

Interview Workshop

In many ways a “First Interview” can be compared to a “First Date”

Objective: To provide concrete advice to interviewees on how to improve their interview performance. The recommendations are not based on the many books that are already available on this topic in the market, but rather on GaiPro’s day-to-day experience as a recruiting company, which serves as the backbone for this workshop. We are fully aware that some of the remarks and thoughts are subjective. Therefore please do enjoy them with a “pinch of salt”.

Introduction

In many ways, a “first interview” can be compared to a “first date.” On first dates many people tend to be a bit nervous. They appropriately dress for the occasion. They make sure they are on time. And they are very conscientious of what they say and do NOT say to their partner. On the one hand, you want your date to have a favorable impression of you. On the other hand, you do not want to tell any lies, because the first date could be followed by many additional dates in which case, eventually, the truth will come out.

Also typical for a first date is that there are usually some ground rules. These ground rules tend to differ from country to country and according to age groups and cultures. The same holds true for the first interview. Therefore, always try to keep in mind the setting of the particular interview when you are preparing for it. Are you interviewing with a Japanese or foreign company? Will you be interviewed by a Japanese or a foreigner?

Role Play: An interview gone sour

During the job seminar, a short mock interview was conducted. It was an example of an interview gone sour. Participants were asked after the interview to list up the numerous shortcomings of the interviewee.

Here are some of the comments related to interviewee

- ▶ Raised salary question at the first interview
- ▶ Argued with interviewer when asked about his Japanese skills
- ▶ Was often glimpsing over to the resume in front of the interviewer and reading from it.
- ▶ Was rambling and not answering the questions in a concise way
- ▶ Made general statements (“I would love doing this kind of work”) instead of convincing the interviewer why he really liked this kind of job.
- ▶ Had not sufficiently researched about the company in question
- ▶ Strengths and “sales point” were fuzzy
- ▶ Lacked self confidence

- ▶ Seemed insincere. On the one hand, he wanted to convey the impression that he had several job offers. On the other hand, he seemed very desperate for the job.
- ▶ Business card was not accepted properly
- ▶

Interpretation

- 1) Almost all of the points mentioned by the participants, even though correct, tend to focus on the main part of the interview and NOT on the most crucial part – the first 30 seconds of the interview.

Although the “main part” is important, the first 30 seconds including a lot of non-verbal communication is just as crucial.

During this crucial first part of the interview, the interviewee made the following mistakes.

- ▶ Punctuality: Candidate came late for the interview.
- ▶ Wrong seating position: In a Japanese company the correct position is defined as the one furthest away from the door.
- ▶ Appearance: Top shirt button was open. Necktie was not properly straightened.
- ▶ Appearance: Interviewee entered the room still wearing the winter coat. The coat should be taken off even before approaching the reception desk of the company.
- ▶ Not enough respect was shown towards the business cards received. It is perfectly acceptable to look at them carefully and it is considered good manner to place them respectively in front of you on the meeting table.

Conclusion and advice: Do not underestimate the importance of the first 30 seconds of the interview when very little is actually being said. Non-verbal communication and the necessary preparation is as important.

- 2) Judging an interview “gone sour” as an outsider is much easier than actually participating in the interview itself and trying to avoid all the points stated above. The solution to this is preparation and interview experience. Try to anticipate as best as you can the questions that may be asked and prepare accordingly. If you have the opportunity ask a friend or a family member to act as the interviewer for trial interviews.

Stages of 1st interview

The good thing about interviews is that often they tend to follow similar patterns. Each company and each position you interview for may be different, but there is a good chance that the structure of the interviews will be similar. Knowing this pattern will help you predict the flow of the interview.

0) Pre-Interview

This stage refers to everything that takes place before the actual interview. It includes all the necessary preparations.

1) Introduction

This phase starts when you enter the company premises and ends when you enter the interview room.

2) Small Talk

It is common for interviewers not to start the interview right away. They will usually engage in some “small talk” at the beginning. This is to provide both interviewee and interviewer the opportunity to settle down and “break the ice” before starting with the important matter at hand.

3) Actual Interview

Small talk can last anything from 30 seconds to a few minutes but is always followed by the lengthier main part of the interview.

4) Discussion

Whereas in the previous stage the interviewer guides the flow of the conversation, the discussion stage allows the interviewee to take a more active role in the conversation and address some of the questions he or she may have. Some companies may choose to integrate the actual interview phase and discussion phase.

5) Closing

This stage starts when the interview itself has ended. The candidate is expected to pack his or her belongings swiftly and is usually escorted to the elevator. Even though this phase is brief, it should not be neglected.

A word of caution:

Companies expect interviewees to come prepared, and it would be foolish for interviewees to do otherwise. Nevertheless, many companies are actually interested to see how candidates react to a question, task or situation they had not anticipated. They want to know how you react under unexpected circumstances because company life is full of uncertainties. Therefore, be equally prepared for the unexpected. Do not be caught off guard if the interviewer purposely asks you something which you had not been prepared for. It is very likely that he or she is more interested in your reaction than your reply.

Checklist for first interview

It is never possible to prepare for everything and yet the following checklist should help you prepare the basics according to the different interview stages outlined above.

0) Pre-Interview
Preparation (content: actual interview, location/map, appearance incl. clothing)
Note: An interview may last anywhere from 45 minutes to 2 hours. However, the preparation should take a multiple of that time.
1) Introduction
Greet receptionist in a professional and friendly manner (reflects on attitude of interviewee)
Enter meeting room (knock, seating position, coat, cell phone etc.)
2) Small Talk
“Interact” with interviewer(s) and “break the ice”
Use this opportunity to set the right tone and atmosphere
3) Actual Interview
Show proper interview behavior (posture, length of answers)
Outline educational and professional background
Know the company
Provide reason(s) for wanting to join the company
Be prepared to be surprised by the interviewer
4) Discussion
Ask the important questions at the appropriate time
5) Closing
Do not let your guard down until the very end

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