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## THE CHAZIN GROUP



**Career Learning Series | Ace the Interview Process.**

## Why the Interview Process is Difficult to Perfect.

The interview process is one of the most subjective and difficult parts of the job search to perfect.

People who conduct interviews hardly ever receive formal training on conducting an effective interview. They simply inherited the responsibility, so they learned to navigate the interview process by trial and error.

It is not as if hiring managers knowingly ask illegal questions or make probing statements to uncover information to determine your age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, etc. Few hiring managers and Human Resources professionals receive formal training on conducting highly effective interviews using the proper techniques. Interviewing is almost always a responsibility that people who manage others are left to acquire on their own, as they advance in their own careers.

The interview is a process in which strangers feel each other out with the express purpose of determining if they would work well together. Combine that with the fact that there are so few job opportunities these days and the pressure of acing the interview places such great stress on the candidate.

By calling you in for an interview, the potential employer is sending you a very strong, positive message:

**“We think that on paper or based on your initial phone interview, you possess the requisite skills and experience to excel as the ideal candidate in this position.”**

You can learn to manage the process IF you understand that the process can be broken down into three separate manageable stages which are: 1) the pre-interview; 2) the interview, and 3) the post-interview. If you plan each stage accordingly, then you WILL learn to perfect the process in its entirety.

## STEP 1 | THE PRE INTERVIEW

During the pre interview, you need to complete all of the actions that are required to ensure a high probability of success during the interview. Begin by knowing exactly where the interview is. If possible, conduct a trial run to get to the office at the same time that your interview is at. You need to go through a checklist of items to pack, and things to do.

Here is a checklist of the things that you need to do in order to prepare for a successful interview:

- Pack sufficient sets of your personal business card, resume, professional bio, and references paper clipped together (a binder is a nice touch) to leave with them
- Place all of your “best work” (writing samples, reports, articles, blogs, research, spreadsheets, graphic designs, advertisements, direct mailers, etc.) in a leather 8-1/2” x 11” portfolio. Rehearse how you would walk someone through your portfolio to emphasize all of your “success stories”, strengths, and most relevant experience
- Proper identification social security card, state-issued driver’s license or non driver identification card, and/or birth certificate)
- Make sure all of your accounts on social networking sites are up-to-date and completely professional
- Call all of your references and let them know you are having an interview and if all goes well they may receive a call from the potential employer
- Breath mints (be sure to take 1-2 before you walk into the location of your interview)
- Comb/brush
- Handkerchief & tissues
- Umbrella (if needed)
- Pens and highlighters (make sure they work)
- Directions to the work place
- Contact information of the person/people you are going to be interviewing with
- Index cards with research and questions you will ask when it’s your turn
- Gather as much information as you can on the company including:
  - The person/people who you are going to meet. You can conduct a search on them online (using Google, Yahoo, Bing, Vivissimo, and other search engines.) Look at their information on their Linked In profile and other executive biographic databases and/or social media resources. Your goal is to find out which professional associations they belong to, what academic institutions they attended, what organizations they worked at before the present company you are interviewing at, if they had any special accreditations, accomplishments, interests, affiliations;
  - Their key products, services, and business lines;
  - The markets they serve, their target market segments, and any client profiles;
  - Strategic partnerships, such as Value-Added Resellers (indirect sales agents)
  - Their Management Team
  - What a standard compensation is for someone in that position in the same industry and market area that the position is located in.

Since most people who conduct interviews are not exceptionally good at it, you can expect that they will ask you a few questions that are fairly standard/common. You must practice rehearsing your answers to

their questions, in order to sound confident and clear in your thought process. Following are a few of the questions you can expect to receive:

- Tell me about yourself
- Walk me through your experience (last job first)
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What is/are your greatest strengths and accomplishments?
- What is your greatest weakness?
- Why are you interested in joining our Company?
- What do you know about our Company?

Here is how you should rehearse answering these questions:

Before you give your answers, look slightly past them and above their head. Take a few seconds pretending to be deep in thought. Then re-establish eye contact, and provide them with the WELL-rehearsed answers you prepared. This will demonstrate that you are giving their questions the serious thought they deserve. However, you have rehearsed them so your answers sound clear, concise, and well thought out. You **MUST** sound as convincing and honest as possible.

**KEY:** For each question they ask, you **MUST** rehearse your answer by adding to the end of each anticipated question: “...**as it applies to my ability to do an exceptional job.**”

As you prepare for your interview understand that there are two types of culture in any organization: the **FORMAL** and the **INFORMAL** culture. The **FORMAL** culture is **aspirational**. It’s what they want others to think they are like. It’s the way they describe themselves in their press releases, on their websites, when their senior management team talks about the organization.

The **INFORMAL** culture is what it’s really like to work there. You **MUST** know each of these in advance of your interview, so you can understand how your own personal values and belief systems fit into their **INFORMAL** culture. Ask questions if needed.

You can research an organization’s culture by speaking with past and/or current employees, follow what employees are saying about the organization on employee rant blogs, websites, etc. This is the sort of research you can best leverage by tapping into your personal and professional networks.

### **PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE**

Have someone that you trust practice interviewing you for each job you prepare for. Ask them for their feedback. If at all possible, videotape the practice interview so you can spot anything that might be an area you need to improve on. Non-verbal communications like unnecessary body movements, hand gestures, head jerks, poor eye contact are often ingrained in our behavior and we need to work hard to control those. Other verbal cues we need to control are phrases such as “Umm, like, huh...” that we do so frequently we are not even aware of.

If you cannot videotape your practice interviews, you can always tape it using a tape recorder and listen to yourself. Try to perfect the interaction with your interviewer and really control how you answer each question. By rehearsing you greatly reduce the chance of rambling on and control your answers so they are concise and clear.

## STEP 2 | THE INTERVIEW

You should always get there fifteen (15) minutes early, even earlier if they specifically request it.

It is best to make a trial run to visit their site at the same time that your interview is scheduled for. Peak commute time (7-9am; 5-7pm) is a lot different than travelling during off-peak times (10am-12pm, 2-4pm) especially if you rely on public transportation.

If you arrive at the location where their office is earlier than fifteen minutes beforehand, do NOT (I repeat DO NOT!) wait at the nearby deli, coffee shop, or eatery. Also, NEVER go to the cafeteria in the building where their office is located, either. You never know if the person you are going to interview with (or their secretary or someone else in the Department you are interviewing with) goes to that place. If they do and see you there, they might very well recall seeing you when you arrive at their office. If they do, they will think it strange you were sitting there before your interview. Find some place far enough away from the office, to minimize the chance that someone working here will see you.

Your interview actually begins when you enter the workplace and make contact with the first person in the department you are going to, typically the Department receptionist/secretary at the main entrance on the floor you are going to. Your receptors should be firing on all cylinders so observe EVERYTHING. Be as courteous as possible. You are now in the midst of their INFORMAL culture. Tell them your name, the person you are there to meet and the time of their meeting. They will ask you to be seated. Sit calmly. Do not fidget.

You will be given an application to complete. When you have completed ALL of the information requested, return it, along with your business card, resume, references and professional bio.

They will notify the person that you are scheduled to meet that you are ready to meet with them. While you are waiting, sit calmly and review your index cards. If they have company promotional materials, take a complete set for your reference.

It is critical that you pay attention to EVERY detail of the surrounding work environment. Pay particular attention to how people interact with one another. As people walk by, do they make eye contact with you? Are they smiling or growling? Are people nice to each other? Do they engage each other in conversation? Keep asking yourself: “**Can I work here?**” This is what it will be like to work there every day, so your job is to pay attention to as many details as you possibly can. This is the **INFORMAL** culture of that organization in all its glory.

If they ask if you would like something to drink, graciously decline. Here’s why:

First, you run the risk of spilling something on yourself. Second, if you are nervous your hand will shake when you take the drink from them. This gives off an aura of fear, implying weakness. Third, you do not want to come across as “demanding?” Fourth, what do you do with the drink once the interview begins? If, however, you are so nervous that your throat gets dry, then it is acceptable to graciously

accept their offer of water. The LAST thing you want is your voice to crack during introductions and/or the interview.

When the person that is going to interview you comes out to the lobby to greet you, get ready to exchange pleasantries. Shake their hand firmly, but only if they offer theirs to you. Match the pressure that they exert in their grip. Remember they might have the limp fish or the vice, so you have to be prepared to exert the same amount of force they apply to the handshake. For example, they might ask you: "Did you have any trouble finding the place?" Whether or not you had trouble arriving to the interview, your answer must be: "No, it is a very easy commute." That is one additional reason to hire you.

When they lead you to their office or the conference room, they will offer you a seat then seat themselves. At this point you hand them a set of your samples of work, resume, professional bio, and your portfolio and your business card.

Get ready to begin using the "mirroring" technique throughout the interview. By "mirroring", you assume the body position that the person across from you takes. For example, you sit back with your arms crossed if that's what they are doing. Conversely, lean slightly forward with eyes in eager engagement if that is their body posture. Psychologists have researched this behavior, and found that it puts the other person in a more relaxed state.

As the interview unfolds it almost always takes on a standard flow. They start out by telling you about themselves, the company, and then the requirements of the job. You must be sure to tell them about your successes. Show them the portfolio of your work. It is your "salesmanship in print." They will then ask you a few questions specific to your background and how you are going to achieve outstanding results in the position. Then they will ask you if you have any questions.

It is perfectly acceptable and in fact desirable for you to ask if it is alright to take notes. After you ask, take out a small notepad to jot down key points. Do NOT try to capture EVERY word they say, but highlight the key points. You may well need to refer back to something they said when you write your thank you letter in step three.

Let's say they are so experienced and competent at the process that they answer nearly all of your questions. You might be nervous, or for some reason are not feeling your best that your inclination is to answer them when they ask: "Do you have any additional questions for me?" by saying: "No, you've answered all my questions."

Whether you meant it or not, by saying that here is what you are implying to them: "I didn't do my homework and I haven't prepared for this rare and unique opportunity. I don't take myself or you seriously. I don't really want this job." Remember the reason you did all that research about them and the organization is at this very moment of the interview to ask 4-5 well thought out questions. By asking these questions you will convey an aura of respect for them (and yourself), professionalism and seriousness that you want the job. You MUST demonstrate through the questions you ask that you are focused on achieving outstanding performance.

Since the interviewee (that's you) will only get the chance to talk for approximately 40% of the time, it is critical that you maximize your time to speak.

Use your time wisely! You should plan on asking excellent questions such as:

- "How will they define outstanding performance in this role when you conduct my first performance review?"
- "What types of personalities have they had the most success working with in their professional relationships?"
- "What problems keep them up at night?"
- "What happened to the person in the job before?" It makes a difference if they were fired, left for greener pastures, or they were promoted. How many people held this role in the past few years?
- "Of all the requirements listed in the job posted, which 2 or 3 are the most critical to achieve success in this role."

Your goal is to ask enough probing questions to demonstrate the research you conducted, while focusing at all times on the greatest challenges facing them. You put yourself in the best position possible when your questions focus on achieving outstanding results and helping them to achieve their goals while overcoming their greatest business challenges.

You must prove throughout the entire interview process that you are UNIQUE, MEMORABLE, and INVALUABLE! To accomplish this, you must explain to them through the research you conducted and your success stories that you will help them to increase their profits, decrease costs, and improve their operational efficiencies.

When it gets to the salary expectations...

At some point in every interview, they will ask you what salary you are looking for. Be prepared to side step. You can say something like:

"Based on my experience and the requirements you are seeking in the ideal candidate I am certain that you will make me an equitable offer."

They may accept that answer and move on, or they may respond: "I understand but what is your current expectation for compensation."

Part of the research you did in preparation for the interview is to understand what a realistic salary range is for such a position in that industry in the geographic area they are located in.

You should say something along the lines of: "I understand that a range for such a position in this field and market area is between \$x,000 and y,000." Please rest assured that I am confident that when we arrive at the compensation discussion you will make me an equitable offer." You can also emphasize that you are aware that compensation is much more than salary and encompasses things like health



benefits, training, use of a computer at work, etc. you want them to rest assured that you will not let compensation get in the way of both parties agreeing to an equitable starting salary.

There are two critical things that you MUST do as the interview comes to an end. Most other candidates simply don't do these two things, so these two steps will set you apart from the other candidates. First, before you leave you must confirm who is expected to make the next move, and what their timeframe is. Are you expected to call them or will they contact you? How long will it be before you should call them or they will call you? It is critical that you understand the next steps in the process.

Second, as you are leaving the office there is something else you can do to set yourself apart. "Ask for the job!" If they said anything that reinforced your strong desire to work there and you come away from the interview more certain than ever that you would excel in the role and work well with them. Did you feel like you and your potential boss just seemed to "click?" If so, you should say:

**"After everything that you have shared with me, I am even more confident that I will achieve outstanding results, and I want to reiterate how interested I am in this position."**

**This is called: "Closing the sale." REMEMBER: the interview is a SALES meeting.**

Thank them for their time in considering you for the opportunity.

### **STEP 3 | THE POST INTERVIEW**

After the interview is over, your extraordinary listening skills will be put to the test. Immediately after you leave your interview, conduct a post-interview assessment. Think about all the things you learned about the organization, the job requirements, the skills you have that would be most utilized, and the behavior/personality of the individual that you would be reporting to.

Ask yourself the following question: “based on everything I discovered during my interview, do I still want to work there?” Remember your experience in their informal culture. BE HONEST!

The same day as the interview, you need to send all the individuals you met with an email and THANK YOU card. A handwritten card that you send by certified mail to the person that you would be reporting to makes a VERY positive statement about your professionalism and seriousness about the job.

In your Thank You note be sure to include the following:

Thank them for giving you the time to meet with them to discuss their needs and your background and experience for the position you advertised for, reiterate the 3 or 4 TOP reasons why you are the ideal candidate. Confirm your understanding of who is expected to make the next move and what the time frame is. If you are expected to follow up, then you must do so in the agreed upon timeframe.

Be prepared to wait as they screen other candidates. They may invite you and a few other final candidates back for additional interviews. The next step is for them to check your references and possibly conduct a background check on you.

When they finally get back to you they will either offer you the position, let you know it has gone to someone else. If they offer you the position, you thank them, and it is perfectly acceptable to take a few days to make a decision. You should know what the compensation will be in terms of salary, when you are eligible for a performance review, what the length of any probationary period is, paid leave (vacation, Holiday, personal days), if there is a potential bonus, your health insurance benefits, 401k account, retirement account, plus matching funds program.