

Acing the Job Interview

Essential truths about job interviews

- Your prospective employer cares mostly about his or her needs, not yours. In job interviews you must focus your commentary on how you can help your new employer accomplish the practice's goals, not on your personal expectations, desires and requirements.
- The biggest fear of prospective employers as they interview you is that they will make an embarrassing mistake and hire someone who will create problems and not last in the new job. During interviews employers will ask questions to assure themselves that you are not:
 - A loner or misfit incapable of getting along with other people;
 - An incompetent incapable of performing essential functions of the job;
 - Lazy and lacking the energy or desire to work hard on the employer's behalf;
 - Negative, cynical, pessimistic and unpleasant to be around;
 - Unstable and unable to hold a job for personal, psychological, health, financial or legal reasons.
- As you answer interview questions, you want to reassure the interviewer that you have none of these disqualifying traits. You will pass the test by demonstrating your positive attributes that are the opposites of these negative traits.
- A job interview is a sales situation in which you are the seller and the employer is the buyer. To sell yourself, you must convince the buyer that hiring you has advantages over other candidates. Your sales pitch should be carefully constructed and rehearsed before an interview.
- Many things are considered as hiring decisions are made, but the single most important hiring criterion in most situations is the perceived amiability, people skills and team spirit of the prospect. People are seldom hired unless they are liked. Your technical qualification is a threshold to be passed, but once judged adequate, is not the primary selection criterion.

Interview preparation mandatories

- Research your prospective employer before the interview. Go to the practice web site for clues on what is important to the practice, the size of the business, the technical sophistication of the practice, specializations and other details. Ask other optometrists in the community about the reputation, strengths and weaknesses of the practice.

If the practice has an office manager, call in advance and ask questions to fill out your profile of the employer. If you are interviewing for a corporate affiliated position, visit one of the company's locations in your area and talk to the O.D. working there.

- Develop a concise statement of your personal features, benefits and advantages to present to your prospective employer. The statement should include a personal goal that is aligned with a major goal of the employer.

- If you have questionable items on your resume, prepare and rehearse answers that will reassure interviewers that you are not a risk. Write down answers to questions you are likely to be asked (see "Common Interview Questions" box). Your answers should demonstrate that you are energetic, assertive, confident, goal oriented, enthusiastic, trustworthy and friendly.

Interview mandatories

- Always wear professional attire to an interview, even at an office that is known to wear casual clothing. Wearing a business suit or dress will increase your credibility and authority and tell your employer that you have made the transition from student to professional.

- Convey energy and enthusiasm. The appearance of being laid back, passive and low key are among the most frequently heard reasons for rejection of job candidates.

No one wants to hire someone who appears incapable of hard work or lacks a strong desire to do a job.

- Use brief stories when explaining your resume, accomplishments and personal traits. Stories that include concrete details in a narrative form are much more memorable and convincing than are abstract, hypothetical answers to questions about your

background, interests and talents.

- Look for commonalities with your interviewers and build upon them to establish rapport.
- Use positive language and tell positive stories; avoid negatives.
- Never criticize former employers or professors or say negative things about previous jobs. Interviewers will identify with your former employer and will picture you being critical of them in the future.
- If you are uncertain about the specific qualities being sought in a candidate, early in the interview ask: “What are the most important qualities you are looking for in a candidate?” This will help you to focus on those skills and talents as you sell yourself.
- If asked to identify your weaknesses, briefly mention a trait or two that have both positive and negative aspects such as perfectionist, workaholic, impatient of failure, intolerant of laziness or dishonesty. Move the interview on quickly to another question.

Common Interview Questions

- What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
- How would your classmates describe you?
- If you could go back and do something different in your academic career, what would you do?
- Do you prefer working with others or working alone?
- What do you really enjoy doing? What type of work would you rather avoid?
- Tell me about your work experience.
- Give me some examples when you did more than was expected in your job or at school to achieve an important goal.
- How would you describe your working style?
- Describe your decision making process.
- Who was your favorite boss? Why?
- Who was your worst boss? Why?
- What experience do you have in managing other people?
- What techniques used by good people managers do you think are most essential?

- Do you consider yourself a leader? Why or why not?
- Tell me about a time when you had to deal with an unreasonable patient. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a time when you disagreed with your boss. How did you handle the situation?
- Tell me about a situation in which you were forced to obey a policy that you disagreed with. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to gain the cooperation of people to accomplish something, when they weren't really motivated to help. What did you do to pull people together?
- Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish something in a very short period of time that seemed insufficient to get the job done. How did you react? What was the outcome?
- Do you consider yourself a good salesperson of your ideas? Why or why not?
- Describe the most creative work project you ever accomplished.
- What are your greatest accomplishments since graduating from high school?
- What is the toughest challenge you ever faced? How did you handle it?
- Why should we hire you? What do you bring to the practice that it needs?
- Tell me about your career plan. What are your objectives over the next five years? Ten years?