

## 4 TIPS TO PREPARE FOR ENTRY LEVEL INTERVIEWS



Congratulations! Whether you called, e-mailed a resume or used your connections, you've landed your first interview.

Scared? It's only natural. Most people get nervous. But don't worry, interviews are really a lot of fun. After all, where else can you talk about yourself for an hour while someone actually listens – without having to pay for the session?

First, the interviewer checks you out, looking for red flags. Firm handshake? Eye contact? Suit pressed? Shoes polished? Nail biter?

Next, she'll read from a script of questions, carefully listening to your responses for a reason not to hire you.

It's like getting your car inspected. Everything must be in working order before they can slap that sticker on your window.

Interviews at job fairs can be like "cattle calls." Some companies interview hundreds of people to fill four jobs. You've got about as good a shot as a lucky sperm vying to impregnate the egg. But relax; there are things you can do to stand out from the crowd. And I don't mean running around the interviewer's table, yelling, "Pick me! Pick me!"

What you can do is say something that will make a lasting impression. For example, even if you put bricks in my shoes, I'm an intimidating five feet three inches. So at one job fair, I dropped this in: "It's not the size of the dog in the fight, it's the size of the fight in the dog."

The woman's eyes lit up, and I damn near got that job. But the point is I got through the maddening crowd for a second interview.

### 1. More homework?

You also need to prepare for your interview by doing some background research. You can guarantee that interviewers will ask you about their company. If you don't take the time to learn about the organization, they'll assume you're not very interested in it.

You'll need to do some homework on yourself, too. What are you looking for in a job? Why do you want the job you're interviewing for? Be sure to prepare some answers to questions like these ahead of time. I cringe when I recall a certain interview with a man and woman early on in my career, when I wasn't even really sure what I wanted to do with my life. In trying to answer their questions, I was so confused that my responses were absolutely horrible. They were so bad, in fact, that after one answer, the guy actually turned to the woman and shook his head "no" right in front of my face. He couldn't even wait for me to leave the room before weeding me out. Don't let this happen to you.

### 2. Go the extra mile.

At entry level, it isn't necessarily your skills that get you employed, but demonstrating how badly you want the job.

When I interviewed at an ad agency, I was asked back for a second meeting. But the morning of the appointment, the area had one of its worst ice storms in history. It was difficult to walk, let alone drive on the slippery roads.

I had no idea what to do. I tried calling the office, and a woman answered saying she hadn't heard from the interviewer and wasn't sure if he was coming in. Time was running out for me to leave and get there on time, so I jumped in the car and headed to the office. When I finally arrived, nobody was in except the woman I'd just spoken with on the phone. She called the hiring manager and told him I made it in. He got on the phone and offered me the job on the spot.

### 3. Just say no!

I understand that with zero years' experience in this economy, it's extremely tough to turn down a job offer. But you shouldn't take just any job. Make sure you start your career out on the right path. Remember that interviews are a two-way street, and you're interviewing the hiring manager as he or she interviews you.

One guy greeted me at an interview with a quick hello, no handshake, no eye contact, no personality... just one big fat attitude! I felt like I was his ex-girlfriend. I thought: If this guy is treating me like dirt now, what will he do if he has some real power over me as my boss?

All I could do is remain professional, answer his questions and try to soften him up. But nothing I did could win him over. I didn't get the job, and it was a blessing in disguise.

Some friends who wound up working for him told me the guy really was a jerk all the time. About nine months after my interview, the company had a round of layoffs and "Mr. Happy" was canned. Word spread, and his entire staff went out to happy hour celebrating his unemployment. So, trust your instincts and avoid jobs that will trap you with a boss from hell.

### 4. Follow up.

After you get home from the interview, don't forget to send a letter or at least an e-mail thanking the interviewer for her time, reiterating your interest in the job, and explaining why you'd like to work for the company. You'll show her that you're hardworking, conscientious, a good listener and interested in the position. You'll also separate yourself from the other schmucks who didn't bother to acknowledge her existence.

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