

## Candidate Chronicles - Make Your First Impression Count

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Congratulations! You have an interview. Whether a recruiter assisted you in obtaining this interview or you earned it through your own efforts, now is the time to put your best foot forward. Many of you have not interviewed for several years and your interviewing skills may be rusty. The following is the first in a two-part series of how to prepare for an interview and make sure your first impression counts.

Initially, you should think of the interview as both an information-gathering session and a sales presentation with you as the product. While visiting a prospective employer, you have the opportunity to peek behind the public image of the company and determine if it is the type of organization in which you see yourself working. When evaluating a potential employer, there are several points to consider. Will you feel comfortable working with the hiring manager and the rest of the staff? Does the company espouse values you believe in? Would you be challenged and have the opportunity to grow?

In addition to information gathering, you should think of your interview as a sales presentation. The company you are interviewing with created this position to solve a business problem, and the solution could be you - provided you have what it takes and can communicate your talents to your interviewer. Your sales presentation should communicate how your experience, skills and credentials can solve the company's problem.

Before the interview you should be prepared to answer the proverbial question, "Tell me about yourself." Your answer should be a 60-second introduction to your talents and accomplishments. Limit your answer to work-related topics. While hiring managers may be interested in your personal life later in the interviewing process, your answer to this question speaks volumes about how you view your skills, accomplishments and career aspirations.

Next, you should be prepared to describe your most significant accomplishments as they relate to the position. You should be able to explain the why, when, how and what of your accomplishments. How did you help your company expand internationally? How did your team bring three new products to market in 6 months? How did the changes you made on the production floor increase output by 20%? Be prepared to answer who was involved, the steps taken, the results and the lessons learned, as well as your specific involvement. Be able to talk about your successes and your failures. Hiring managers appreciate individuals who have learned from their failures as well as their successes.

Realize that not all hiring managers are experienced interviewers. If the interviewer does not ask questions pertinent to the job, then you may need to take control of the interview and direct attention to your skills, experience and credentials. Part of the sales process is ensuring that you describe your background as it relates to the position, even if the hiring manager doesn't ask specific questions.

Before your interview, make sure you adequately research the company. Take time to learn about the company's products, services, organizational structure, customers, competitors, culture, parent company, locations, sales/revenue, growth, etc. This information can be found on the company's web site, through its annual report, in business directories and trade publications. The more time you take to understand the company, the better you will be able to demonstrate how your background and credentials are the solution to the company's problem.

In addition to investigating the company, make attempts to learn the background of the interviewer. If you are working with a Sanford Rose Associates search consultant, that person should be able to provide information about the interviewer, such as how long that person has been with the company, where they came from, their educational background and traits they may be looking for during the interview.



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Finally, you should prepare a list of questions to ask the interviewer. A list of well-thought-out questions demonstrates that you have carefully considered the position, the company and the challenges of the job. The interviewer will appreciate the time you spent researching the company and industry. Your efforts will be rewarded when you become a finalist for the position. Again, your goal when preparing for the interview is to ensure you make the best possible first impression.

In the next Candidate Chronicle, Part II of Preparing for an Interview, we will review common interview questions.