



Interview With Confidence!

Successful Interviewing: Tips and Techniques



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INTRODUCTION

This guide is intended to serve as an easy reference guide, to help you through the process of job hunting and interviewing. It should serve as a supplement to the information and advice that your recruitment consultant will give you about each client and job that he or she introduces you to. Successful interviewing works best when it is a team effort between you and your recruiter, so the more you cooperate with your recruiter and the more you do to prepare yourself for interview success, the greater chance the recruiter will have of helping you. Please take a few minutes to read the following pages in order to give yourself the best possible chance of creating a good impression and to help you get the most out of every interview you experience.

Three important points to remember when interviewing:

- The interview process is not intended to “screen out” bad candidates, but to “screen in” good candidates. Every time an interviewer meets a candidate he or she is hoping that this is “the one”. It is your mission to prove that you are that person.
- The interviewer already knows from your resume that you have most of the technical skills for the job. In most cases the deciding factors are more about personality and how well you will fit into their team.
- Companies are seldom able to hire the “perfect” candidate. In reality they mostly hire the “best available candidate”. By following the advice in this document you will have a better chance of creating a distinction between yourself and the other candidates, and showing that you are indeed the best available candidate for the job. Good luck!

“PARTNERING” WITH YOUR RECRUITER

Please remember that your recruiter can not pass the interview for you. Only you can do that. Icon Partners *Recruiters are trained to give you the best support and advice possible, but they can only be effective with your active cooperation.* By treating your recruiter as a strategic partner in the job application and interview process you can greatly improve your chances of success. Here are a few points to remember:

Keeping in touch: Make it easy for your recruiter to stay in touch with you. If you get a message, call back quickly. Events often move very rapidly in the hiring process and in order not to miss opportunities it is important to stay in close touch, particularly when it comes to scheduling interviews. Remember, *your responsiveness and enthusiasm is part of the assessment process!*

Honesty: *Be totally honest with your recruiter.* Unless he or she knows the facts about such matters as your salary expectations, reasons for leaving your current job, other interviews you may be attending, other offers you are considering etc. it will be very difficult to represent you in a good way to an employer. Remember, your recruiter has worked hard to develop trust relationships with our client companies, and he or she will not want to risk damaging those relationships by introducing candidates who withhold relevant information. It is in your interests to be open and honest, and help us to help you.

Feedback: Throughout the interview process, give your recruiter information and feedback about your impressions and any concerns you might have. It is often very hard to get an accurate impression of a potential employer from one meeting, so if there are areas that you would like to clarify please ask your recruiter for more information.

Salary negotiations: In most cases it is best to let your recruiter handle salary negotiations for you. He or she will already have a good idea of the budget the client has for any position, and how much it is possible to "push the envelope" during negotiations. It is also our job to advise you of what your current market value is, and what level of salary you can realistically expect. We will work to achieve a settlement that leaves all parties satisfied, but in order to facilitate this, it is essential that your recruiter has accurate knowledge of your salary expectations (both your "ideal" salary and "bottom line" salary figures). If you have told your recruiter a certain figure, you should never tell a potential employer a different figure during an interview. This will only discredit you and undermine the position of your recruiter. If you prefer to handle salary negotiations yourself, please make that clear to your recruiter before any interview, otherwise it is best to communicate your preferences through him or her.

Counter-offers: In some cases current employers make counter-offers to try to retain staff who have announced their intention to leave. In our opinion, and for the following reasons, it is never a good idea to accept a counter-offer:

- 1) If you were satisfied with your current employer or job, you would probably not have started looking for another job in the first place. Remember your original reasons for leaving, and ask yourself if the counter-offer changes anything other than your salary.
- 2) Once you have announced your intention to leave, the trust relationship with your current employer will be broken. A counter offer is usually just an attempt by your current employer to buy time until they can find your replacement. *If they really valued you as an employee they should already be paying you what you are worth.*
- 3) Now that your employer knows that you are not considering a long term future with the company, your chances of further promotion will be severely curtailed. Once you have made your decision to leave, and made that public, it is best to stick to your principles and seek a better future elsewhere.

After-care: If you join a company as a result of an introduction from Icon Partners, as a matter of policy we will keep in touch with you throughout your probation period to make sure you are settling into your new role properly. Please continue to communicate with your recruiter throughout this period, and if you experience any difficulties settling in to your new role, please make sure your recruiter is aware of this. We are often in a good position to resolve issues by advising our clients, or bringing matters to their attention. We hope all our introductions turn into lasting relationships for our clients and candidates, and will appreciate your cooperation in helping us to achieve this.

Referrals: If you have been satisfied with the service you have received from us, then by all means please introduce your colleagues and friends to us. From our point of view the most motivated candidates are usually those who come to us by word of mouth introductions. Also the most sincere compliment and best way of thanking your recruiter is to give him or her the opportunity to help someone else by making an introduction.

PREPARATION

Think and Understand: Before you do anything else it is important that you think about what it is that appeals to you about the job you are applying for, and why you would like to work for that company. Most interviewers will not just be interested in whether or not you have the technical skills for the job. They will also be interested in whether or not you are a good cultural fit for their organization, and whether or not this job opportunity will fit with your overall career goals.

It is important that you understand that for the hiring company, *the selection process is heavily influenced by risk management*. If they make a miss-hire it will be a costly mistake for them so they will give a lot of thought to whether or not they will be able to retain you after hiring you, and also whether you have the capacity to grow into a larger role in future. If you have given some thought to the pressures and risks the hiring managers are facing, you will be able to present yourself as a low risk, and highly desirable addition to their team.

If you do not understand why the job would fit with your personal goals, then please talk it over with your recruiter and make sure you have a clear understanding before you go to the interview. Remember, *you should not just talk about your past achievements, you must convince the interviewer of your future potential!*

Research: Never attend an interview without doing some research about the company. At the very least you should look at their web site and understand what kind of company it is that you are applying to. Here are some of the things you should try to find out:

- What are their industry/ products or services/ areas of specialization?
- Who are their competitors?
- What is their “brand difference”?
- How big are they globally/ locally?
- Have they been in the news recently, and if so, why?
- Is it a private or public company?
- Where is the head office?
- Why are they hiring?

In addition to doing your own research, please make sure that your recruiter gives you as much information about the company and position as you need in order to feel confident. Additionally make sure you receive a copy of the job description from your recruiter.

Make notes: As you gather information, we recommend making notes in a note book and reading them over a few times before your interview. It is often easier to recall information by visualizing notes you have written yourself than by trying to recall the contents of a web site. Additionally we recommend writing out the entire interview in your notebook beforehand, including all the questions you expect, and all the answers you would give to those questions. Take the notebook to the interview with you, and use it as an aide memoir if necessary. The more things you can plan for in advance the better!

Prepare your own questions: In addition to preparing answers to questions, it is also advisable for you to prepare some questions of your own. Sometimes interviewers are poorly prepared and have very few questions to ask you. In such cases it will help if you have a list of good questions to ask. The longer you spend talking with the interviewer the better chance you will have of building a rapport with that person and creating a good impression. Some questions, however, will give a good impression whereas others will give a bad impression so please give your questions some careful thought. Good questions are those that show that you have long-term thinking, and are focused on what you can contribute as well as how you can grow in the role. Personalizing the questions is also good idea as it helps to build a closer connection with the interviewer. Bad questions are those that give the impression of short term thinking, self-centered motives or simply desperation to get a job. Here are a few examples:

Good Questions

- What do you like most about working for your company?
- How does this role fit in with the overall growth strategy of the company?
- Will I have opportunities to take on more responsibility in future?
- What are the biggest challenges I can expect to face in my first few months?
- What were the main challenges that you faced when you first joined this company?
- Is there anything you would recommend me to study or prepare before joining your organization?

Bad Questions

- Is this the most you can pay?
- How many days holiday will I get?
- Can I take sick leave with full pay?
- What is it that this company does?
- Will you pay for me to do an MBA?
- I'm short of money, how soon can I start?
- Why is your office in this building/ location and are you planning to move to a better one any time soon?

Of course you will need to get answers to most of the above questions at some point in the process, but

the first interview is not the right time. These are things that you should discuss with your recruiter if you need answers quickly.

Practice/ Role-play: If you are nervous about interviewing, or inexperienced in changing jobs, it is very helpful to practice answering interview questions out loud. You can do this with a friend or family member, on your own with a voice recording device, or with your recruiter. Icon Partners recruiters are trained to do proper interview preparation with our candidates, and will be happy to provide this service for you if you wish.

BUSINESS MANNERS

Be on time: It is good manners to arrive about 5 minutes early for an interview. It is always a good idea to get to the venue early enough to use the bathroom, cool down, relax and prepare yourself mentally. If for any reason you are going to be late you must phone ahead and let the interviewer know this. Always take clear directions to the interview location and the interviewer's contact number with you.

Shaking hands/ greeting: In Japan it is hard to know whether to shake hands or to bow. The best way to deal with this is to follow the lead of the interviewer. If he or she offers to shake hands then go ahead, otherwise a bow will be fine. If you do shake hands, give a firm squeeze, but do not try too hard! Similarly a "soft" handshake may give the impression that you lack confidence. It is a good idea to carry a handkerchief so you can wipe your hands before going in to an interview, as sweaty palms will give a very bad impression.

Sitting/Standing: Wait until you are invited to sit down before doing so. If you are shown to a meeting room before the interviewer arrives, then it is OK to sit down, but stand when he or she enters the room. Never exchange name cards while sitting.

Mobile Phones: Switch your phone off! There is nothing more distracting than having your phone ring or buzz in the middle of an interview. Also never answer a call during an interview! If you use a PDA, such as an iPhone or other portable device, do not use it during the interview. A smart, clean notebook and a pen should be the only things you use during an interview.

PERSONAL PRESENTATION

Dress for Success: Dress in a smart, professional and conservative way for any interview. The company itself may be casual and modern, but you don't work there yet so don't assume it's OK to go to an interview dressed like them. Dark blue or gray suits and white shirts or blouses are always a safe way to dress. Avoid wearing novelty neck ties (Mickey Mouse etc), flashy jewelry or strong smelling perfumes or cologne. Men should always wear a proper business suit. Sports jackets and soft-collared shirts are too casual. Both men and women should wear proper business shoes. For men, the only acceptable color for business shoes is black. Never attend an interview wearing sports shoes. Finally it should go without saying that you should only wear clean clothes, and make sure suits, shirts, blouses, jackets, skirts etc are well pressed or ironed and that shoes are clean and polished.

Personal cleanliness: Please pay great attention to personal cleanliness.

- Make sure you have clean and tidy hair.
- Pay great attention to your hands and finger nails. Dirty nails will create a very bad impression and will be very noticeable in an interview situation.
- In summer we suggest you aim to arrive early enough to cool down before going into an interview.
- Brush your teeth before going for an interview, and avoid eating strong smelling food.
- *We strongly suggest you avoid smoking before an interview* as non-smokers are very sensitive to the smell of cigarettes. You won't be aware of the smell on your clothes, hands and breath, but your interviewer will! If you arrive early and want to kill time in a café before your meeting, try to go to a non-smoking café like Starbucks.

Eye Contact: During your interview and when answering questions it is important to make occasional eye contact with all interviewers, not just the person asking the questions. If you spend the whole time looking down at your hands or avoiding eye contact you will come across as lacking in confidence or as untrustworthy. A quick look at the other person's eyes will show that you are listening, that you have understood what they are saying and are fully engaged in the interview process.

Speaking: *Avoid talking too much.* If you don't know the answer to a question or need more clarification ask for it. Don't be tempted to just keep talking until the interviewer stops you. It is better to say nothing than to talk nonsense! An interview is not intended to find out how much you can talk. ***You will be judged on the quality of your thinking and delivery of your words, not the quantity of them!***

Wait until the interviewer asks a question before you start speaking, and on no account interrupt the interviewer or correct him or her. Being confident is good, but interrupting will make you seem rude and

overly aggressive. Of course you may ask questions when appropriate to do so, for example when you need the interviewer to clarify a question. Also, if the interview seems to be stalling, then asking intelligent questions is a good way to keep the flow of the interview going, just be careful not to talk over the interviewer when he or she is trying to ask you a question or make a point.

Keep it positive: Don't criticize your current employer or say negative things about your current position. It is better to say that you are looking for a new challenge than that you want to get away from a bad company. Don't say "I want to work less hours", it is better to say "I'd like to work in a more efficient environment", for example. The point is to emphasize the positive aspects of the new opportunity rather than the negative aspects of your old job. *Positive energy is attractive and infectious, and no one wants to hire or work with a whiner!*

Turn weaknesses into strengths: If asked about your weaknesses use it as an opportunity to sell yourself. For example: "I used to be very weak at public speaking and making presentations, so I joined the Tokyo Toast Masters club and practiced for two years. Now I am very confident in my speaking abilities"; or, "I felt that I was weak in computer skills so I took a night class at Temple University and learnt how to use business applications much more effectively", etc.

Active Listening: Use "active listening" to show that you understand the interviewer. This means sometimes repeating phrases or words back to him or her to clarify questions and demonstrate your understanding of points he or she is making. "Active listening" should be used at such times as when the interviewer has made an important point, or asked a long or complicated question and you want to show that you have understood the point, or want to clarify something. This technique can also buy you some thinking time, allowing you to formulate a good answer to the interviewer's question. You should not use it for every question or answer though. It is an excellent communication tool if used sparingly and at the appropriate times. Here are some examples:

Interviewer: "We're aggressively hiring sales people right now because we aim to double our revenues in the next 12 months....."

You: "Thank you for explaining your company's plans. So I understand from what you told me that you're aiming to grow sales in Japan by 100% next year, is that right?"

Interviewer: "Why do you want to quit your current job?"

You: "You'd like to know more about my reasons for leaving my current employer? Well I'm looking for a role that will give me room to take on more responsibility in future....."

Interviewer: “Our company has been doing business in Japan for 40 years and we have grown on average by 15% per annum since 1972”

You: “15% per year, that’s very impressive.....”

FOLLOW UP

With the interviewer: After an interview it is a good idea to follow up by sending an E mail or note to your interviewers to thank them for the opportunity to interview, and also to express your interest in the job or in the company. This will show you to be polite and considerate, and will also help to separate you from the other candidates who are being interviewed for the job. Always remember to CC your recruiter as well please.

With your recruiter: *It is* also essential that you follow up with your recruiter afterwards, and give a brief report of your impressions and feedback about the interview. If you are very enthusiastic about the opportunity, tell this to your recruiter. ***Your level of interest will be a big factor in the employer’s hiring decision*** so it will help your recruiter to hear your enthusiasm. If you have concerns or questions about the role or company, you should also ask your recruiter to help you to get answers to those points. He or she will also be able to ask questions that you might not feel comfortable asking.

Finally: Remember that you are being assessed from the moment the selection process begins until the moment you turn up for work at your new job so be polite and professional at all times. If you meet another employee of the company in the elevator, the lobby, or even in a restaurant they should also receive a good impression of you. If you are invited for lunch, coffee, or even for a “welcome drink” you are still being assessed, so maintain your composure at all times. Be proactive about communicating and staying in touch with your recruiter throughout the process, and be flexible and prompt if you are asked for information or for dates of availability for interviews. ***If you conduct yourself with dignity and professionalism throughout the whole process you will give the impression of being someone who is easy to do business with. This will greatly improve your chances of achieving a successful result.***

INTERVIEW PREPARATION CHECK LIST

Mental Preparation

- Ask yourself “Why am I interested in this job/company?” and make sure you have an answer!
- Research the company: Web site, location, company size, industry, products/ services, brand position etc.
- Think about answers for the following questions:
 - ✓ Tell us about your background
 - ✓ Why do you want to leave your current company?
 - ✓ Why do you want to work for our company?
 - ✓ Where do you want to be 5 years from now, in career terms?
 - ✓ What’s your biggest achievement to date?
 - ✓ What’s the biggest challenge you’ve faced and overcome in your life?
 - ✓ What kind of work do you really like doing?
 - ✓ What kind of work are you best at doing?
 - ✓ What do you know about our company?
 - ✓ What do you know about this job?
 - ✓ What do you think you can contribute to our company?
 - ✓ Do you work best alone or in a team?
 - ✓ Do your family support your decision to change jobs?
 - ✓ What are your weaknesses or development areas?
- Prepare some questions to ask the interviewers (Remember: The quality of your questions will say a lot about the quality of your thinking, so don’t ask things that are too obvious or simple!).
- Ask your recruiter for as much information as possible about the kind of people who will be interviewing you – e.g. their likes, dislikes, personalities, positions etc.
- Practice Interviewing. Speaking your answers out loud is an excellent way of committing them to memory

Practical Preparation

- Are you properly dressed? Check your appearance in the mirror!
- Do you have a map, or details of the interview location?
- Have you got the name and phone number of the interviewer or HR person?
- Have you got the name and phone number of your recruiter with you?
- Have you got some extra copies of your resume, a note book and pen with you?

Follow Up

- Have you E mailed a thank you note to your interviewers/HR for setting up the meeting and taking time to meet you (and CCd your recruiter)?
- Have you contacted your recruiter to give him or her your feedback and impressions.

***Good luck, and if you have any questions or need any additional advice,
please do not hesitate to contact your Icon Partners recruiter,
or E Mail us at info@icon-partners.com***