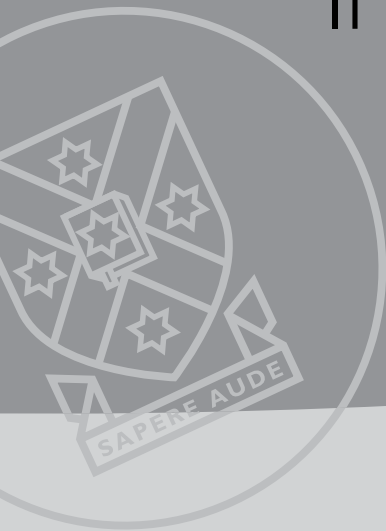
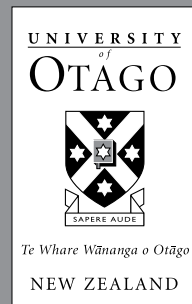


UNIVERSITY OF OTAGO
CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

Interview Skills



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

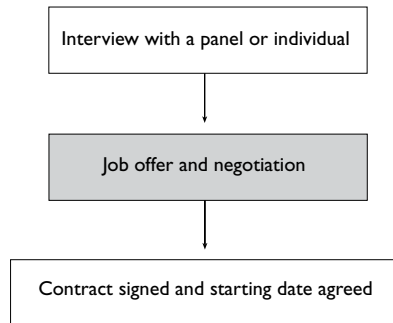
This booklet is the product of handouts written by Careers Advisers over many years at the University of Otago. The current editors are, Robyn Bridges, Graduate Recruitment Co-ordinator; and Yvonne Gaut, Careers Adviser. Grateful thanks to Graphic Designer, Peter Scott, University of Otago.

Special thanks to: Paul Jacobs, Integrated People Strategies; Peter Marshall, Human Resource Institute of NZ for permission to reprint article from Human Resources; Cherie Herbst and Queensland Treasury for permission to use their case study; Boston Consulting Company for permission to use their *Guide to Case Interviews*; Grateful thanks to Guy Pierce, Group Chief Financial Officer; Fulton Hogan Ltd for his contribution.

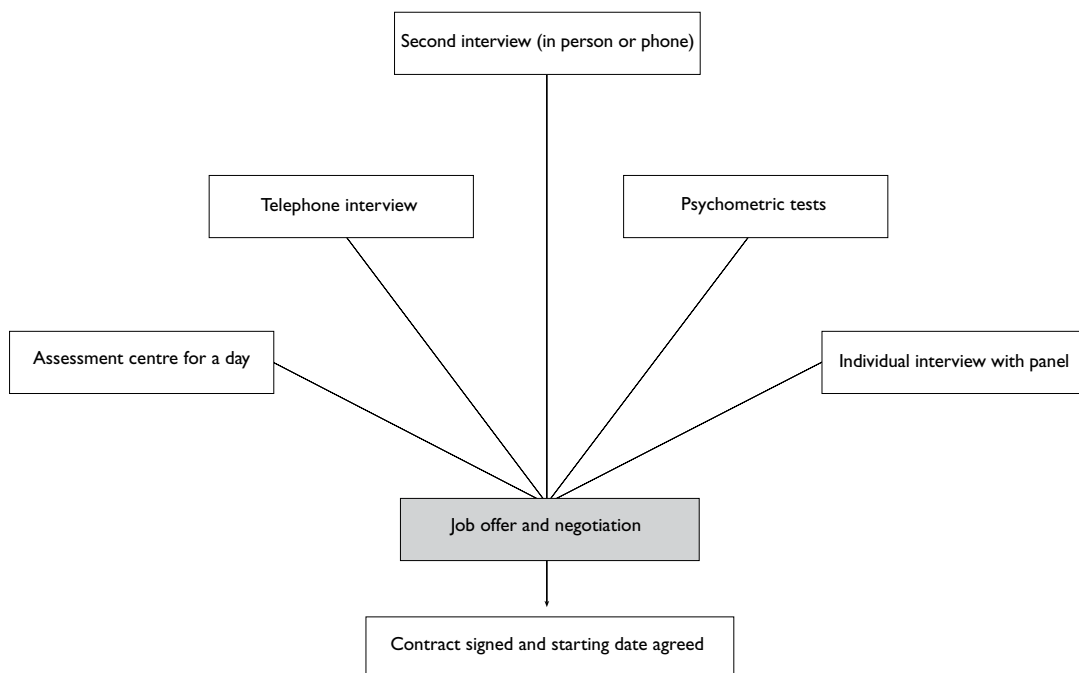
THE SELECTION PROCESS

Well done! Your CV and cover letter has worked and you are now invited to attend an interview. Remember a job interview not only tries to find out if you can do the job, but also if you are the best person. Interviewers try to access both aspects in the interview process.

Job interviews can be as straightforward as this:



But increasingly many of you will face an interview process containing some or all of the following elements:



Since this is what employers expect, how can the interviewee deliver the goods? How do you remain cool, calm and confident during a job interview?

This guide first of all lays the foundation with a focus on the job interview. Other types of selection processes are then looked at: telephone interviews, psychometric testing, case studies and scenarios. The guide concludes with tips for international students, negotiating and tapping the hidden job market.

EMPLOYER PERSPECTIVE

For an employer, recruitment is an expensive process both in time and money. A wrong decision can bring personal grievances and at worst, litigation. Employers invest in training and development of new staff. It can take some time for most graduates to be productive and start earning their keep. Therefore employers need to be thorough and rely increasingly on recruitment consultants and the objectivity of psychometric testing.

Wearing 'employer spectacles' note the feedback given by University of Otago Graduate Recruitment employers since 1996.

What Employers have said.....

Sparkle! market yourself with conviction and confidence.

Personality is important – build good rapport with the interviewer.

Be honest under all circumstances.

Practise, but prepare for anything! Forget preconceived ideas. Be ready for 'off the wall' questions, current affairs, even fantastical scenarios.

Listen and think before answering. Pause for thinking time.

If you are asked to problem solve within the interview, be transparent about your method, talking through your problem solving process.

Be prepared for "behavioural event" interviewing i.e. questions based on past experiences in order to identify competencies required in the job – "past behaviour predicts future behaviour."

Think about how you would handle likely job situations e.g. conflict within a team.

Tailor your interview answers, rather than giving generic answers.

Be informative but not lengthy. Try to engage the interviewers in a dialogue rather than treating an interview like an oral exam and know when to stop talking.

Many companies use psychometric testing as part of their interview procedure. The Career Development Centre has practice tests and resources to introduce you to psychometric testing.

Relax – if possible! If you have attended several interviews, be careful that you don't become too relaxed.

Focus on what you can offer the employer more than on your need for a job.

Prepare questions to ask. Avoid questions which show you have not researched the company's website or done your homework.

"It is very important to be yourself and not try to act or misconstrue the facts to the way you think the interviewer wants you to answer. If the employer suspects any mistruths, then the whole interview is compromised. Your career prospects in the company will definitely be affected if any lies or contrary personality traits come to light in the future."

Guy Pierce, Group Chief Financial Officer, Fulton Hogan Ltd.

THE 3 PS OF SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS – PREPARATION, PRESENTATION, PRACTICE

As a general rule, interviews last between 20-30mins so the time to make the impact needed to win the job is brief! This means you can't have a "seat of the pants" approach. Ask any person who has an unsuccessful interview and they usually tell you they tried to "wing it". Most people learn from this the importance of preparation.

PREPARATION

research
the
company

Graduate Recruiters consistently comment on candidates' lack of preparation, for example this comment: *If you're really interested in the position, surely you would find out about the company, and how long they've been around and what they do. Are they just in one city? But they [candidates] don't know. They don't do their homework.* A common question in job interviews is "Why do you want to work for us?" and to answer this you need to know about the organisation.

Research
what the company does, location, turnover, annual reports, company websites, corporate profiles, business pages and magazines, library databases
name of the Chief Executive
organizational structure and culture
products and services
positions available in different areas
main competitors
current business/industry environment in which they operate. Note mergers, joint ventures and awards
what does the position involve?
what competencies/skills are necessary for the position?

If there is not a job description outlining the qualities and competencies being looked for, contact the employer. Also check 'Job Outlines' on Kiwi Careers www.careers.govt.nz, browse similar organisations' websites for similar positions, check out the relevant professional association's website, and look at overseas profiles for information, esp. www.wetfeet.com in the US or www.prospects.ac.uk in the UK. Talk to people who have worked or are working for the organisation.

know
your cv

Read through your job application to remind yourself of what you wrote – it is all too easy when doing multiple job applications to get muddled. Take a copy to the interview. By the time you are interviewed, your interview panel may have read a number of CVs. No matter how brilliant you think yours is, CVs have a habit of blurring. Your task in the interview is to highlight your CV by breathing life into it.

prepare
your
evidence

Variety is the spice of any interview so give them a range of examples to remember you by! There is nothing worse in an interview than a person using the same old example every time.

Use the simple SAR approach to prepare your behavioural examples:

S situation outline the situation briefly and concisely

A action I took tell them what you did (focus in an interview is on “I” not “we”)

R result or outcome don't leave this bit out – were you successful/what did you learn?

Behavioural questioning is also referred to as a competency or competency-based interview or situational interviewing, among others. See P29 for detail on why and how employers use these techniques.

prepare answers to questions The section on Practice (p 9) contains likely questions you can expect to be asked. Be mentally prepared for a question you have not thought of and don't let it throw you. Some interviewers are very fond of the fantastical scenario approach and there is no right or wrong answer here; they are interested in the way you approach a problem and how you think. Be aware of being over-rehearsed.

prepare questions to ask them What kind of orientation programme is offered?
What would a 'day in the life of a _____' with your company typically involve?
To whom will I be accountable in this position?
Is there a periodic employee appraisal or performance review? How is this organised?
Will the company support on-going study and development?
Will there be opportunities for increased responsibility and broader experience in the company?
What is the quality and variety of the firm's clients?
How much contact will I have with management?
I find it interesting that you are expanding into _____. Could you tell me more about that?

Questions to avoid

Why the last person left the job?

What are the pay and perks in the job?

deal to anxiety Not many people find the prospect of a job interview exciting! Sometimes the more you want the job, the more anxious, nervous, and tense it can make you. Work out how to calm your nerves by looking at ways that have worked for you in the past and factor this into your preparation.

Creative visualization: Sports teams successfully use a technique of picturing themselves winning. Visualise yourself in the interview handling it with calm confidence.

Deep breathing can have a very calming effect, while having the side benefit of oxygenating your brain so you can think better!

Reflect on a time when you were proud of the way you handled a situation and remind yourself of how you felt at that time. It is especially important to have an image of yourself as a successful person when you are waiting outside that interview room! Carry the image with you into the room (think of it like a halo or aura).

consider
the
logistics

The Interviewers

You are entitled to know how many people are on the interview panel, their names and job titles. When you are nervous it can be hard remembering names. Calling someone the wrong name is getting off on the wrong foot. You can prepare for the different questions they will ask; the Human Resources person will have a different perspective from the technical expert.

The Process

Do you know if there are other tasks to be given to you or is the interview the sole means of assessment? It pays to be prepared mentally for any psychometric testing. At the interview they will probably outline the next steps so it is premature to ask before the interview.

Documents

Decide what to take with you and how you will carry them:

- CV and Cover letter
- Original copy of academic transcript
- Copy of awards, references/testimonials
- Examples of work if appropriate
- Questions you want to ask

The Location

Where exactly is the interview to be held? Get clear instructions and write these down. Plan how you will get there, and allow for traffic delays. Have a contact phone number for emergencies. Being late without explanation creates a poor impression and is very hard to overcome.

have a good
night's sleep

Having done your preparation, you can spend the night prior to the interview not cramming your head with information but treating yourself to a decent dinner and an early night. If the selection process includes socializing with the company the night before the interview, carefully monitor your alcohol intake. It is hard to be taken seriously at an interview by people who have seen a motorized mouth running on booze the night before.

hot tip

If you can, go to the place the day before and have a "dry run" by checking out the building and even seeing the dress code of people who work there. Introduce yourself to the reception, tell them you have an interview the following day and check out any publicity material available you have not already viewed. If you intend to do this, remember to dress smartly as they may invite you in and show you round!

PRESENTATION

People often say, "It only takes a few minutes to make a lasting impression" or, "You don't get a second chance to make a first impression". Within ten seconds the person you've just met is busy building a picture based on the image you projected! It is also said ninety per cent of the interview is spent substantiating that first impression.

One woman had worked hard for a particular job. She noticed on the way to the interview a tiny run in her tights. "I thought about changing but knew it would make me late. When I got to the interview the run was a gaping ladder so I apologized for not looking my best. Then I sat throughout the interview trying to manoeuvre my position so it wasn't obvious. Needless to say, I didn't get the job and I heard later the interviewer's only comment was if a person could not be bothered to present their best image at an interview there was little hope for later on." Glaser, C and Smalley, B 1992.

- dress** Your goal is to signal your professionalism, not to scream your individuality from the rooftops. Dress professionally and dress for the job you want. If you have any doubts, check out the dress code.
- It is important to feel comfortable in the clothes you are going to wear at the interview. Nervous tugging at a tie and shirt collar or pulling on a skirt hem is a sure giveaway that this is not the kind of gear a person feels good in!
- Employers regularly mention the lack of dress sense in the students they interview. The key is to fit in with the organisation's dress code. Dark trousers and shirt and tie are pretty much expected for men, and a jacket or suit enhances your image, while women are safe with a skirt (not mini) or formal trousers and shirt, preferably with jacket or a suit. Women need to consider choice of dress carefully – you are not there to reveal all and distract the interview panel.
- shoes** Polished both front and back. Some interviewers check the backs of shoes especially if the job demands an eye for detail!
- fingernails** Clean and tidy.
- jewellery** Less is more. Body piercings out, tattoos covered up, and rely on discreet jewellery which doesn't distract (avoid dangly earrings).
- hair and body** Clean is non-negotiable. Use body sprays carefully as you don't want your interviewer sneezing in reaction to your choice of perfume.
- body language** The way you move and the gestures you use, profoundly affect an interviewer. You can put a person off by appearing too keen and eager (desperate) for the job or conversely you can appear to lack any emotion (bored and unenthusiastic). Avoid body language which is at odds with the message you want to convey. One man kept covering his mouth with his hand as he spoke about his achievements. He came across as lacking conviction.
- handshake** Shake hands firmly but not crushing the bones or causing the other person to cringe at the floppy offering! Handshaking is the accepted business practice when meeting a person. Accompany the handshake with a friendly direct look into the person's eyes. Repeat the name of the person you are meeting, "Very pleased to meet you....." Sometimes men are not sure if women expect the handshake so take the initiative to avoid confusion or embarrassment.
- eye contact** Maintain eye contact when answering questions. In a panel interview, the general rule is "the person who asks the question, owns the answer". That said, don't lock eyeball to eyeball with the person who asked the question, but gently move your eyes to include the others as well, before coming back to the main questioner.
- sitting posture** Sit in a way not to distract from what you are saying. Over-confidence is a big turnoff so watch any habit of flinging your arm over the back of the chair and sticking your legs out in front! Likewise, the tightly grasped arms round the chest signal nervousness and tension. Make sure you have your hands in a comfortable place and hold them gently in front of you if you are the sort to wave your arms around. Find a comfortable position for your legs and avoid the swinging or tap dance routine.
- hand gestures** If you are a gesticulating person make sure your gestures are not intimidating or dominating. Avoid the trap of the ballpoint flicker or the pen finger roller.
- tone of voice** Some folk are not aware of how big or how small their voice can be in a confined space. You don't want to deafen the panel, nor do you want them to strain in an effort to hear.
- mannerisms** Interviews can make a habit really obvious such as playing with earrings or twisting hair into stress balls! Don't panic about an "um" now and then as it is nowhere as distracting as that endearing Kiwi habit of raising the voice in a question at the end of a statement. Listening to yourself answering questions out loud will generally spotlight any mannerisms such as a sharp intake of breath, a nervous licking of the lips or sniffing.

Albert Mehrabian's classic study found 55% of a message's impact comes from facial expression, 38% from voice and only 7% from words used.

PRACTICE

Practice is important for helping an interviewee see themselves and hear themselves as others do. One of the greatest assets for a job seeker is a 'truth teller', a person who will give honest feedback when you practise in front of them. Ask them to note tone of voice, hand gestures, eye contact, sitting position and other body language. Videoing a trial interview is another way to get a very clear idea of how you present. Use your cell-phone or digital camera to record yourself answering questions and review it carefully – this is a good way to identify unconscious mannerisms as well as to observe your own posture and tone and speed of voice.

Margaret Farry Williams, Director of Vanity Walk Modelling School and Agency, gave a presentation to students on the Dunedin campus. She pointed out most people when they walk and sit, "lead with the head" resulting in a rather bent body and consequently hesitant body language. She encouraged students to keep their head up when walking and when sitting. There was a noticeable improvement in the brave volunteers who took up the challenge and demonstrated this during the seminar. They exuded an attractive quiet confidence!

practise
social
chitchat

The skill of establishing easy conversation with people you meet for the first time can be improved with practice. Don't be dismissive of "small talk" thinking it a time waster before the "real" questions begin. At the beginning of the interview small talk is vital in forming that immediate impression. Most jobs rely on good communication and the ability to form relationships – this is the chance you have at the interview to show you possess this kind of competence. If you lack this skill you run the risk of appearing aloof, arrogant, or socially inept.

Make the most of opportunities to meet new people. Networking functions require you to introduce yourself to new people and talk briefly with them. When you go home for the vacation, practise on your parents' friends. If you have a customer service role, make the most of the opportunities you have, e.g. over the checkout counter, quickly establish connection with new people.

practise
likely
questions

These questions have all been asked of students over the past 5 years. Practising answers can be of immense benefit, especially for the behavioural questions and general themes.

General

1. Why do you want to work for this company/organisation?
2. What have you got to offer?
3. What do you see as your strengths?
4. Who are you? Tell us about yourself.
5. Why should we employ you?

Behavioural Questions - Past behaviour predicting future performance

6. Tell us about a time when you were part of a group or a team and experienced conflict. What role did you play? What did you learn? How would you do it differently next time?
7. Tell us of a time when you felt your communication skills served you particularly well.
8. Tell me about a time when you took a leadership role within a group.
9. Tell us of a time when you did something that did not go particularly well.
10. Tell me about a time when you experienced failure/disappointment. What did you learn?
11. What are the accomplishments that have given you the most satisfaction?
12. What is a goal you have set and how did you go about achieving that goal?
13. How do you deal with conflict?
14. How do you react under pressure?

15. How do you go about planning and/or managing time?
16. Give me an example of your problem solving style.
17. Give me an example of how you have provided good customer service.
18. What idea have you developed and implemented that was particularly creative or innovative?
19. What experience have you had of working with people of other cultures?
20. When have you done something without being asked?

Other questions

21. What do you know about us as a company?
22. What do you imagine a _____ does?
23. What do you see as the major issues facing our company?
24. Why did you choose your particular course?
25. Why did you choose to come to Otago?
26. Outline your personal goals for this year?
27. What are your career goals?
28. Where do you see yourself in five years' time?
29. What challenges are you looking for in this position?
30. How do you think that you have changed personally since you started university?
31. If people were talking about you, what weaknesses would they say you have?
32. What do you think you will find most difficult about being a _____? How would you deal with this?
33. What self-improvement learning do you do?
34. Tell us about your honours project.
35. Why did you change study direction 3 years ago?
36. Why did you choose the extracurricular activities you have been involved with? What have you gained through these activities and what have you contributed?
37. What current issues do you feel strongly about?
38. How would you see Treaty issues being important within our work?
39. How would your flatmates describe you?
40. What do you do for fun?
41. If you were to be reincarnated what would you like to return as?
42. If you could choose, what era would you like to be born into?
43. What else should we know about you?

hot tips

Do not think, "What is the right answer?" Think, "How can I use this question to demonstrate my suitability for this position?"

Focus on your accomplishments and skills, and give specific examples.

Make your thinking transparent. Show how you are working through questions.

Be diplomatic and discreet. Don't badmouth anybody.

Point out your skills by telling the interviewer what other people think of you e.g. "My supervisors have told me that I am very good at...."

Recognise that an interview is communication between two or more people. Each person needs to participate fully and take some responsibility for the communication to be effective. Work to develop rapport with the interviewer.

SOME TRICKY QUESTIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR ANSWERS

WHY DID YOU CHOOSE TO STUDY.....?
<p>What are they looking for?</p> <p>A job seeker can expect this question in most interviews – it tests motivation and the resolve to enter a chosen field.</p> <p>The interviewer wants to see logical thought, your decision-making process, a positive attitude towards your study and enthusiasm.</p>
<p>What doesn't work?</p> <p>Answers that suggest aimlessness or uncertainty go down like a lead balloon.</p> <p>Criticism of past advisers e.g. teachers, parents gives a bad impression.</p>
<p>What you might say.....</p> <p>I was continuing interests developed at school especially _____ .</p> <p>My interest was fuelled by a great teacher or _____ (some other influential person).</p> <p>Because I was uncertain at that time what I might do after finishing my education, I wanted to allow myself as many options as possible.</p> <p>I was convinced it would provide a sound basis for an interesting career.</p> <p>At the time I chose my studies, the career prospects were very attractive.</p>

WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES?
<p>What are they looking for?</p> <p>This question is a favourite of interviewers and requires careful thought beforehand. They are examining your ability to cope with a potentially anxiety-inducing question in a relaxed and organized way. The reason for asking this question is threefold: to see if the candidate can be objective about themselves, to see if they can appreciate the demands of the position, and to see what steps they have taken, are taking, and envisage taking to offset this. This can include training while in the position, but should also highlight some steps already taken in this regard. A well considered and reasonable answer here can be very powerful in the interview.</p>
<p>What doesn't work?</p> <p>Taking up time in the interview with lots of “umms” and “ahs” as you desperately search for an answer.</p> <p>Too many weaknesses type you as negative.</p> <p>Denying weaknesses saying “can't think of any” or “pass” make you appear arrogant or naive.</p> <p>Mentioning a weakness which is anti-social or is one directly relevant to the job i.e. if the job requires strict time management and you say you often take on too much.</p>
<p>How to handle this question.....</p> <p>The key here is to consider the position and relate your weakness to it – avoid clichés at all costs, esp perfectionism – rather than having a stock answer.</p> <p>A good approach is to ask friends, tutors, and previous managers (from vacation jobs) for feedback on your performance, this can usually give you good material to work with – as well as increasing your own self-awareness. Don't forget to ask for positive as well as negative feedback!</p>

WHAT ARE YOU WORTH?

What are they looking for?

Generally interviewers are looking to see if you know your market value. It is an unfair question to ask graduates but some employers ask it! You don't want to appear too money-hungry nor do you want to appear financially irresponsible! Bear in mind that the overall package may be bigger than the mere salary, encompassing things like professional association fees, conference support, assisted training and related education, health insurance, kiwisaver, even gym membership in some cases.

What doesn't work?

Mentioning a particular salary e.g. \$36k. They may get you cheaper than others or it may be beyond their budget and they will rule you out right away. Best to provide a range.

What you might say.....

Do your homework by talking with people who work in the organization or in a similar role. Careers staff can also assist. Check out the salary information links on OtagoCareerHub.

From my research, talking with other policy analysts and checking out salary scales, I gather the range is in the mid \$30s.

I gather that the expected range in the Public Sector for such a position is between \$ ____ to \$ ____ I would be interested in knowing what you think the position is worth.

Previous graduates who have joined your law firm tell me they earn between \$ ____ and \$ ____

WHY SHOULD WE EMPLOY YOU?

What are they looking for?

This demand "sell yourself to us" is a painful reminder to a job applicant that the interviewer has the power to call the tune. Employers are looking for a quiet confidence here not a brashness. They are also interested to see if you have a realistic idea of your suitability for the position.

What doesn't work?

Listing qualities and experience irrelevant to the job.

Having no answer.

Telling them all the ways you would benefit e.g. trips overseas.

What you might say.....

Provide a well thought out summary of your suitability for the position, highlighting qualities and experiences relevant to the position.

Focus on the benefits to the organization, whether it be in maintaining client relationships, or adding to the bottom line, or increasing their ability to deliver on a new direction they are headed in, or in selling more products or services.

For additional help see these books in the Career Development Centre
201 Knockout Answers to Tough Interview Questions: The Ultimate Guide to Handling the New Competency-Based Interview Style, Matias, Linda. 2009
Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions, Second Edition, DeLuca, Matthew and DeLuca, Nanette. 2010
Job Interview Skills 101, The Course You Forgot to Take, Enisman, Ellyn. 2010

UNSUCCESSFUL INTERVIEWS

Regard these as practice and learn from them. Ask yourself, “What could I have done better?” or, “What would I do better next time?” If the company is open to providing feedback this can be a most valuable way to improve. It is easy to let an unsuccessful interview knock your confidence, but remember interviewers too have been unsuccessful in getting a job they applied for. Have a few trusted people you can talk to about your feelings and then when you are out there on the job market, you can keep presenting in a confident and positive way.

PITFALLS TO AVOID:
Arriving late
Untidy appearance
Lank hair
Body odour
Tobacco cling-on
Dirty nails
Sweaty palms
Talking about money
Talking too much
Appearing desperate
Not actively listening
Handshake like a cold fish
Handshake like a vice
Poor research about the company
Not being prepared for “standard” questions
Mumbling your words
Poor eye contact
Being rude to front desk/reception staff
Talking negatively about a previous employer
Unprepared with own questions

OTHER SELECTION METHODS

As mentioned earlier, candidates can face a variety of assessment methods besides the traditional face to face interview with one person or a panel. Phone or video interviews are common. You may be invited back for a second interview or you might be asked to take part in an assessment centre. Sometimes a “social event” is included or a tour of the company’s premises. You may be asked to sit psychometric tests, make a presentation to a group of staff, participate in group discussion, case studies or team problem solving exercises. Sometimes candidates are given a scenario to consider and make recommendations. In this section we focus on the different methods and provide some information and hot tips for handling these.

TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

How do you prepare for a telephone interview?

Telephone interviews need to be taken as seriously as face to face job interviews and the preparation is mainly the same. (See p 5). If your telephone interview is scheduled in advance, be at your phone early, turn off call waiting if you can, and be prepared to be available for a longer period of time. You need a quiet place where you will not be disturbed.

Have in front of you

A list of questions you may want to ask.

A copy of your job application.

A copy of any other notes/references you might like to refer to.

A pen and paper to make notes – you may like to write down the interviewer’s name (or names if more than one person is interviewing you via speaker phone).

A drink of water.

While you are conducting your job search, be prepared for the “unexpected” telephone interview. If you have given your mobile number, remember to answer your calls in a professional way.

When the call comes unexpectedly, it is okay to take a few minutes to compose yourself. Excuse yourself to close doors, move to a private room and/or turn off distracting sounds. Take a deep breath and return to the phone composed. As with other interviews, remember to thank them!

During the telephone interview:

Talk clearly and not too fast. There may be a panel on speaker phone.

Sit up straight (or stand up) and smile. The idea is to lift your chin which will lighten the tone of your voice.

Having a picture of a smiley face on the wall at eye level can remind you to keep your chin up as well as smile!

Put some enthusiasm into your voice and project energy. You are deprived of all other forms of body language so tone is vital.

Do not eat, drink, smoke, or chew gum during the interview.

Do not be overly relaxed or familiar just because you are sitting at home.

Avoid rustling your papers.

Avoid talking too much and allow normal pauses in your conversation.

It is acceptable to pause before answering and to ask for clarification if you are not sure of what was said.

Check occasionally with questions such as, “Does that answer your question?” or, “Would you like me to elaborate on that?”

Remember to say thank you at the end of the interview and express your interest in the position.

Video/webcam/Skype interviews
Remote interviews using technology such as the PC Web-cam or videoconferences are expected to increase in coming years. Videoconference technology is expensive and not often used for Graduate Recruitment. Web-cams are more cost effective, especially where expensive travel is involved. Both these forms of interviewing have the advantage of non verbal communication. The guidelines of the 3Ps apply equally to remote interviews. Be prepared for a time lag. Smile 😊 and maintain good eye contact.
Related websites:
<p>Phone Interviewing Do's and Dont's www.quintcareers.com/phone_interviewing-dos-donts.html</p> <p>Phone Interview Etiquette www.quintcareers.com/phone_interview_etiquette.html</p> <p>www.worktree.com/tb/IN_telephone.cfm</p>

CURVEBALL QUESTIONS

Sometimes in the formal individual interview or in a team exercise as part of an assessment centre, interviewees are given scenarios to show their problem solving skills.

It may be an impossible question to answer accurately:

- How many cell phone towers in Wellington?
- Why are manhole covers round?
- If you were a vegetable what kind of vegetable would you be? Why?

It might be a hypothetical situation such as:

- The NZ government has decided to change to driving on the right hand side of the road to bring NZ into line with Europe and the USA. You have been asked to head up the project team. How would you go about it?

Clearly there are no right answers to these scenarios. The strategy of the interviewer is to:

- Test your reaction under pressure
- Observe your problem solving / analytical skills
- Assess creativity and logical reasoning
- Test your general knowledge

hot tips

Keep calm (correct answers are not expected!)

Pause for thought, don't leap to conclusions

Present your thoughts logically

If given time to prepare take notes

THE ASSESSMENT CENTRE

The term “assessment centre” is used to describe a series of exercises which candidates undertake while being observed by a team of managers or consultants who act as assessors. Candidates do not compete against each other at an assessment centre. They are tested and measured individually against a predefined set of criteria.

“The Assessment Centre will be an intensive situation at which the company will learn about you. But, more importantly for you, you should gain an insight into what the company is like, and you should learn about your own strengths and weaknesses. Whether the company tells you how you did or not, you should have a better feel for what your weaknesses are and what actions you should take to remedy them.”

Mark Oliver, Principal Adviser, Employee Relations, Comalco Smelting.

An assessment centre offers graduates an opportunity to sell themselves and to find out much more about a prospective company than a brochure, website or presentation will ever achieve.

The tasks are designed to create an environment to enable you to perform well, and to test competencies, each one covering a range of attributes deemed relevant by the organisation. These may try to measure intellectual, technical and/or interpersonal capabilities, academic knowledge, and how suited you are to the work. If you see this as a fun, challenging and rewarding experience you can't lose, even if you don't win the job!

Remember, the assessment centre is not the place to be someone you think an employer wants to see. **Be yourself!**

hot tips

Try to keep as calm as possible and do not overindulge the night before.

Assume you are under the spotlight at all times. From the moment you walk through the door until the moment you walk out again people are considering you as a possible employee, team member or colleague. Informal lunches or social evenings may not be part of the formal criteria but the assessors will be weighing you up. Often front desk or reception staff are asked what they thought of a candidate on first meeting them.

Demonstrate the qualities the interviewer may be looking for. Positive qualities include making contributions, keeping focused on the task at hand, listening to others, co-operating in a team, getting others to talk and demonstrating good judgment.

Avoid negative qualities such as not making any contributions, ignoring what others are saying, monopolising discussions and being unable to accept criticism.

Contribute. Say and/or do something in each activity. Forget the artificial surroundings and enter into the spirit of what you're asked to do. You are all in the same boat after all! Most graduates find it hard to balance saying too much or too little, listening versus talking, leading versus following.

Energy, enthusiasm, creative ideas, attention to detail and facts coupled with persuasive arguments, respect for people and a sense of humour is a hard combination to beat.

At all times learn more about the company by asking questions of the executives, managers and staff present. Find out about the organisation and gather information to help you decide if you want to work there.

Check out the DVD 'The Assessment Centre', at the Career Development Centre.
'How to Succeed at an Assessment Centre: Essential Preparation for Psychometric Tests, Group and Role-Play Exercises, Panel Interviews and Presentations. Tolley, Harry and Wood, Robert. 2011

PSYCHOMETRIC TESTS

These may be used as a tool to shortlist applicants especially where the number of people applying is large, or as a further selection tool after an initial interview.

Tests are used to measure job-related competencies and assess applicants on a similar set of performance objectives. The most common types of tests are aptitude tests, personality tests and vocational preference tests.

Aptitude tests assess things such as mathematical abilities, literacy, computer aptitude and critical thinking. Aptitude tests can often be used to select applicants for interviews, while personality and vocational preference tests are better used as an adjunct to the interview process.

Personality tests are used to provide a profile of personality type or personal characteristics. They help to assess leadership skills, management styles and appropriate working environments.

Vocational preference tests are used to assess how consistent your career interests are.

hot tips

Arrive for the test in plenty of time, give yourself a chance to become familiar with the environment and try to relax.

A good night's sleep, deep breathing exercises and imagining calm situations can all help you to relax.

Listen carefully to all instructions given to you and read the written instructions before starting (sounds a familiar exam technique?)

Do the questions you are familiar with first. On many tests it is the number of questions you get right that counts, not the number of questions you answer.

Work at an even pace. If you cannot answer a question immediately, leave it and come back to it later.

If you have time, review your answers and check that you have not missed anything out.

Be yourself and avoid trying to fake it, answering in the way you think employers want them to be answered.

Remember they are used to assess a particular set of personality traits and there is no right or wrong answer. These types of tests are also designed to "catch" fake answers so it is best to answer them as honestly as you can.

Do not expect to finish the test. Keep in mind these tests must be designed to accommodate genius scores within a test given to "non-genius" people. This is achieved by making the questions progressively harder and by providing many more questions than can reasonably be answered in the allotted time.

It is important to familiarise yourself with the process of psychometric exercises as this can reduce candidates' anxiety levels, and with ability tests practise can improve your performance. So PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE.

www.shldirect.com

For a list of resources on Psychometric Tests, see list of resources on p 32.

A GUIDE TO CASE INTERVIEWS – THE BOSTON CONSULTING GROUP

BCGs Recruiting Process

The recruiting process at The Boston Consulting Group (BCG) usually consists of three rounds of interviews. Each round will consist of two interviews of approximately 45 minutes long. These interviews have three parts: a discussion about you based on aspects of your resumé, a case study discussion and some time at the end to ask questions about BCG. In the final round, each interview will be conducted by a partner and these interviews may include a case study or general business discussion.

Typically, it is the case interview that raises the most questions among candidates. Therefore, we thought it might be useful to give you some do's and don'ts to help you prepare. We hope this will help you feel more confident and, most importantly, help you to enjoy the experience.

The BCG angle

BCG places a strong emphasis on creativity and innovation. In their daily work BCG consultants focus on generating insights and creating impact for their clients. This is largely what differentiates us from our competitors, and builds our unique reputation among CEOs. You should keep this in mind as the interview progresses.

What is a case interview?

The case interview will present you with a set of facts that you might encounter when dealing with a new client. The aim is to observe how you analyse the problem and propose a solution. These facts may be presented verbally, or with the aid of graphs and charts that may or may not be relevant to your problem. This interview mimics real life; there is no unique solution or standard path to reach a conclusion. It is your creativity and business judgement that the interviewer is looking for you to demonstrate.

How to prepare for the case interview

Good preparation will help you to remain at ease and demonstrate the best of your capabilities.

Firstly, you should carefully read the do's and don'ts presented below. Secondly, you should visit our website (<http://www.bcg.com>) and go through the case interview presented there. It contains typical questions and feedback on the appropriateness of your answers. Finally, you should simulate a case interview with fellow students or colleagues, alternating the role of interviewer and candidate.

CASE INTERVIEW DO'S

Do listen and interact

The interviewer starts by laying out the problem or the question. You should ask some probing questions to bring out the major issues, as the interviewer will not usually volunteer the root of the problem. Throughout the interview, he/she will make comments to orientate the discussion and drive you to a solution. You should carefully listen and ask questions to clarify any point. You should also adapt your thoughts, hypotheses and options according to the information communicated to you throughout the case.

Do structure the problem around a customised framework

The interviewer will then ask you how you would approach the question. This is the time to quickly structure the problem and highlight the major areas that you will want to explore. You will be even more convincing if you are able to capture your structure in a simple, concise framework, and you may find it useful to sketch that framework on a piece of paper or whiteboard while explaining it to the interviewer.

CASE INTERVIEW DON'TS

Don't jump too quickly into the analysis

Before starting the analysis, make sure that you understand the question and its main components. Take the time to collect your thoughts, present a framework you will be working with, and ask further questions.

Don't panic if the answer isn't readily apparent

You are not expected to know everything about every business situation. Therefore, don't panic if you don't seem to get ahead or if you are stuck in a dead end. The objective of the interview is to discuss your thoughts, present your hypotheses, imagine options, and finally, develop a solution through your interaction with the interviewer.

Don't defend your own solution at all costs

It might be that the solution you develop is inappropriate. In such cases, the interviewer will make it clear to you so that you can adapt your solution. Do not defend your solution at all costs. On the other hand, you should be ready to defend your approach if you believe it is a good one.

Do not hesitate to pause for a couple of moments after the interviewer asks a question in order to define your high-level structure.

Do focus on the issues that have the greatest impact on business value

The interviewer will potentially let you choose the key issues to explore further. Focus on the ones where you think your recommendations can potentially create the most value. Also explain the logic that drove you to your choice of key issues.

Do explore a variety of options with creative thinking

Once you have chosen the key issues to focus on, (eg, how to increase revenues from new products) you should come up with a couple of hypotheses on how to do this. You will definitely make a good impression by going beyond standard answers, conventional wisdom or generally accepted rules.

Do demonstrate good business judgement

The interviewer will ask you probing questions about your comments, hypotheses or conclusions, so that he/she can test your ability to use your judgement given the (sometimes-limited) information available to you. Your interviewer will be more interested in seeing how you think than in whether you come up with the 'correct' answer, so be sure to clearly explain your assumptions and how you arrived at your hypotheses.

Do perform simple calculations quickly and accurately

At some point, the interviewer will ask you to make some simple calculations. If the calculation does not appear to be simple, try rounding the numbers to the nearest 10 or 100 before proceeding. Besides the calculation itself, which should be accurate, the interviewer will look at how you integrate into the calculation what you have discovered so far about the problem.

Do synthesize your thoughts and conclude your analysis

At the end of the interview, or when the analysis comes to an end, you should go back to the original question. It is then time to summarize, in a few words, your key hypothesis and the options, and conclude with the most relevant recommendations you would make to a client. Your recommendations should include the next steps that a client should take. If you feel that more information is needed before proceeding, spell out what further analysis you think is necessary.

The interviewer might just want to test whether you firmly believe what you are saying. Be critical and flexible enough to follow the road that looks most promising, even if this means changing course.

Don't internalize your thought process

The interview is set up as a discussion. Therefore, make your logic, prioritisation and hypotheses explicit. If you do not think out loud and explain your reasoning, the interviewer will be unable to assess your performance. A good case interview is not limited to answers and solutions, but demonstrates the process you used to arrive at those solutions. It is useful to practise with a colleague so that you can get used to speaking clearly (eg using short pauses rather than um's) and being focussed.

Don't stick to an artificial framework

Some standard frameworks are not always applicable to the business situation discussed. Make sure that you keep it simple and that the framework actually helps you go straight to the key issues.

Don't jump to conclusions

Base your recommendations on both the facts and your analysis of the situation throughout the interview. Aim to identify the key issues involved rather than suggesting early solutions that appear possible to you.

Don't circulate cases or use advance knowledge

The case presented might be familiar to you: a friend may have told you about it or you might have specific knowledge in the area. In most cases, this will have a negative impact on your performance. We therefore advise you to mention this to the interviewer, who will choose another business situation.

We hope these pointers have given you a better idea of what a BCG case interview is like.

A Last word of advice:

Do not try to play the role of a person you think we would like to hire. Just be yourself!

CASE STUDY EXAMPLE FROM QUEENSLAND TREASURY

The Queensland Government has an industry policy objective of developing a sustainable shipping industry in Queensland. The Government has been approached by a Queensland based shipping company which operates a range of shipping businesses including a coastal shipping fleet, maritime training and marine engineering. It employs 100 people all of whom are located outside of Brisbane.

The company claims to be experiencing cash flow difficulties which are affecting its viability. The main causes have been a continuing loss of freight to road and rail (as a result of greater efficiency of rail and road) and increasing environmental regulation of coastal shipping. It is seeking exemption from all Government taxes and charges in order to remain viable.

The company has previously received grant funding from the Government when a terrorist threat resulted in the government suspending all coastal shipping for a period of several months.

The company has agreed to allow the government unfettered access to its financial records.

An interdepartmental committee (consisting of several government departments) has been formed to prepare advice for government on the company's request. Your branch will represent Treasury, although several other branches are involved. Your Director has asked you to prepare a briefing on the issue and attend the first interdepartmental committee meeting with them. You have been asked to work in a team with the other areas of Treasury to prepare the brief. You have been asked to address all relevant financial, economic, legal or other issues in your brief.

- 1) Discuss the major issues you would consider relevant to the brief and why? (Weighting 10)
- 2) How would you ensure timely and effective completion of your tasks in a teamwork situation, when working with the team members from the other Treasury Branches? Some of these team members will be more experienced than you. (Weighting 8.5)
- 3) Your Director is unwell and unable to attend the meeting of the interdepartmental committee where it agrees on the advice to be provided to Government. You have to represent Treasury. Treasury may have concerns with providing assistance which is not shared by other members of the committee. How would you deal with a situation where a conflict arose with the officers of the other government departments? (Weighting 8)

Cherie Herbst, Queensland Treasury

“SOCIAL” EVENTS

hot tips

Remember this is a business event

Drink water (or keep to one glass of alcohol)

Try not to eat and talk at the same time

Make an effort to meet a number of people

Repeat people’s names when you are introduced

Topics for social chat:

Where they work within the organisation

What they enjoy most in their work

What leisure pursuits they enjoy

Give them opportunity to ask you a question!

If you get trapped with one person:

Move decisively to another person without making excuses, “Been great talking with you”

Avoid the temptation to flirt and/or ogle

Enjoy! Show enjoyment (even if you are sick inside!)

NEGOTIATING A CONTRACT

After the job offer comes the negotiation. It is normal to feel apprehensive at this stage however it is also important to recognise that the candidate’s position has strengthened considerably. Organisations take their selection processes seriously and having identified their preferred candidate(s) they will be keen to get an acceptance of their offer(s). View negotiation as a normal part and parcel of everyday life, you had to negotiate flats, housework rosters, money, assignment extensions as a student, this is no different.

It is important to keep in mind the environment in which you are being offered the job. In a tight job market where graduate recruiters offer more positions than they have available because they plan for some rejections, you know there is a waiting list. You need to be realistic about how far you want to go in trying to get a better job offer.

Generally, in private sector companies, it is expected you come back with a counter offer higher than the original salary package offered. There are a couple of points to keep in mind. If you seem too greedy, it can go against you. If you don’t try you may regret it later when you find out some other graduate negotiated a better deal. However, most of the employers in the Graduate Recruitment Programme have their offers worked out to be fair to all graduates they employ.

first step
research

To negotiate successfully you need to know the market rate for the role you have been offered. Often students talk to friends who are in the workplace already to get an idea of what is current. You can check out salary information links on OtagoCareerHub. Allow for some discrepancy in salary between Auckland and Invercargill where costs of living are not so high.

second step
preparatory
thinking

Preparatory Thinking

You want to approach negotiation with the aim of achieving what is best for both sides. First of all negotiate with **yourself**. You need to work out how far you will compromise:

- What is your fallback position? What is the lowest salary you are comfortable with?
- Are you really prepared to say goodbye to this job because they didn't reach your expectations of salary?
- When does the first salary and performance review take place? Often graduates who start on a lower salary can move quickly up the pay scale in a company which has six monthly or yearly salary and performance reviews.
- What are the other benefits associated with the job offer? Sometimes employers offer help with buying a corporate wardrobe or assistance with travel and moving costs. While these are a one-off, the financial help at the time you need it can be priceless.
- What are you prepared to accept for a great entry on your CV and the chance to work in a well-known and respected company?
- How much does the chance to stay in a city where you love the lifestyle mean to you?
- What value do you give training and professional development?
- What does flexible work time mean to you? Think about what is most important to you to deliver a sense of purpose in work and in life - your values. If a job can deliver to you on what is most important, then you might well decide to take a lower salary than some of your friends who are working in a company that will work them every hour of the day, six days a week.
- How essential is teamwork to your job satisfaction? You might have really liked the folk you would be working with whom you met at the social function - this might seem to you more valuable than another thousand dollars in your pay packet from a company where you would work with folk you didn't really relate to.

Besides thinking about your needs put yourself in the **shoes of the employer**. What is your best guess at what they want to achieve? If you suspect they want to hire you as cheaply as possible, then a wise person would consider if this is the kind of place you want to work in for the next vital years of your professional life. If you have felt good about the way you have been handled throughout the recruitment process, and the position is with a public sector organization, then you can confidently expect that while you may be offered a lower salary than the private sector, the obligations to meet best practice guidelines will ensure fairness and equity of treatment from your employer. People with highly desired skills, where there is a shortage of applicants, naturally have a better chance of being able to negotiate a better package than the original one offered. Realistically, not many graduates are in that position. If an employer knows they have ten keen people waiting in line, you need to factor that into your thinking.

Remember, it is only natural for a company or organization to want to save money, so don't take it personally that you are included in their "stringent budget".

third step
consult if
necessary

If in any doubt about your contract, check it out with an expert.

Practise what you plan to say with a truth teller and use a number of "What if" scenarios e.g. What if they say to me, 'It seems we have nothing further to talk about'.

fourth step
negotiate

Remember this is the start of your working relationship. It's hard to recover if you start out making a bad impression. Keep emotion out of it.

Be prepared to take time out if you are not sure and/or feel stuck. You can always say, "I'd like time to reconsider – can I phone you back by such and such?" It's not unusual for a deadlock to occur in negotiations. Take a break and refocus on what is most important to you. See if you can come up with options – people feel less pushed into a corner if there are a number of choices.

fifth step
celebrate

You have done well if you win a bit more. Pat yourself on the back and go out and celebrate with people who have helped you.

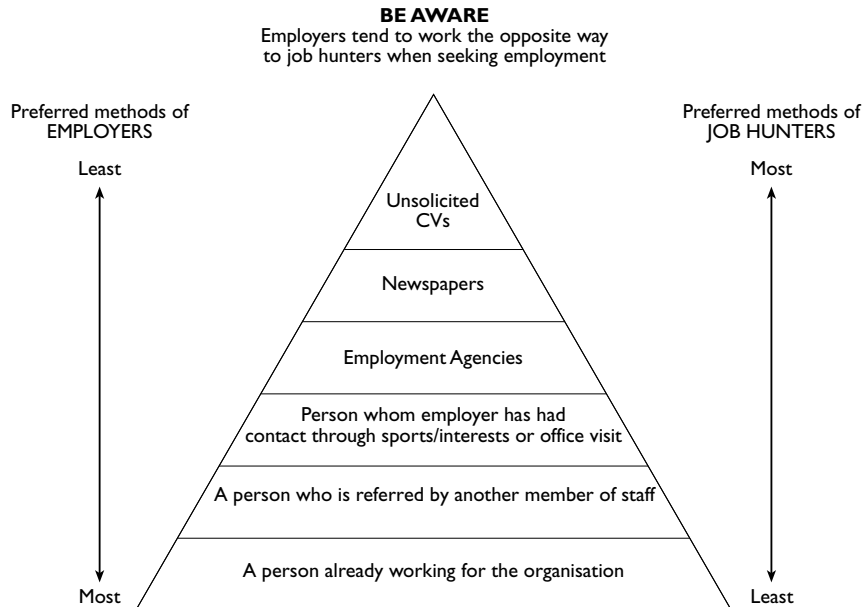
Useful websites:

NZ Careers Services: www.careers.govt.nz/

Employment Tribunal website: www.dol.govt.nz

Statistics NZ: www.stats.govt.nz

WAYS TO FIND EMPLOYMENT



TAPPING THE HIDDEN JOB MARKET

Many people find work in the “hidden” job market. This term is used for the 70 -80% of jobs which are not advertised. Recent research carried out in New Zealand by Career Analysts (www.careeranalysts.co.nz) found that 50% of the 222 job seeking respondents surveyed had gained their last job through recruitment agencies or networking. Nevertheless, few of these job hunters were currently using networking as a job search technique.

Overwhelmingly, people still prefer to rely on online websites and newspaper situations vacant. Any job seeker needs to supplement these traditional methods of job search by systematically exploring the hidden job market as well. Think of yourself with a number of fishing lines cast out into the sea waiting to see what nibbles you get. If your living depended on fishing would you rely on only one fishing line? The main ways to tap the hidden job market are through networking, “cold calling” (a direct approach to an employer to see if there are work or employment opportunities), or through recruitment agencies.

NETWORKING IS NOT.....

- Using others
- Pushing yourself at others
- Begging for a job

NETWORKING IS....

- Reciprocal
- Building relationships
- Finding out information

You simply identify the people and organisations that could be helpful to you in your job search and contact them. Your aim in networking is to:

- obtain more information about your chosen industry and the labour market in general so that you can decide where best to concentrate your efforts and find a job.

You carry out a marketing exercise where the product is yourself:

- identify the appropriate market for your skills
- understand the specifications and preferences of the employer
- present the positive qualities of your “product” (qualifications, skills, abilities, experience)
- communicate how these will benefit the employer

hot tips for successful networking

Find out about areas of interest, advising people of your range of skills, and letting people know that you are looking for work

Ask to be part of their network of contacts, to use their knowledge and information

Seek referrals, further people to talk to – “the multiplier principle” the more people who know you are looking, the greater chance of opportunities arising

Request help from the people in your network with your job hunt, NOT asking them directly to hire you

Elicit feedback so you can continually modify your skills and techniques in your job search.

It is important to use your drive and initiative, mobilise your energy and enthusiasm, and get talking to people!

step one
build your job
information
database

The first step is to start building your contact list. You want names, contacts, details and possible openings or positions.

Where are your contacts likely to come from?

People

Everyone is a potential contact e.g. friends, acquaintances, family, local business people, relatives, lecturers, tutors, landlord, your doctor, dentist, hairdresser, past work colleagues, previous employers, neighbours, church, sporting club, cultural group, fellow students, your solicitor, minister, insurance agent. When you think about it, the theory of six degrees of separation means you can reach anyone you want to! So someone who knows you, knows someone somewhere who knows someone who knows.....

Information resources

- Internet resources, links on OtagoCareerHub, organization websites
- Career Development Centre
- Newspapers, academic journals, bibliographies, industrial publications & newsletters
- Old job advertisements
- Many different Business Directories and Yellow Pages.

Other sources

- Gain work experience whenever you can, developing skills and contacts
- Join relevant professional organisations and societies e.g. The Computer Society, Human Resource Institute, Botanical Society
- Attend professional gatherings, present papers, do poster displays at Conferences.

What do you need to do?

Record every contact

- Who referred you to this person or how you heard of them, what you could talk to the person about and any other interesting information about the person
- Collect business cards whenever you can
- Communications you have with that person, by phone, fax, email, in person, snail mail
- Actions and timeframe you will take as a result of your communication with the person e.g. other people to ring, send in CV, follow up CV, ring back in a month's time
- Actions that the person is going to take on your behalf e.g. going to pass your CV on to Human Resources or to their boss, find out another person's details for you to contact

step two
informational
interviewing

Follow up

- Diary all the important dates and check your schedule every day to see what has to happen
- Where appropriate, deliver before the deadline - the “surprise” factor - indicates keenness and shows you can meet deadlines
- Never be late with an agreed timeframe - it is hard to recover from that loss of credibility
- Thank the person.

This is interviewing for information, not for employment. If your networking is going well, you will be talking to someone on the recommendation of one of your contacts so this is not cold calling - the introduction has been “warmed”. Often in the beginning you will be talking to workers, not employers. Your ultimate goal, however, is to talk with people who make recruiting decisions or who influence them. You are asking for help, advice, contacts or referrals, and most people are only too ready to help a young person start their career, or a mid-career person get off to a fresh start.

Advantages

- Increases your knowledge about your field of interest
- Helps you clarify and redefine your career goals
- Often eliminates a possible area because you realize from your research the fit is not right for you
- Helps to establish a network of contacts which could lead to further employment

The 3Ps of Networking: Preparation, Presentation, Practice

- As in any interview, thoroughly research the industry or area of interest.
- Confidently articulate your skills, interests, goals – try to link these to their business.
- Contact the person. If you don’t have a specific name, the receptionist is usually a good person to speak to.
- Always ensure that you know the name of the person you are being put through to.
- Arrange a meeting. Introduce yourself, your situation (e.g recent graduate with a BCom in Finance), who referred you, what you would like to discuss (e.g an overview of the industry) and ask for a brief meeting.
- Be prepared to talk on the phone. Ask if this is a convenient time or for another time when you could ring back.
- When visiting, dress appropriately to make a good impression – for most organizations it is better to be too formal than too casual.
- Remember this is career research so you ask the questions.
- Always ask for further contacts and ask permission to use their name as a referral.
- Take along your CV – often a concise one pager is brilliant for these situations.
- Consider designing your own “business” card to leave with them – your contact details, qualifications and three bullet points about the benefits you would bring an employer.
- Keep to your time and thank them for their time.
- Immediately take notes of all the information you have gathered.
- Write a thank you note or send a card – because we use email so much there is something very precious about a handwritten document!
- Think about how you could reciprocate – perhaps you could send them an article you know would interest them, tell them some non-confidential information you picked up in a previous interview, suggest someone they should talk to for their own career advancement.
- As mentioned earlier, keep a comprehensive record of all contacts made.
- Follow up all referrals and let them know the outcome; a perfect excuse to keep in contact.
- When you get a job – let people know. They may become your client network.
- Always think about the person you are talking to – what is most convenient for them
- Prepare and practise your list of questions

Questions you might ask in an Informational Interview

- What steps did you take to get into this work?
- What skills are required to be successful?
- What are the activities and responsibilities on the job?
- What is a typical day like?
- What do you like best/worst about the job? Why?
- Does your work affect other areas of your life, like family/social life? How?
- What would you change about the job if you could?
- What is the salary range for people in this work?
- What is a typical career path?
- What professional associations have you found helpful?
- What sort of demand is there for your skills?
- Who are the recognised market leaders/competitors?
- Do you have any specific advice for someone entering this field?
- Do you have any advice on how to improve my CV?
- What else could I be doing now to enhance my chances of being employed in this area of work? Can you suggest other people I could speak to? Would it be acceptable for me to use your name as a referral?
- Where are vacancies in this area advertised? (Newspaper, recruitment agency, website, professional publication, in house).

COLD CALLING

Basically, this means approaching employers directly for work, whether in person, by telephone, email or by sending a cover letter with a CV. In essence you are doing two things; finding out if they have an opening for someone with your skills and qualifications and “selling” yourself by creating your own job. Accurate targeting is crucial in this approach, so the amount of time you spend researching the company, and who to target within it, will be much greater than the amount of time you spend making the contact. As with Networking, clarity about what you have to offer and your goals, plus a businesslike approach, are essential for making a good first impression. As with formal interviews and with networking, cold calling without the 3Ps of preparation, presentation and practice is likely to fall flat and leave you feeling “hot” with embarrassment!

Creating Your Own Job

It may be that in your research you find an employer who could use your skills even though they haven’t realised this yet. You might have spoken with someone from the company who mentions an initiative, a new direction the company is going in, a growth spurt they are about to make, a new client they have won, a new product they are keen to develop.

What is essential to successful cold calling is to have a mindset of an abundance mentality rather than a scarcity mentality. In other words, assume there is plenty of work to go around. If, on the other hand, you think with the scarcity mindset (i.e. jobs are few and far between and it’s a dog eat dog world) then you will convey that and end up convincing your listener!

Those of you who have skills in selling will know success is not about pushing yourself aggressively at a potential customer but relies on good communication skills, listening, establishing rapport, connecting, and then knowing what you have to offer that will meet the needs of your customer.

hot tips for cold calling

Research the company, markets, outputs and be able to illustrate succinctly how your skills will complement what they do

Concentrate on the needs of the company and adopt a positive tone

Focus on the benefits you bring to them, not so much on what they will do for you

If you are sending in your CV with a cover letter, ensure that you maintain control of the process by stating that you will ring to follow up the letter. Keep working the contacts. Don’t assume that once you have submitted your CV, that is all you need to do. Aim to make contact once a month

Know who you are talking to and their role in the organisation
Establish your communication as a serious dialogue between equals. The direct approach creates an image of an enterprising candidate who takes the initiative and perceives opportunities. Change your mindset from student world to world of work. You are not dealing with another student or university staff member where first names are usual and the culture is relaxed and often casual.
Dress for success when you meet prospective employers face-to-face for the first time. While they know you are a student, wearing student clothes will usually impose a barrier to being taken seriously. Check out the dress code for the organisation and adapt your clothes to suit.
Use an honorific (i.e. Mr/Ms/Miss/Mrs) until they ask you to use their first name.
Avoid slang and “txting” language in your communications especially your emails. Regard your email as a formal communication within a business environment. Before pushing the “send” button check for spelling and punctuation. Employers are very critical of poor writing skills in university students and graduates.
Develop your communication skills by learning the art of asking questions and making small talk. Business people usually like to build relationships by connecting as human beings first before they leap into the task.
Always arrive slightly early for your face-to-face meetings. If you are unavoidably delayed, ring to let them know you are running late.
Treat any Executive Assistants or front desk/reception people with the utmost respect – they are an important gate-keeper to decision-makers and they often organize executives’ schedules. Remember their name and the name of any staff you meet or talk with.
Always follow up any face-to-face meetings with a thank you email or a card. Busy people have to prioritise their time and you want your prospective employer to feel good about allocating their precious time to you.
Never abuse the time slot given you by overstaying your welcome – this is “time larceny” or stealing – time is money for employers.
Be positive in your comments and responses – business people value optimism

RECRUITMENT AGENTS

As you network, you may hear different recruitment agencies and consultants being referred to. Take a note of their names and contact details and get in touch using your cold calling skills! Many businesses and organizations prefer to leave their recruitment needs in the hands of agents, rather than in house. So treat these people with the respect due to any gatekeeper. Remember, they have built solid relationships with employers, know the structure, people and culture of an organization and often have placed individuals in work teams so they can accurately work out if you would fit.

The 3 Ps apply when working with recruitment agents. Often people are unprepared when they get invited for a “coffee” or “a little chat”. Treat these occasions in the same way as any job interview. Prepare, present yourself professionally and practise beforehand. As recruitment agents are paid by employers, you can expect their agenda to be driven by this. If you are unable to articulate your own talents, skills, areas of interest, career goals, organizations and businesses you are keen to work for, then you will be quickly assessed by the agent and appropriately categorized as best they can.

Many recruitment agents are very helpful to job seekers. They like to have a really good database of potential candidates to draw on. But it is up to you to make it as easy as possible for them to see your potential. Put yourself in their shoes and deliver what **they** are looking for. Have your CV with you when you meet. Often agents will redo it in the format they prefer so the more your skills are readily accessible and key words are obvious, the easier it is for them to add you to their database.

Keep in contact with recruitment agents but don’t stalk them! Diarise a monthly call where you can phone with the “Bringing you up to date” call rather than, “Have you got any jobs for me?” And (you will know this by now) thank them for their time.

JOB SEARCH TIPS FOR INTERNATIONAL STUDENTS

There are some extra hurdles international students often have to face. While the information contained in this guide is applicable to you, there are further points to keep in mind. Use the resources available at the Career Development Centre, and in particular view the videos relevant to international students:

Finding Work in a New Country

Getting the Job

extra tips for interviews & work experience

Watch for the volume of your voice – avoid speaking too quietly

Maintain eye contact – it is not rude in NZ to look people in the eye

Practise your spoken English at every opportunity – ask a good friend for feedback

Ensure a firm handshake. It is common practice to use one hand only.

If your goal is to obtain work in New Zealand once you have completed your degree then gaining work experience while you are studying should be a priority. Try to work outside your own cultural group.

Work experience can be gained from:

Voluntary work in the community

Being a student rep for your course

Voluntary or paid roles with OUSA – including cultural clubs

Any positions where you can practise some of your transferable skills (organizing leadership, time management, multi-skilling)

JOB SEARCH IN NEW ZEALAND

Employer expectations

As a job seeker it is important to know your work status and what you need to do to obtain paid work in New Zealand. The conditions and regulations in this area are constantly changing and any job seeker must be aware of the current regulations for themselves and those relating to employers. Many small and medium sized organisations are not aware of the up-to-date rules, some will have out-of-date information or information that is simply wrong. It is your job as a job seeker to be able to enlighten the employer about the real situation. The relevant information can be found at the New Zealand Immigration website (see below). Some employers are prepared to consider a candidate who has done their homework! This is a vital part of preparation for international students.

Job Search Attitude

It can be hard finding yourself a job in a new country. New Zealanders are friendly and helpful. Employers included! The more people that you speak with the closer you will get to finding the employer prepared to offer you a job - it does happen! Networking is an important job search tool for international students too.

Job Search Websites

The following websites give useful information about working in New Zealand. Topics covered include applying for visas, applying for work permits and all the rules and regulations to do with working in New Zealand.

New Zealand Government Jobs Online – www.jobs.govt.nz

Working in New Zealand – www.workingin-newzealand.com

New Kiwis – www.newkiwis.co.nz

For information about work permits

New Zealand Immigration Service – www.immigration.govt.nz/migrant/stream/work/

www.immigration.govt.nz/Study/ See students undertaking employment

Department of Labour – www.dol.govt.nz

Immigration Consultants

www.nzami.co.nz

NZAMI – The New Zealand Association of Migration and Investment has a large list of immigration consultants some of whom have web sites with good information written especially for the ‘yet to be Kiwi’, on how to find a job and how to make an immigration application. As well there are some sites with free self assessments for permanent residency.

JOB SEARCH TIPS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

- If you have a visible disability, decide whether you will mention your disability on your CV or before you go to an interview.
- Be prepared with what and/or how you will disclose.
- If you have a hidden disability, assess the job against your strengths and weaknesses to determine what is right for you.
- There are always pros and cons around the process of disclosure. Resource – Quick Job Search for People with Disabilities. Farr, Michael, Ryan Daniel J., Job Search Handbook for People with Disabilities 2nd Edition Ryan, Daniel J
- www.eeotrust.org.nz/jobseekers/resources.cfm and useful for international students too.

BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEWING – EFFECTIVE QUESTIONING

Paul Jacobs, Human Resources, Dec 2003 pp22-23

These days Behavioural Interviewing is commonly recognised as the preferred approach to conducting successful job interviews. Asking the right questions at the right time provides more valid and relevant information for the interviewer to evaluate a candidate. Unfortunately, all too often there are fundamental errors in questioning technique that compromise the entire process.

Why Employers Use Behavioural Interviewing

Behavioural Interviewing is a structured, competency-based approach that is founded on the premise that past behaviour / experience is the best predictor of future behaviour / performance in a target role. A clear and concise competency model underpins behavioural interviewing. The competencies should define the desired behaviours that a candidate needs to demonstrate in the role. Behavioural Interview questions should in turn provide the candidate with an opportunity to highlight their experience against the desired competencies/behaviours. The candidate is evaluated against the behaviours for each competency – of particular interest is whether the candidate has demonstrated the desired behaviours previously to reach a positive outcome. Also, taken into account are the relevance of the examples and their relevance to the level of complexity required in the role.

BELOW ARE A FEW EXAMPLES OF BEHAVIOURAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

Leadership – Can you think of a time when you were tasked with improving the performance of a staff member who did not perform to your expectations? What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?

Customer Focus – Please outline a situation when a customer was not 100 percent happy with the service they received from you. What was the situation? What did you do to resolve the problem/ improve the level of service? What was the outcome?

Results Focus – Please outline a time when you were working to a tight timeframe that could not be moved and then something out of left-field came along that caused some roadblocks. What was the situation? What did you do to keep within the existing timeframes? What was the outcome?

Commercial Acumen – Please provide an example of a time when you made improvements to existing business processes to achieve greater levels of efficiency, cost effectiveness and growth. What was the situation? What did you do? What was the outcome?

A framework for questioning – As you will note from the above Behavioural Interview questions, each question asks the candidate for a specific example for a given situation. Then the candidate is asked to outline what they specifically did (i.e. the process they went through; how they added value) and what the ultimate outcome was. These three components form a popular framework for questioning, note taking and evaluation. There are some popular acronyms (a few of which are outlined below) that form the structure of many Behavioural Interview templates (often presented in three columns for note taking) -

- STAR (Situation/Task, Actions, Results)
- BAR (Background, Actions, Results)
- ABC (Antecedents, Behaviour, Consequences)

ADDRESSING COMMON MISTAKES

Theoretical questions – Recognising that the process is about probing past experiences, many interviewers fall into a habit of asking the candidate “How” questions (e.g. “How would you deal with a dissatisfied customer?”). A theoretical question asks applicants for theories, opinions, or general actions -what they think about a topic or situation or what they would do or usually do – not what they actually did in a specific situation. Theoretical questions are ineffective because people usually respond with theories and opinions. However, it is OK to ask this type of question occasionally to assess a candidate’s level of knowledge or if the candidate is struggling to think of an example, but should always be followed up with a behavioural question (e.g. “Can you think of a specific example where you have put what you just said into practice?”).

Leading questions – Leading questions prompt candidates to give the answer they think you want to hear. They are worded in a way that hints a ‘correct response’, encouraging the candidate to make that response. For example, avoid questions like “Obviously that was a success?” or “So, it sounds like customer left satisfied in the end?” It is better to ask open questions like “How did things pan out in the end?” and “What was the outcome?” It is also important to identify how the candidate knew why they were successful (i.e. did they get positive feedback? win an award? etc.).

“We” vs “I” – Behavioural Interviewing is interested in how the candidate added value. Candidates commonly use the term “We” rather than “I” when describing their examples. It is important to identify the candidate’s role in any particular situation and their level of involvement. We find that when a candidate is using the term “We” a lot we politely interrupt and say to the candidate something along the lines of “We recognise that you work in a team environment, but what we are interested in is how you actually added value. What was your specific role?”

Not enough time probing ‘actions’ – Many candidates do themselves an injustice by spending too much time painting the background to an example or jumping straight to the result without highlighting the actual steps they went through. The actions the candidate took are key to assessing the candidate against each of the behavioural indicators. A good interviewer probes until the candidate has had an opportunity to outline their actions, asking questions like “What steps did you specifically go through?” and “What was your thinking process?”

Focusing only on work examples – Though relevance is important, it is important not to ignore non-work examples. The candidate may have developed strong leadership skills coaching or captaining a sports team or developed project management skills coordinating a project within a club or professional association.

Forgetting about candidate motivation – In addition to capability, motivational fit is very important and should not be lost sight of in a Behavioural Interview. Ideally there should be some questions at the start of the interview that explore why the candidate has applied for the role and what appeals to them about it. As the interview continues, at the end of each set of questions for a competency it is good to ask some questions around whether that competency area is something they enjoy. For example, “Is selling products something that you enjoy and would you prefer making ‘cold calls’ or working on the implementation team?” Again, it is important not to fall into the trap of asking leading questions.

Getting into the swing of Behavioural Interviewing often takes some re-programming for interviewers. Through hands-on practice, coaching, training, and peer feedback, interviewers will improve their skills and start to see the benefits of the Behavioural Interviewing technique. The importance of establishing a clear and concise behavioural model cannot be understated - interviewers need to understand what criteria they are evaluating the candidate against. The term ‘gut feel’ still rears its head in Behavioural Interviewing and when this happens the interviewer should be able to justify their hunch in behavioural and legally-defensible terms. Some organisations offer behavioural interviewing coaching sessions to their employees and internal candidates, which allows everybody to get the most out of Behavioural Interviewing.

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WEBSITES FOR INTERVIEW INFORMATION

Being able to do the job well will not necessarily get you hired. The person who gets hired is often the one who knows the most about how to get hired. This is the advice from Richard Bolles' website where you will find a crash-course in interviewing from the book "What Color is Your Parachute".

www.jobhuntersbible.com

A New Zealand website with information on the key to successful interviews, including how to handle and answer difficult questions.

msn.seek.co.nz/career-resources/get-your-dream-job/interview-success.ascx

New Zealand website with information on careers, interview coaching and specific techniques for interviews.

www.job.co.nz/interview%20Technique.htm

American site offering new graduates an extensive careers library which includes a huge range of interview and job search information.

www.jobweb.com

Western State College Colorado has some bullet pointed information for a quick overview of interview information.

www.western.edu/academics/career-services/interview-skills.html/

Canadian site offering good advice on interview hints and tips

www.nextsteps.org/interview/index.html

A well resourced site offering guidance on Interviewing, Networking and Negotiating.

www.rileyguide.com/interview.html

Search Interview Skills on YouTube

www.youtube.com

WEBSITES FOR TELEPHONE INTERVIEWS

Phone Interviewing Do's and Dont's

www.quintcareers.com/phone_interviewing-dos-donts.html

Telephone Interview Tips and Techniques

jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/phoneinterview.htm

How to master Telephone Interviews

www.worktree.com/tb/IN_telephone.cfm

RESOURCES AVAILABLE IN THE CAREER DEVELOPMENT CENTRE

The Career Development Centre offers a range of resources to help with Job Interviews. Check out OtagoCareerHub <https://careerhub.otago.ac.nz/Login.chpx?> for details of the Professional Skills programme which offers seminars and workshops on Interview Skills.

Books on Interview Skills

- 201 Knockout Answers to Tough Interview Questions: The Ultimate Guide to Handling the New Competency-Based Interview Style*, Matias, Linda. 2009
- A Woman's Guide to Successful Negotiating*, Miller, Lee. 2010
- Best Answers to the 201 Most Frequently Asked Interview Questions, Second Edition*, DeLuca, Matthew and DeLuca, Nanette. 2010
- Boost Your Interview IQ*, Martin, Carole. 2003
- How to Get Into the Top Consulting Firms: A Surefire Case Interview Method - 2nd Edition*, Darling, T. 2009
- Interview Magic: Job Interview Secrets from America's Career and Life Coach*, Britton Whitcomb, Susan. 2008
- Job Interview Skills 101, The Course You Forgot to Take*, Enisman, Ellyn. 2010
- Killer Interviews: Success Strategies for Young Professionals*, W. Ball, Frederick W, and Ball, Barbara B. 2010
- Knock 'em Dead Job Interview Flash Cards: 300 Questions & Answers to Help You Land Your Dream Job!*, Yate, Martin. 2011
- Knockout Job Interview Presentations: How to Present with Confidence, Beat the Competition and Impress Your Way into a Top Job*, Corfield, Rebecca. 2010
- Now you've been shortlisted: Step by step, your guide to being successful at interviews and assessment centres*, Taylor, Denise. 2010
- The Essential Phone Interview Handbook*, Bailo, Paul. 2011
- Top Notch Interviews: Tips, Tricks, and Techniques from the First Call to Getting the Job You Want*, Davis, Brian. 2010
- What Color Is Your Parachute? 2011: A Practical Manual for Job-Hunters and Career-Changers*, Bolles, Richard N. 2010.

Books on Psychometric Testing

- Brilliant Psychometric Tests: What the best candidates know, do and say*, Edenborough, Robert. 2009
- How to Pass Advanced Verbal Reasoning Tests: Essential Practice for English Usage, Critical Reasoning and Reading Comprehension Test*, Byron, Mike. 2008
- How to Pass Graduate Psychometric Tests: Essential Preparation for Numerical and Verbal Ability Tests Plus Personality Questionnaires*, Byron, Mike. 2011
- How to Pass Numeracy Tests*, Tolley, Harry. 2006
- How to Succeed at an Assessment Centre: Essential Preparation for Psychometric Tests, Group and Role-Play Exercises, Panel Interviews and Presentations*, Tolley, Harry and Wood, Robert. 2011
- IQ and Psychometric Test Workbook: Essential Preparation for Verbal, Numerical and Spatial Aptitude Tests and Personality Tests*, Carter, Philip J. 2011
- The Graduate Psychometric Test Workbook*, Byron, Mike. 2011

DVDs on Interview Skills include:

- At the Assessment Centre*, AGCAS, 2009
- Making An Impact: The Graduate Job Interview*, AGCAS, 2007