

## INTERVIEWS - A TWO-WAY STREET

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Two questions that are often asked about the interview process are: 1) How do I get around questions I don't like? and 2) As the person being interviewed, what questions can I ask?

There have been distinct cycles to the job search process over the past 20 years. - both downturns and upturns in the economy, times when mergers were prevalent and times when restructuring was the operative word in a wide variety of industries. While the downturns have their own special issues for job seekers, upturns like the one we are experiencing bring new opportunities in the search for employment.

### BALANCE AND THE WORK-LIFE CYCLE

Candidates for current open positions are more likely to look at factors of job satisfaction beyond salary, especially if they are in one of the emerging technologies. This is not to be confused with "writing your own ticket" because as always there are hurdles to jump. The selection process is still formalized to the extent that there are telephone and initial screening interviews, in-depth interviews and reference checks. Unlikely prospects are still going to be eliminated during the interview process. So, getting much of what you want from the job can only come if you are the successful candidate.

### DIFFICULT QUESTIONS

Making a good impression in an interview can be difficult if you try to skirt uncomfortable issues. Difficult questions are a normal part of a good interview. Expect interviewers to probe areas of your resume. Be prepared for questions that might focus around relationships with former bosses, job hopping, gaps in employment history, reason for termination of employment, and personality clashes with peers or bosses.

### DESIGN A POSITIVE RESPONSE

Denial and avoidance of a potential problem will not serve you well. Human resources personnel, recruiters and professional interviewers are trained to seek out sensitive issues or areas of concern - sometimes called "red flags" in a candidate. Therefore, prepare fully for each interview by practicing responses to what you consider to be the most difficult or uncomfortable questions. What you think could be a "fatal flaw" is really a challenge to be met. Design an honest, positive and convincing response that you feel would satisfy the interviewer. Present it with confidence.

### TIME AND THE SELLER'S MARKET

One of the difficulties for employers in a seller's market is time. While months may have been taken for a hiring decision (and yes, it does still happen) more likely, companies are pushing the process forward to get the best candidate. If they don't act decisively, a competitor who is able to commit, does not procrastinate or who has clearer plans in place may snatch up the person. When the process drags on longer than expected, it is in the best interest of all concerned to keep the lines of communication open and available.

### QUESTIONS

Another aspect of the interview process is that the job seeker is more likely to have pertinent questions about the company and the position offered. While many of these questions are usually not proffered during the first interview, you can create the opportunity to diplomatically ask meaningful questions as the process continues. For instance:

- .. What happened to the person who had the job?
- .. Why isn't the job being filled internally?
- .. How long has the company been in business?
- .. How is it capitalized?
- .. What is the reporting structure?
- .. How would you describe the atmosphere in the work environment?
- .. What clients does the firm work with?

- .. What are the main issues facing the department/division?
- .. What is the long-term strategy of the company?

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- .. Is there a job description? What are the primary duties of the function?
- .. What are the salary range and benefits: courses, profit sharing, bonuses, etc.?
- .. Is there a policy manual that I can look over?
- .. What are the possibilities for professional growth within the company?
- .. How would you describe the company's corporate culture?

#### WEIGHING CRITERIA

Prior to entering into any employment negotiation, a company usually has a budgeted amount for salary beyond which they are unlikely to go. Constraints to offering a greater salary may be in place such as a preset salary range for the position. Likewise, a job seeker must know the minimum amount of salary he/she is willing to accept. Prior to making a decision to accept a job, weight your salary requirements in conjunction with personal and financial circumstances and whichever of the following criteria are important to you. Check those that you rate as highly desirable.

- Type of industry
- Growth in the market
- Clients/customers
- History of the company
- Stated vision and mission
- Products
- Size of company
- Management structure
- Preferred function
- Desired title
- Degree of administration
- Performance measurement process
- Benefits/pension/perquisites
- Key responsibilities/accountabilities
  
- Promotion possibilities
- Autonomy
- Company philosophy
- Atmosphere in the workplace
- Reporting structure
- Access to facilities/amenities
- Training/courses
- Location/distance from home
- Travel expectations
- Holidays
- Time of next salary review
- Hours of work/flexibility
- Pressure/stress on the job
- Mobility

YOU CAN ALWAYS SAY 'NO'

Don't give up too soon and don't jump too soon. The reason that you were granted in interview is because your qualifications appear to match the company requirements. Show your human

side so that you stand out from the other interviewees and discover the value of being a succinct and interesting short story teller. Think positively about yourself as well as the career opportunity presented. Listen for clues to problems that the company might be experiencing. Your response can indicate both interest in the company and problem solving ability. Keep your list of relevant topics handy and check it to make sure that you haven't missed an important point prior to leaving the interview. Try to find out what it is the company really wants and certainly, know what you want. Remember, you can always say "No" to a proposal so do not be too hasty in declining an opportunity before investigating it fully.

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