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The Blayze Unguem Guide to Interview Success

“ad unguem”

To seek perfection...

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The Interview

So the CV got you in the door, but that's just the start of it. The face to face interview is where you 'clinch the deal'. Interviewing well can sometimes be more important than actual relevant career experience. Often, the person who interviews best is offered the role over the person with the more relevant career experience.

Remember, once you're in the door, your CV has done its job, now it's over to you. Your CV will have ensured you are on at least an equal footing with other applicants and the employer will be satisfied that you have the relevant experience to be invited forward for interview.

Now is the time to make yourself stand out as head and shoulders above the competition. This is your big chance to really promote yourself, so it pays to prepare. The employer has a detailed picture of the attributes of the candidate whom they wish to recruit for the role, and it is your job to mirror this specification as closely as possible. This is done by presenting your skills and experience in such a way that it matches what they are seeking. If you sell yourself correctly, the interviewer will be able to tick' each aspect of their specification as you run through your (prepared) selling point.

Do Your Homework

Before entering the interview door make sure you know the background to the company, their key activities and detail about the job in question. Not only will this enable you to relate any relevant experience and knowledge you may have, but it will also demonstrate to the interviewer that you have done some preparation and are taking the whole recruitment process seriously, do not assume that the employer will think you are keen - you must show that through your presentation.

- Access the company's website
- Request company marketing literature and research the company's market sector and competition on the internet.

Preparing For the Day

The Journey and Skills & Attributes

- Plan your route, take change for parking and the Company and Blayze Unguem's telephone number just in case.
- Do a dummy run to ensure you know exactly where you are going for the interview.
- Make sure you know your own CV and take several copies in a professional looking folder.

So, how do you prepare to sell yourself?

How do you explain why your skills and experience make you the best choice for the role?

Exercise:

Before you go the interview, you must list all the skills / attributes that the job requires, and against that list write why you satisfy each element of the job specification. (This is best done by referring to your CV and writing down what you will say in response to each point).

This list will then constitute a summary of your key work-related attributes and experience in relation to this job. All you then have to do is learn it and then tell the interviewer!

Remember you are being interviewed for a particular vacancy, so you must try to put your experience and skills across in a way that is **relevant** to the role in question. Focus on the attributes required by the job specification, and be prepared to back up your abilities to meet each of these criteria. In fact, it is true to say that armed with this list of your key attributes, you are well equipped to answer any question which is related to the job specification.

The following questions can all be answered in this way:

- What are your strengths?

Your strong attributes for this job

- What motivates you?

Describe one of your strengths as a motivational factor

- Why should we employ you?

List your attributes for this job

- Describe your ideal job

Describe a role which uses your key attributes for this role

- How would your best friend/colleague/boss describe you?

Relate a strength for this job

- What are your personal skills and abilities?

The list for this job

- What are specific examples of how you have used them?

Keep your answers factual, explaining your skills and experience. Practice answering the above questions until you can do so in a clear, concise, confident manner, staying relevant to the job in question. Do not be afraid to repeat yourself when answering these questions. If you have prepared the list of your strengths in relation to this role, you will be able to talk about specific skills and experience which are directly relevant to what the interviewer is looking for.

If the questions you are asked give you the openings to do this then you will be able to respond with confidence, but if the interviewer does not provide the leading questions, you will be able to “take the bull by the horns” and present a lucid, well-rehearsed summary of how your experience and skills are right for the job. In other words, you will be able to sell yourself to the best of your ability.

If you do not undertake the preparation detailed above you will not stand a chance of being able to relate all the relevant selling points clearly and concisely, (and consequently will probably not be offered the job).

Questions You May Be Asked

- Why did you leave your last job / why do you want to leave your current role?

The interviewer is looking to see if there were problems at your last job that may arise again. Employees usually leave a job for more than one reason and you should mention only those reasons that are favourable to you. If you were fired from your last job, explain what happened in a positive manner and note that the situation would never occur again. Do not say anything negative about a Company or Manager you used to work for as the interviewer will most likely view you as someone who will do the same thing again.

- What are your weaknesses?

You MUST prepare an answer. Use one that can be turned into a strength, and explain your efforts to overcome it.

- Why have all your jobs been short term?

The interviewer is trying to find out if you can keep a job. You should mention any straight forward factors that are responsible for your work history, such as returning to school, summer or temporary employment, travel, etc. If you have no explanation to offer the employer, mention that you were looking for work and assure the employer you plan to stay with this job for some time.

- What kind of salary do you expect?

It is wise to learn what this range is prior to the interview. If unsure, tell the interviewer that you would work for whatever the company feels is fair, based on your qualifications and the company's standard salary level for that position. If you want to request a specific salary, be able to back up why you should get that amount (avoid stating personal reasons).

- Where do you see yourself in 2 years' time?

If unsure, play the middle ground between ambition and stability. The interviewer wants to know whether you are serious about staying with the company and to determine whether you have given some thought to your future. If your goals are related to the job in question, be certain to make note of this. If the position is not related to your goals, mention the advantages of gaining additional work experience as part of your career planning.

- How much were you absent from work/school?

How is your health? The interviewer is trying to determine how dependable you are. If this has not been an area of concern for you, stress your past reliability and give assurance of your future reliability. If you have had past difficulties in this area, tell the interviewer why this was and why you feel that it will no longer be a problem. If it will continue to be a problem, be up front about this and try to negotiate a schedule that works for both of you.

- When are you available for work?

If you are presently unemployed, you can most likely respond that you can begin work right away. However, if you are presently employed, you should be aware of how much notice your present employer requires before you are able to leave your present job.

- Can you explain this gap in your employment?

The employer may be questioning your commitment to employment, thinking that you don't like to work, or wanting to find out what you have been doing with yourself during the gap. If you have been doing anything constructive during this time, such as dedicating yourself to college, taking courses, volunteer work, etc., mention these. Also, mention that you were looking for work, and that you enjoy working.

- Do you have a criminal record?

If you have a criminal record, don't try to hide it from the interviewer. Briefly explain the situation, remembering not to sound like you are making excuses or blaming the incident on someone else. Reassure the interviewer that you have learned from your mistakes and have changed your ways.

- Are you willing to cut your hair/take out your earring?

The interviewer feels that some aspect of your appearance does not "fit" with the business and wants to know if you are willing to change your appearance. The decision of what you say is yours. However, if you say no, you may not be considered for the job. Saying yes will increase the chances of being seen as a cooperative and professionally mature person and, consequently, of being hired.

- What frustrates you?
- Why do you want to work for us?
- How do you handle pressure?

Give the interviewer examples of paid or unpaid activities that involved deadlines and pressures and be able to explain how you handled the stress. If you were unable to meet the deadline, explain what you did to compensate, such as working overtime, renegotiating the deadline etc.

Importantly, prepare your thoughts / answers to the typical questions below:

- What are your career aspirations?
- What do you know about their organisation/the job?
- What are you most and least proud of?
- Who do you admire most public or private and why?
- What company cultures do you thrive in?
- What newspapers do you read? / What was the last book you read? / What television programmes do you watch?
- How would you define a team?
- Prepare an example of when in your present role, you have done more than that which was required.
- Prepare an example of when you have had to be persuasive / prioritise / deal with a difficult customer / follow a course of action you didn't agree with.
- What were your favourite and worst subjects at school / college / university etc.?
- Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
- What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
- What major challenge have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
- What have you learned from your mistakes?
- What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction?

On the Day

First Impressions

- If you don't arrive early, you're late!
- Allow plenty of time for parking and signing in at reception etc.
- Aim to arrive at least 15 minutes before your interview time. This will allow you time to relax rather than rushing, and will make a good impression with the employer.
- Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, a positive smile and good eye contact.
- Don't worry! It's easy to be your own worst enemy by clamming up and being nervous. Remember, you're talking about something you're an expert on, YOU.
- Be yourself, talk confidently about your experience and skills and enjoy the interview.
- Remember to turn off your mobile phone.
- Make a great impression with the receptionist too.

Dress to Impress

You don't get a second chance to make a first impression. If you look the part, there is an initial assumption you can do the job.

- Dress professionally

A dark business suit works well, with a co-ordinating shirt and tie for men and a shirt or formal top for women.

- Keep jewellery to an absolute minimum. Ideally just a wedding ring and watch.
- Do not chew gum during the interview or whilst waiting.
- Do not smoke before the interview. You want the interviewer to be bowled over with how smart you are, not overpowered with the smell of cigarettes.

Body Language

- Always offer a firm handshake both at the start and the end of the interview
- Maintain good eye contact at all times
- Do not slouch, fidget or look out of the window – Hands.
- Don't bite your nails or put your hands in front of your mouth when talking.

Personality & Attitude

Your Personality and attitude are crucial. In situations where all candidates are capable of doing the job, these points are what make the difference between you and the other candidates. You are seeking to convey the right mix of professionalism and personality. Therefore, your approach must be:

- Polite and Professional
- Confident
- Lively
- Interested - in this job, not just any job

- Enthusiastic

The value of enthusiasm cannot be over-emphasised, it's infectious! So, if you want to be remembered as a candidate that the interviewer actually wants to employ, inject some enthusiasm into your performance. You will be amazed at how the interviewer will warm to you thus how much better you will come across.

In the Interview

Build rapport as quickly as possible. Be professional, but it's good to be friendly too. You want to give the interviewer a 'good feeling' about you. Use good manners and good English. Do not use slang and under no circumstances should you ever swear in interview, even if the interviewer does.

Be positive and enthusiastic throughout. Enthusiasm can sometimes compensate for lack of experience. Answer questions precisely and concisely. Never speak for more than two or three minutes without further prompt. Follow the interviewer's lead, but try to get the interviewer to describe the position and duties to you fairly early in the interview so that you can then relate your background and skills in context. Be specific, concrete, and detailed in your answers. The more information you volunteer, the better the employer gets to know you. Answer questions as truthfully and as frankly as you can. The interviewer may steer the interview into ticklish political or social questions - answer honestly, trying not to say more than is necessary.

Elaborate

This is your chance to really 'sell' yourself and your skills and experience. Don't answer questions with just a "yes" or "no" Listen carefully to the interviewer and the questions and don't interrupt. If you don't fully understand a question or aren't sure what exactly is being asked, it's better to ask the interviewer for clarification before trying to answer. End the interview positively so you leave a favourable impression in the employer's mind. Tell the interviewer you have enjoyed meeting them, that you've been very impressed by what you've seen today and that you would be very interested in taking it to the next stage.

Closing the Interview

So, imagine that you are in the interview, and have put forward your selling points, strengths and key skills and attributes for the job in a clear, professional manner. You have developed a rapport with the interviewer and feel interested in the job. Now what happens next?

Usually you will be asked if you wish to ask any questions, and usually your questions have already been answered during the interview. However, you must ask some questions (or at least create the impression that you were going to), since it demonstrates that you have thought seriously about the role and have done some preparation. This is one of the most important parts of the interview, and a poor performance here will result in failure – Our experience has taught us this.

It is advisable that you take a folder in to the interview containing your question list.

This will:

- Demonstrate your preparation.
- Demonstrate that you are taking the job seriously.
- Ensure that you don't forget anything.

You should produce and look in this folder, even if all your questions have already been answered. Look in it and say 'all my questions have been answered, thank you'. The interviewer will be impressed, and you will stand head and shoulders above the candidates.

You could also write down your key strengths in relation to the job (as previously prepared), so that when you look at the list you can check to see if you have forgotten to tell the interviewer something.

Questions You Can Ask

- What would my key responsibilities and duties be?
- How do you see the department / company developing or 'Where do you see the company in two years?'
- How many people have you seen?
- When do you need someone to start? Say when you are available
- How often are performance reviews given?
- What are the most difficult aspects of the position?
- Can you describe a typical day on the job?
- What's the Company's/department's growth forecast for the next 2 years?
- What is the philosophy on training and development here?
- How do you think I'd fit into the job and into the company?
- What projects would I be involved in now? In the future?
- Who would I be working for and with?
- What is the person doing who used to hold this position?
- Can you tell me about your career history with the Company?

Please note - the interview is **not** the time to ask questions about salary, benefits, hours or vacation. This information may be critical for you in making your decision, but wait until you have been offered the job before asking about them.

Ask for the job.

A final question to ask may be, 'do you have any reservations about me/my experience?' 'And do you believe I can deliver the requirements you seek in the role?' You will then be able to lay to rest any doubts which the interviewer may have.

The final thing to do is to tell the interviewer that you are interested in the job. Write this on your questions list so that you don't forget:

'Thank you for taking the time to see me. I am very interested in the job, it is the position I have been looking for. When are you looking to make a decision?'

Telephone Interviews

Preparing for a Telephone Interview

Companies often prefer to conduct telephone (screening) interviews before inviting candidates to their offices for a face-to-face interview.

This applies particularly:

- When candidates will have to travel a long way.
- When there are large numbers of candidates.
- When screening by CV is difficult (when for example, personality is more important than experience or qualification).
- When a large part of the job will involve talking to people on the telephone.

If this telephone interview has been arranged through an agency/recruitment consultant you should know exactly when to call the hiring manager, or when they will call you. In other circumstances, you may have to be prepared to receive a call 'out of the blue'.

From the telephone interview, your objectives should be:

- To obtain enough information to decide if you would like to proceed with the interview process.
- To give just enough information to answer the hiring manager's questions and persuade them that you are indeed worth interviewing face-to-face
- To 'close' the interview effectively and agree a time, date and place for your face-to-face interview.

Preparation

Preparation for a telephone interview is as important as preparation before any other form of interview or meeting. The impression you create in the opening moments, and the manner with which you present yourself will determine whether or not you will be successful.

Find out as much as you can about the company and the job description. If your telephone interview has been arranged by a third party, you should receive much of this information from them. But in any case, do your own researches - company websites are one of the best sources of information. Find out about the size and structure of the company, its products and its markets.

Make a note of any questions you would like to ask. Ask about things if they are important to you, especially if your decision whether to proceed depends upon the answers (for example: will I have to relocate? (If that is something you don't want to do!). Otherwise, ask broad questions such as 'what training will be given?', 'what opportunities are there for advancement?' Have these questions written down.

Have a notepad and pen ready, along with your diary.

Have your CV at hand. In all probability the hiring manager will have a copy of it too, so you probably won't be asked to describe your background in detail.

Prepare mentally, or better still in writing, a very brief 'potted history' to answer the demand 'tell me about yourself.' Managers ask this not because they want the information (they already have your CV!), but because they want to listen to you, to find out how communicative you are, and how you sound.

The Call

If you have been asked to call at a specific time, call at precisely the correct time. Too early shows over-keenness and may damage your negotiating position later on, or your chances of getting to the next stage. Too late shows lack of interest - excuses won't be tolerated. If you can't get through (manager busy), leave a message with the secretary/receptionist to show that you called at the right time. Ask when the manager is expected to be free, and try again then. Repeat the same procedure until you make contact. If you have been told that the hiring manager will call you - do not expect the same rules to apply! They will call you when they want to! (They're the one with the job after all!)

Tone of voice. This is the most important aspect of this form of interview. The detail is of very little importance - the manager has your CV, so they know exactly what you've done, and in all probability wouldn't be talking to you if they weren't essentially interested.

The main rules are:

- Think about how you normally answer the phone at home. When you answer the phone, do so by announcing your name, in an enthusiastic style: 'John Pickles, Good Morning!' If this is not your natural style, change it!
- Sound interesting/interested, energetic and enthusiastic
- Be succinct (don't waffle)
- Ask open-ended questions (beginning with who, what, when, why, where, how: these all ask for information, and keep the ball in the other person's court). Be prepared that they will do exactly the same!
- Don't use jargon
- Don't swear or use colloquialisms (local phrases: 'I covered the whole of London on Shanks' pony')
- Be polite: speak to Ms (not Miss or Mrs. - even if you know their marital status), or Mr. Jones. If you are invited to use their first name, then use it. Use their title if you know they are for example, a doctor.
- Use the other person's name regularly throughout the conversation (but not all the time). Also, use the company name a few times.

Closing the Telephone Interview

Part of the purpose of the telephone interview (from the hiring manager's perspective) is to find out how keen you are, and (especially in the case of sales jobs) whether you have natural closing ability.

As soon as it seems appropriate during the conversation, ask for a date to meet for a face-to-face interview. Say something like 'well, this certainly sounds like just the job I'm looking for Mr. Brown. I'm sure I can contribute a lot to your company. I'd really like to visit you to show you what I can do for you. When can you meet me?'

You may have to be content with the response 'I'll call you', but at least you can ask 'when am I likely to hear from you?' - If the manager hedges, decide upon a reasonable time scale, and suggest 'well, I'm very keen to know if I've got a chance with you Mr. Brown, so if I haven't heard from you by next Friday, would you mind if I call you then to find out?'

This approach is particularly important if you are applying to sales jobs, as you are expected to demonstrate your natural salesmanship. But even in the case of other jobs, most people will appreciate your keenness and enthusiasm. If they don't, and you lose the job on account of being 'too pushy' (most unlikely) well, is it the sort of job you wanted anyway?

If you are invited for a face-to-face interview, thank the manager, and ask for details:

- When?
- Where?
- With whom?
- What should you take to the interview?
- What will the procedure be?
- Will they be able to make a decision after the next interview? If not, what will happen after that?
- How many people are you up against?
- What is the most important thing the company is looking for?

Don't worry if you don't feel able to ask all these questions. The first three questions are the most important obviously.

If your telephone interview has been arranged by an agent/recruitment consultant, telephone them immediately to let them know the outcome. They should be able to find out the answers to the other questions, on your behalf.

Remember, the most important things that all employers are looking for, in any circumstance is energy, enthusiasm and 100% commitment to the job.

Additional Documents

Blayze Unguem also offers its Candidates a comprehensive guide to writing the perfect résumé. It's a brief but very useful step-by-step approach to gather all of the key elements to create the perfect résumé. Here at Blayze Unguem, we try to help you maximise every opportunity in securing the role that matches your onward career aspirations. If you believe that *'The Blayze Unguem Guide to Writing the Perfect Résumé'* would also benefit you, please do not hesitate to get in contacts with one of our expert Consultants on 0345 11 22 828, or email us at info@blayze-unguem.com.