



## Interview Preparation

**Congratulations – you have been selected to interview with one of Sage Search Partner’s clients. Review the information below in order to help you be more prepared and ultimately accomplish the goal of getting an offer. It is ultimately your role to convince the employer that you are the best candidate for the job.**

**Chemistry:** The main key to any interview is chemistry. You’re going to want to go into an environment where you have connection and feel you fit in, and the same goes for the employer. Therefore, you need to establish some sort of common denominator in the first few minutes of the interview. (Value, Personality, past experiences.) REMEMBER THE PROCESS IS 90% CHEMISTRY, AND 10% EVERYTHING ELSE. Of course, this assumes you are capable of the job from a skill set view point.

**Attitude:** A strong positive attitude is essential when interviewing. Make sure that you say things in a positive manner. Be energetic it will help; be sure to be pleasant to EVERYONE you see. Look the person in the eye and give him or her a firm handshake and SMILE!!! Remember, the interview starts when you pull into the parking lot.

**Selling Your Skills:** Remember, this is a sales presentation. It is important to answer questions in terms of your skills and your accomplishments. Formulate your strengths, weakness and other potential qualities beforehand. Have your answers ready is the difference in being prepared and unprepared. Look for opportunities to discuss how your specific skills fit the opportunity. Value the short timeframe you have for the interview and give your answers in a concise and detailed manner without making it a short Yes/No answer.

**Tough Questions:** The following is a list of some of the tough questions you may face in an interview. It is vitally important that you have already formulated appropriate answers. In competitive employment markets, a single slip can cost you a position you are excited about. Here are some questions to consider and be prepared for.

### Getting started

Make sure you are prepared for the interview and have all of the information concerning:

- Confirmed interview time
- Directions & Parking
- Contact person and additional names of people you will meet
- Phone number (main and direct) in case of emergency
- Job Description
- Company Web page
- Tips on the hiring manager(s) interviewing style (if known), questions they have asked in the past, etc
- Address / email address for a thank you letter, business card before you leave

### Interview Etiquette:

- Appropriate dress attire (normally a suit)
- Keep in mind professionalism no exposed tattoos, piecing, groomed facial hair/nails and no perfume/cologne
- No eating, drinking or SMOKING prior to the interview
- Think of Body Language
- Portfolio rather than briefcase
- Do not bring cellular phone into the interview
- Remember to have direct Eye Contact
- Arrive no more than 15 minutes early - Do a drive-by if possible
- Have a Firm Handshake with a smile

### During the interview

- Let the interviewer guide the interview.

- Do not analyze the position during the interview. Only decide if you are interested afterwards and maintain positivity throughout the interview.
- **Be enthusiastic!** Employers prefer candidates who are interested about the job/company over someone who is more qualified. Don't make the mistake of assuming the less you appear interested, the better negotiating position you will be in (ie. the "used car" approach). Get the employer excited about you first.
- Regardless of what you hear in the interview, ***maintain enthusiasm***. You never know, but the bottom line is you want to be the one to make the decision on whether or not you move forward in the interview process! If you don't sell yourself they will make it for you by eliminating you as a candidate regardless of your interest.
- Understand that, at this stage, 90% of the interview is designed to determine whether you're a good personality fit within the organization and if you would be happy in the job. You wouldn't be on the interview if they were afraid you couldn't do the job. The interviewer might ask a variety of questions, but they are looking primarily at the personality fit. Be energetic, outgoing, and have a flexible attitude.
- Be prepared for the standard interviewing questions (see examples below)
- Be prepared with questions of your own (see examples below)
- Have fun and be yourself!

### **Most Commonly Asked Questions**

- Tell me about yourself (Hit the major highlights of your professional experience, no more than 2-3 minutes)
- Why are you leaving your current position? (Never speak negatively about current or past employers)
- What are your career goals? Short term/Long term?
- Why are you interested in this position?
- How would your boss/co-workers describe you?
- What are your greatest strengths? / What is your greatest weakness?
- What are you looking for in a job?
- What distinguishes you from your peer group?
- How do you: A) Set priorities B) Organize your time C) Solve problems?
- What has been your biggest professional/personal challenge/accomplishment?

### **Behavioral Interview Questions - must be able to give concrete examples:**

- Describe a time when you were faced with a stressful situation that demonstrated your coping skills.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you used good judgment and logic in solving a problem.
- Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to meet or achieve it.
- Give me a specific example of a time when you had to conform to a policy with which you did not agree.
- Please discuss an important written document you were required to complete.
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Tell me about a time when you had too many things to do and you were required to prioritize your tasks.
- What is your typical way of dealing with conflict? Give me an example.
- Tell me about a difficult decision you've made in the last year.
- Give me an example of when you showed initiative and took the lead.
- Give me an example of a time when you motivated others.
- Tell me about a time when you delegated a project effectively.
- Give me an example of a time when you used your fact-finding skills to solve a problem.
- Tell me about a time when you missed an obvious solution to a problem.
- Describe a time when you anticipated potential problems and developed preventive measures.
- Tell me about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision.
- Please tell me about a time you had to fire a friend.
- Describe a time when you set your sights too high (or too low).
- Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.
- Give an example of a time in which you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
- Describe a time when you had to use your written communication skills to get an important point across
- Tell me about a time when you had to go above and beyond the call of duty in order to get a job done.
- Describe a situation where others you were working with on a project disagreed with your ideas. What did you do?

- Tell of some situations in which you have had to adjust quickly to changes over which you had no control. What was the impact of the change on you?
- Describe some times when you were not very satisfied or pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
- Describe some projects or ideas (not necessarily your own) that were implemented, or carried out successfully primarily because of your efforts.
- Describe a situation that required a number of things to be done at the same time. How did you handle it? What was the result?
- Give an example of when you had to work with someone who was difficult to get along with. Why was this person difficult? How did you handle that person?
- Tell me about a difficult situation when it was desirable for you to keep a positive attitude. What did you do?
- Give me an example of a time you had to make an important decision. How did you make the decision? How does it affect you today?
- Tell me about a time you had to handle multiple responsibilities. How did you organize the work you needed to do?
- Describe the system you use for keeping track of multiple projects. How do you track your progress so that you can meet deadlines? How do you stay focused?
- Tell me about a time when you failed to meet a deadline. What things did you fail to do? What were the repercussions? What did you learn?

#### Sample Interview Questions to ask the Interviewer

- What characteristics will make someone successful in this position / company
- What would my typical day look like (ie. what percentage of my time would be spent on this, that...)
- What are the expectations of the person coming into this position in the first 6 months
- How long was the last person in this position, and what made them successful
- If things went well, where can they see this role within 2-3 years
- How would you describe the environment here (laid back, busy, etc...)
- What are the short & long range objectives of the company
- What is the organizational structure of: A) the department B) the company
- What do you see as the biggest obstacle for the person coming into this position
- What is your background / what attracted you to this organization (people love to talk about themselves)
- **Best way to wrap up the interviews by communicating your interest:** "I just want to let you know that based on what I've learned so far I am very interested in pursuing this to the next step and I truly appreciate you taking the time to meet with me."

#### Topics to avoid (use your recruiter to ask these questions!)

Avoid anything that can be construed as "what's in it for me" such as:

- Questions on benefits / cost of benefits
- Questions about other compensation issues (bonus, stock options, paid parking, CPA dues, whether overtime is paid, flex-time, typical raises, etc)
- Vacation policy
- Timing of raises, reviews
- Compensation! If they ask what is your current salary - "I am interested in the opportunity and what it has to offer. I would prefer that compensation be discussed with SNI Financial. I'm sure that I'm in the salary range or SNI Financial would not have me in front of you for the current opening."
  - If they push on salary or ask what compensation you are targeting, **do not** give a specific number. Indicate that compensation is not your motivation for making a change, and although an important factor, you are considering everything in your decision. By giving a number, it will either be lower than what they are willing to offer you (ie. you hurt yourself) or a little higher than they were thinking (ie. you screen yourself out). **Many candidates indicate what compensation they are currently at** ("I am currently making \$40K base with a bonus of 0-10%, and I am up for a raise/review in April") – this information is commonly asked on applications as well. This allows the client to verify that you will be in their salary range without pinning yourself down to a specific number.

### **Ask for the Job!**

Finally & Most Important (almost as important as chemistry); **You must ask for the job!** Be certain that the employer knows before you leave that you are excited about the opportunity and the company. Candidates that do this well get the best offers! Employers want to hire people who are excited about coming to work for them. End interview in a positive and committal way. Say things like, "Thanks for the time today." "I think this would be a great move for me and I would be very excited to join the team".

### **Interview Reminders:**

- Be sure and ask for their business card
- **Follow up with a thank you notes/emails after the interview both hand written and by email to everyone in the interview process**
- **Send the thank you email first to your recruiter to review. Make sure you review grammar, spell check and triple check prior to sending anything!**
- **Optional - Take blank thank you cards in order to leave a personal hand written thank you with the front desk**

### **After the interview**

- **Call your Sage contact ASAP and give them your candid, honest feedback. Keep in mind that we do not talk to the client until we hear your feedback!**

Questions we ask are:

- How did it go?
- How long were you there? Who did you meet with? How did they describe the position, etc?
- How would you rank it on a scale of 1-10, 10 being the best. What was good about it. What concerns / questions do you have at this point.
- Do you want us to pursue a second interview / offer at this time?
- Think about all of the pros and cons of the position. Write them down if necessary
- Accumulate a list of additional questions you have at this point (ie. that won't be addressed in a second interview)

### **Telephone Interview Tips**

- Speak up and make sure you are in a place with good reception
- Make sure you are articulate – let me define that for you...don't use slang words or Abbreviations
- Make sure and stand when having the interview – gives better breathing and keeps you from getting too relaxed
- Make sure there are NO distractions in the background – radio, TV, dogs barking, etc.
- Have good energy and ask questions
- Follow all the additional interview tips listed above for face to face interviews

**Good luck!**