, but the principle is: be specific while allowing yourself the flexibility which suggests that you understand the complexities of the business you're applying for.

**8. Have clear personal standards.**

This is a sleeper because, on the face of it, the question doesn't seem to have much to do with the immediate interview. Today, however, many organizations are looking for people who do have standards regarding their personal and professional lives, who can articulate them clearly and concisely, and who live by them. In this case, the briefer, the better. "I delegate my weaknesses." "I don't take on projects unless I can give them 100% dedication." "I respond in specifics and avoid meaningless generalities." "I am committed to life-long learning and growth."

**9. Interview the interviewer.**

The applicant who will take anything offered is unlikely to win any but the most temporary of positions. A competent interviewer (there are some) will respect your efforts to assess the organisation and the position in terms of whether or not it meets your requirements. And you owe it to yourself to have defined beforehand, what you ideally want and what you are willing to settle for, under certain conditions. For example, you might really want a salary of \$75,000 to begin with, but you'd be willing to take less if the opportunities for growth are clearly in the picture.

**10. Don't allow yourself to be badgered by the salary issue.**

In most organisations, there are clear parameters for a given job, a range of salary that is adjustable depending upon the market and the applicant's experience. In most cases, unless you are very good,

you will have to work within those limits. But, within the limits, what you are worth is a matter of mutual agreement based on your own knowledge of your worth and your ability to convince those interviewing you. So, to sum it up: Know the range of compensation for the job you're seeking, make your own realistic determination of what you're worth, and then be prepared to stand your ground.

After the interview some specific etiquette is essential like:

- Making notes right away so that the critical details are not forgotten.
- If you are working with a search firm or recruiter, call that recruiter immediately while the facts of the interview are fresh on your mind. The recruiter will want to know what you thought went well and what you may have concerns about.
- Always send a thank you letter to the interviewer immediately. It is good to keep the letter short but to also reiterate your interest in the position and your confidence in your qualifications.
- Don't call the employer back immediately. If the employer said they would have a decision in a week, it is OK to call them in a week, again to thank them for the interview and reiterate your interest.
- If you receive word that another candidate was chosen, you may also send a follow-up letter to that employer, again thanking him or her for the opportunity to interview for the position. Let them know that should another or similar position open in the future, you would love to have the opportunity to get interviewed again

There are several other key factors which contribute to a great extent in making a candidate a winner:

1. Personality- Personality is basically a combination of attributes such physical features, knowledge, attitude & practise, skills, behaviour, leadership qualities, communication and value system
2. Body Language- Strangely our body speaks more than we do. We have classified into two broad terms – deliberate body gestures and non-deliberate gestures. Further we divide them into positive and negative gestures. Positive body language reflects – pleasantness, acceptance, comfort, friendliness, dignity, sobriety, and warmth. Negative body language reflects – ignorance, arrogance, snobbery and cold welcome. One wrong gesture could give an irreparable wrong impression. It is the body language that unconsciously distinguishes one individual from the other. But mind it. Never go against your natural self

Different types of body language can be interpreted from:

- Movement of hands
- Way of looking (eye contact)
- Stiff or loose body style
- Dressing up and carrying it
- General manners and etiquettes

**3. Communication Skills -** Good communication is always two ways- understanding and making understand. Communication could be written and oral. Written has a silent effect and more formal. Oral has a more immediate effect and more personal. People often misunderstand it by good English. Good communication is not good English. It is always supported by a purpose. Following are a few points to be taken care of to ensure good communication :

- Have clarity of thought
- Remove hesitation
- Right framing of sentences
- Be simple (no jargons) and comprehensive
- Answers should be supported by the right body gestures and language
- Right (not monotonous) speed of voice, accent.
- Expressive voice modulation
- Support your views with examples
- Show assertiveness not aggressiveness
- Be audible and clear
- Confirm the communication
- Try to be relevant and sensible
- Never probe into the matter

And finally, to sum it up, we must be aware of what are the key traits of a good manager/ professional that an employer always looks for an interview. It is essential to be aware of them as they help us orient & integrate ourselves accordingly with the interview process:

**KEY TRAITS OF A GOOD MANAGER**

1. Consistency
2. Proactiveness
3. Communication
4. Integrity
5. Adaptability
6. Vision and purpose
7. Problem solving
8. Grace under pressure
9. Open to learning
10. Wise disagreement
11. Leadership
12. Desire to manage
13. Confidence to make decisions

These golden rules will help you negotiate the interview process successfully. Its time to prepare yourself for the journey that lies ahead. It can be a little scary, but with the proper preparation you will go a long way in being a winner. All the best!