

## PREPARATION BEFORE YOU START YOUR SEARCH

Welcome to one of the most important and positive decisions you can make in your life- contemplating a job change. Making a change may or may not be right for you at this time. We've included a few questions to consider prior to starting a job search.

### Questions to consider

- How could making a job change add more value in your life? Are you committed to a certain cause? For example, if you were committed to helping people get out of debt or save for retirement, perhaps you would like to work as a financial counselor in a bank or other corporate setting.
- How will a new job impact your family and your values? If a new position necessitates more time in the office or traveling, make sure to factor that into your decision-making process.
- Will you be open to relocation? This should be discussed with your family and people who are important to you prior to starting your search. This will play a part in your target companies- if they are located near you currently or if you are open to moving for your dream job.
- Is it possible this new job could be outsourced or eliminated? Do some research so you can make educated decisions in this ever-changing economic climate.
- Are you entrepreneurial? Would starting your own business or partnering with others be feasible to providing services to these companies? Do you feel comfortable taking on the risks of being a business-owner or would you rather focus on the work you love?
- Am I making this decision as the result of an emotional or situational blow-up? It is not advisable that you decide to make a job change in an emotionally turbulent state. Take a breather, and revisit at another time when you can think objectively about what is right for you, your career and your personal situation.
- Have I been at my current job long enough? Before the technology bubble, long tenure at a job was looked upon as a requirement and an asset, but employers are more open-minded now and realize that, in certain cases, having several positions may result in a candidate with well-rounded experience and broad skill sets. Two years of tenure is the shortest amount of time that most human resource professionals recommend before looking for a new position. Anything less, and you haven't stayed long enough to see the benefits and/or ramifications of the decisions that you've made in an company. From a professional reference standpoint, it is hard for someone to get to know you in under two years. Think about how your tenure will look on your resume, in accord with what niche you are in.
- What do you love doing? Not all of us know the answer to this, so volunteer, intern, research, take tests, talk to a job coach, and go on informational interviews. Talk to everyone you know about your interests and see if they know someone you can talk to. Those people may become great resources when you start targeting a new career/job.

### How to spend your resources wisely

- Your time  
Prepare yourself for spending a good amount of time on your job search. Selling yourself requires a significant investment of your time. Think of yourself like a product- the more contacts you make, the better your chances are of finding a lead. The more relevant positions you apply to, the better chance you have of getting called in for an interview. Keep a realistic goal of how long it will take to find a job. It will usually take longer than expected. The more time you can devote to research and applying to relevant positions, the better result you will yield. Be prepared to work interviews into your work schedule.
- Perseverance  
Know that emotional and psychological stresses are all part of searching for and changing jobs. It takes a lot of energy to keep plugging along, especially if the employers' responses are slow. Rejection is part of the game, but always focus on the positive and remember not to act out of desperation.

### Setting goals and planning for success

- Setting goals  
When you are setting goals, think about what is missing from your life and/or current position. Is it challenge, professional growth, independence, more time with family, more money, or a better work/life balance? What types of positions have what you are looking for? For example, do you want a large corporate setting where there may be superior benefits but more red tape, or do you want a smaller office where you feel like you're making a difference but have to work more hours? Think about what is really important to you and then write down your goals for your future job. Some examples could be: (1) stay at my job for 6 more months (if you have been there for only a short period of time), (2) get promoted or earn a performance bonus, (3) make contacts at my desired next location, (4) learn a new skill, and (5) wait for the right need to arise at another company. Just having a plan of action, even if it is not for an immediate change will make you feel like you are being proactive and creating your own future.
- Planning for success  
Once you decide what your goals are, break them down into small accomplishments for each day and build on that momentum. For example, if you know what you need to do to get your performance bonus, work backwards in your planner or calendar and break your big goal into little steps that you can do everyday. It may seem overly simplistic at first when you start breaking them down, but it will become a habit for you. This process will also teach you to jump from the big picture to the details quickly, which is a great job skill to have. Looking back on accomplishments helps rev up your plan and provides a sense of satisfaction. Do this for each task and you will find your calendar 'to do' list busily planned, in addition to getting motivated and excited about the results.

## SEARCHING FOR A JOB

### Responding to an ad/posting

- **Organize**  
Once you identify a job that you're interested in, set up a folder, resume and cover letter for that company with your materials. Follow the directions to the letter on how they want to receive your application or your name may never get to the hiring manager. Pay close attention to the job skills and language that are relevant to the position. Before you send any resumes/cover letters, it is important for you to devise a system of keeping track of what you sent to whom and when. It is critical to know what you said in a particular cover letter and to be able to follow up with accuracy. You should have a method that allows you to take further action on a timely basis.
- **Personalize**  
If you don't know the name of the hiring manager, a little investigating can go a long way. If you see the name of the company, but no hiring manager, call and find out who that person is. Also, using a mutual contact is a great way to get the interest of the reader. Always address your cover letter to a person, preferably the hiring manager.
- **Position description analysis**  
To effectively respond to a job posting or advertisement, it is imperative to carefully dissect and analyze the description to maximize your impact. When you find a position which interests you, separate out each of the following:
  1. Qualifications
  2. Skills & abilities
  3. Career experiences
  4. Education levels
  5. Licensures/certifications
  6. Keywords or phrases

### Targeting companies with no specific opening in mind

- **Identify your short list**  
If you are an experienced professional and know your desired criteria for the perfect company and position, write this down. List the attributes your ideal employer would have, such as size, industry and location. This strategy includes finding five to ten targets, and building a network inside each company so you know when a need arises before it is posted publicly. This more patient, company-centered strategy can help a candidate stand out from those who spend most of their time going about job searching the traditional way. This works well if you are very focused.
- **Diversify your network**  
Join associations, network, work with recruiters and attend healthcare conferences. The more avenues you open to your search, the more likely you will connect with the employers you are looking for. Don't forget to let people know you are looking- a friend of a friend can provide a lead or a valuable connection. Increase your circle of contacts by performing community service, taking a temporary job, or participating in groups or associations.
- **Be creative**  
The more creative you become with your job search, the more you will enjoy it. Think of ways to talk to and interact with people in companies that you are targeting. Join associations or clubs with people that work in your niche. Learning about what you want to do and where you want to be will help you feel much more prepared when the time comes for interviews. Always build your network and recognize that each person you meet has value- they may know somebody who will open the perfect door for your career. Become a student and stay abreast of industry trends.

## WORKING WITH RECRUITERS

An Executive Recruiter partners with employers to find established leaders and rising stars to place within the organizations they represent. Cultivating a relationship with a recruiter in your niche can be very advantageous to long-term career advancement, whether or not you are actively seeking a new job at this time. Recruiters often decide whether your resume is directed to the hiring manager's desk or to their office files. As you move up the corporate ladder, the more attractive you are likely to become to an executive recruiter.

Organizations will engage a recruiter for many different reasons. The three most common are:

1. A sense of urgency in filling a position
2. The organization has not been successful generating qualified candidates on their own using traditional methods
3. The position calls for a specific skill set and there exists a limited pool of qualified candidates.

### Types of recruiters:

- Contract/temporary recruiters contract with an employer to act as the employer's agent in the recruiting and employment function. They hire individuals to work for the client organization, but are almost always considered employed and paid by the recruiting agency.
- Contingency recruiters receive payment from employers only when one of their candidates accepts a position. The majority of these placements are completed by filling open positions and it's not uncommon for a contingency recruiter to be working on an exclusive basis.
- Retained recruiters are paid a retainer in advance for their services. Typically, a retained search shows a partnership between the recruiter and their client company and is an indication of both a sense of urgency and a commitment to find the best available talent for a specific position.

### Working with recruiters:

- Consider the services of a recruiter, only if you have carefully assessed your situation, and have made a definite decision to pursue other opportunities. A recruiter will work hard on your behalf, so if he or she has secured you an interview and you opt out, the chances are high the recruiter won't work with you again.
- All recruiters are not the same, so make sure your interests are being represented accurately. Comfort level and trust is essential especially when you are agreeing to place sensitive information such as your resume in the hands of a recruiter.
- When approaching or being approached by a recruiter, make sure you verbally express and put in your cover letter that they may not send your resume to any organization without your express permission. This will ensure that the recruiter has a legitimate position and that it is from an organization that you have not contacted yourself.
- Include three professional references, (3 names with contact information), when sending your resume to a recruiter. Providing references is a great way to increase the recruiter's desire to represent you to his or her clients.
- When a recruiter contacts you, treat the conversation as you would an interview. Be cautious about releasing your resume freely to a recruiter without getting to know them and their organization. If your qualifications and experience are not a very good match for a specific position, it is unlikely that the recruiter will move forward with your candidacy for the position but will usually request your resume for their database.
- Remember to be honest and straightforward when working with a recruiter. They work and negotiate on your behalf, so let them know where you are in your job search process and if you have any concerns or issues along the way.
- Recruiters often work a "hidden marketplace" and have knowledge and access to positions you do not have knowledge of.
- When talking to the recruiter, be decisive about the position that you are seeking and be able to clearly communicate the value that you would bring to the position and the organization.
- If a recruiter approaches you, ask questions about the employer, its culture, the skills needed and why the position is available. The recruiter will recognize you as somebody who is serious about the potential job.
- Recruiters will want to know your current or most recent compensation package up front. You may be asked to verify your salary with a W-2. They will know the compensation parameters of each position and will ensure you fall into the range for the position before moving forward.
- Check out the recruiter's website to verify that they are reputable.
- Gain a clearer understanding by asking questions about the position and the organization.
- Recruiters are not career coaches. They typically don't craft cover letters, edit your resume or plan your career path.

- Stay involved by contacting the recruiter with feedback on an interview or progress you've made on your own. Provide a list of companies that you have interviewed with already and companies that you have a strong interest in pursuing.
- For jobs that aren't a good fit, explain why to help the recruiter gain a clearer understanding of your preferences. The recruiter may keep your information on file to contact you if a suitable position emerges. If possible, leave a lasting impression by recommending someone else for the jobs you turn down.

### Questions to ask

Initial questions to ask a recruiter before submitting your resume:

- What is their specialty/niche?
- Have they made local, regional, national placements?
- How do they handle candidate confidentiality?
- Are they an Employer Paid Firm (EPF), rather than an Applicant Paid Firm (APF)?

Additional questions you may ask if you are not comfortable:

- Do they have a website?
- Are they independent, a boutique firm, or franchise or division of a large company?
- What is their level of search activity?
- Are they a contract, contingency, or retained recruiter?
- What networks/associations do they belong to?
- How many years experience do they have?
- Do they meet with candidates in person or is everything done over the phone or through video conferencing?
- What are their certifications? Are they a CPC—Certified Personnel Consultant—if it is a permanent position or a CTS—Certified Temporary Staffing Consultant—if it is a contract or temporary position?

### Sample letter to recruiter

Following is a sample letter to give you an example of what to include when first contacting a recruiter.

[Sample Letter](#)

### RESEARCHING COMPANYS

If you have secured an interview, identified the companies you want to work for, or found a job posting that has caught your eye, research the company thoroughly. Look at the company's website, and use internet search engines to do a complete search. Knowing a prospective employer's strengths, challenges and competition will position you as a valuable commodity.

#### Basic information to gather:

- type of company and its products
- mission, vision and goals
- services or products provided
- senior management team
- size in terms of locations and sales
- local, regional and national competition
- recently completed initiatives
- most recent news-press releases
- new trends

#### Popular resources and periodicals used to research:

##### To find Industry Articles

findarticles.com –search engine for articles by category, most popular articles, most popular publications  
magportal.com – search engine for magazine articles in various categories

### Online resources

business.com – business search engine, directory, and advertising network  
corporateinformation.com – company research reports with explanatory footnotes  
zoominfo.com – 3 million company profiles, information on products, services, and jobs  
hoovers.com – profile database with information on companies, industries and executives  
searchsystems.net - an online public records directory  
yahoo!industrynews -industry press releases and current news  
google.com – popular search engine, features include blogs, finance info, news  
dogpile.com - metasearch engine, searches multiple search engines at once  
wikipedia.org- free online encyclopedia  
vault.com - insider information on over 5,000 companies and 70 industries. Includes salary surveys on major employers and company specific message boards.  
ask.com – a leading search engine features include blogs, stock quotes, and a local search tool

### Some ways to research companies

Online career networking sites  
Online message boards  
Professional associations  
Blogs

### Popular Business Journals

Forbes  
Business Week  
The Economist  
Fortune  
Money  
Inc.  
Newsweek  
Fast Company  
Wall Street Journal  
Smart Money  
Time

### **Investigating company culture**

To stay in line with corporate culture, companies hire people they feel “fit” and often reject qualified candidates who don’t. During each interview, you have an opportunity to assess how the culture aligns with your values.

#### The following list can help uncover cultural indicators:

- See how people are treated- if you can get to talk to someone that works there, take note of how well they are treated by their managers and supervisors.
- Try to pick up phrases the interviewer repeats in talking about the company and its values.
- When being asked questions, is there an underlying theme to the subjects you are being asked about?
- How does the environment feel to you?
- Are the interviewers organized and on time? Did they give you an interview schedule?
- Were you interrogated or treated like a guest?
- Were your responses to questions treated with suspicion or curiosity?

#### Questions you can ask to investigate the company’s culture:

- Please describe the company or department culture in three adjectives or short phrases.
- How does the team handle conflict or differing opinions?
- How does the company recognize employee accomplishments?
- Please describe the leadership or managerial style of the company.
- What are the common denominators of the most successful employees?
- Is professional and educational advancement encouraged?

## YOUR RESUME

You need to choose a format that best showcases the successes of your career. Language in the resume should generate a sense of action, purpose, success, dynamism, impact, progress, results, and value. It needs to be organized, easy to read, focused, tailored to the job at hand, consistent in style, and relevant. Your goal is to separate yourself from the majority of candidates applying, to stand out and accurately communicate the values and talents you possess.

<p><b>Name &amp; Contact Information</b> Objective/Summary</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Areas of expertise</li></ul> <p><b>Position Summary A</b> General Information Value Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic Contribution 1</li><li>• Strategic Contribution 2</li></ul> <p><b>Position Summary B</b> General Information Value Statement</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Strategic Contribution 1</li><li>• Strategic Contribution 2</li></ul> <p><b>Education</b> (If applicable, these sections come next) Advanced Credentials, Professional development and training, Licensures/certifications, Technology summary, Articles authored, Presentations, Associations</p>
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### Types

- **Chronological** is the most commonly used format- see the sidebar for example of order of content. We will review the components of the chronological type resume, as it is most commonly used.
- **Functional** format may be used to take the focus away from work history or to focus on specific areas of expertise when an individual is changing functions.
- A resume differs from a **Curriculum Vitale** ("CV" or "vitale"), as it is a comprehensive biographical statement emphasizing your professional qualifications and activities. It is not the standard resume but a variation provided only when specifically requested, usually in pursuit of an academic or research position.
- **Online resumes** are often different than what you prepare when you are applying for a specific job. Look at multiple jobs that you are interested in and try to find the keywords that they use. Then, incorporate those into your resume. Many times, recruiters use computer filters to narrow down choices before they even look at a resume, so you want to make sure yours gets through.

### Content

- You should think about what message you are communicating- do you want to focus on your depth of experience, your years of experience, etc. Highlight the information on your resume that relates to what you are emphasizing.
- It should be a brief and focused marketing tool that conveys key credentials for future positions.
- Write it like a technical memo- don't use "I" statements and omit the articles such as "the" and "a."
- It should contain pertinent information- no more, no less. Try to limit the content to one page unless you have certifications, publications, presentations, etc. to exhibit. You may opt to limit your information to the past ten to fifteen years, unless special circumstances warrant more.
- You should indicate the type of impact you have on a company by using specific percentages and dollar amounts whenever possible to indicate savings, results, etc.
- Remember the person will be reading top to bottom and left to right so put the most important information in that order. If you want to focus the reader on the company, put that first in your position summary. If your title was more important, put that first.
- The reader scans your resume in the first 10-15 seconds. If you have captured their interest, they will invest time to continue reading your resume.

## Resume Components

### Objective or summary

- An objective on your resume can be very useful when targeted and concise, but leave it out if you're afraid it may block you from certain positions. Make sure that it quickly defines what you're looking for in two or three sentences. Think of your objective as a headline, title, or a branding statement. It tells the reader in as few words as possible what separates you from other candidates.
- The summary describes in broad terms the unique qualities, talents, abilities that you have utilized throughout your career to create your success and the impact they have had on the companies and departments you have led or been a part of. You will usually find it easier to write this after you have completed the experience section of your resume.

### Areas of expertise

This is a bulleted section to draw the reader's attention to your areas of leadership, knowledge and expertise. Include keywords in this section to increase the likelihood that your resume will be selected when an electronic scan retrieval system is used. Again, you will find it easier to write this section after you have completed the experience section of your resume.

### Position Summary

- Each job summary consists of *General Information*, *Value Statements* and *Strategic Contributions*.
- Starting with your last job (if doing a chronological format), start with the *general information*. Write down your employer name, dates of employment, title and duties.
- Next, for that same job, replace your duties with *strategic contributions*. Identify your achievements and the underlying drivers. What has made you successful in your career? These accomplishments validate the statements and focus the reader on the impact these successes had. Measure results- think about your performance, and apply numbers where possible, using percentages, dollar signs and time qualifiers. Some questions to help you:
  - What is your most significant achievement?
  - What was your impact on the division, company and group?
  - You can also ask colleagues and vendors for their input. For example, you could say, "We had a great working relationship. What did you like best about working with me?"
  - What would not have happened if you hadn't been there?
  - Dig through your old annual reviews and take note of what your supervisors praised you for.
  - Describe the challenge or situation you were presented with and define your impact. Quantify with numbers and percentages.
- Finally, summarize your contributions with a brief *value statement* describing your areas of success, accomplishments, value, and impact in each company. Here are some examples of value statements.

Education Begin with the most advanced degree you have obtained.

### Additional sections, if applicable

Advanced credentials

Professional development and training

Licensures / certifications

Technology summary

Articles authored

Presentations

Association memberships

## **Resume tips**

### Preparing

- Use high-quality stationery and envelopes matching your cover letter.
- Use the same font as your cover letter.

### Composing

- Put your contact information on the top of both pages of your resume.
- Write all aspects of the resume in active voice. Here are examples of action words.
- Write out numbers one through nine. Numbers 10 and up can be written numerically. Avoid the use of abbreviations, industry-related jargon and acronyms. Use an objective tone. Words that are overused, trite and self-congratulatory should not be used.
- As a rule, keep it brief and simple. Omit references, personal information and interests. Try to present your value, the who, what, where, why, how and when, all within thirty-sixty seconds of reading your resume.
- Avoid leaving gaps between employment dates. It's best to list jobs by year rather than by month.
- Look ahead and stay relevant- use key words reflecting the industry and profession you are targeting rather than from previous experience. Remove any outdated skills.
- Be factual. Employers have terminated employees for falsifying resume information.
- Focus on accomplishments, not duties. Instead of writing a list of job duties on your resume, demonstrate how each duty contributed to your company's bottom line.
- In your objective statement, write about what you will provide to your employer, not what you want to provide.
- Avoid repeating information. If you performed the same tasks for more than one employer, you can eliminate it from one of the companies. Focus on your experience from the last 10-15 years.
- Tailor your resume. Make it your job to know a great deal about the company you intend to send your resume to. Know their needs and history and how you can help them. Highlight relevant skills and experience that address their needs.

### Formatting/Sending

- Proofread twice yourself and then have two other people check for spelling, grammar and facts. You may inadvertently type words that are not picked up by spell check. Check grammar, spelling and facts.
- Format in a simple way. Avoid over-usage of bolding, italicizing, exclamation marks, underlining, etc. When it gets translated to a simplified format that employers use, it often looks like a broken jigsaw puzzle, so keep your formatting clean and simple.
- If emailing, use Microsoft Word and send it to yourself first to make sure it looks professional.

**POP UP BOXES- Come up when links are clicked on in the text.**

- **Some keywords:**  
Strategic planning, performance and productivity, improvement, company design, infrastructure development, new media, internet, e-commerce, change management, team-building, leadership, competitive market, product positioning, investor and board relations, oral and written communications, problem-solving, decision-making, project management, customer retention, business development, corporate vision, long-range planning, cost reduction, built consensus, customer attraction and retention, department company, merger/acquisition, procedure redesign, process reengineer, product introduction, project oversight, position creation, relationship building, reallocation of resources, systems development/enhancement
- **Quantifying words:**  
Growth, profit, business development, expansion, market share increase, sales/customer increase, revenue generation, increasing productivity, optimization, reduced overhead, and shareholder value
- **Value statements:**  
Visionary leader who excels in process improvement, turnaround management, and business development strategies for international business, high tech and manufacturing industries.  
Strong communicator  
Persuasive negotiator who  
Innovator of  
Visionary with special expertise in  
Respected leader of  
Strategic planning expertise in workflow prioritization, elimination of work redundancies, multi-company unit restructure and integration, maximizing workforce performance excellence, streamlining systems, and revenue generating productivity."  
Successful execution of  
Strong entrepreneurial background  
Dynamic manager  
Dynamic senior executive with expertise in leading company and downsizing efforts, dramatically improving operations and successfully directing new product development.  
Accomplished executive  
Critical thinker with a strong commitment to creating profitable systems improvements that exceed company objectives, by relying on business acumen and pioneering industry innovations.  
Extensive record in  
Tactically proficiency in  
Change agent with decisive leadership strengths in building profitable relationships in global distribution planning, creating rapid execution systems, and protecting revenue and reducing costs.  
Adept negotiator of multimillion dollar new accounts, who has won expanded market share and improved profit margins to drive growth and revenue.  
Spearheaded  
Spearheaded programs credited with the creation of community-based resources, promoting involvement to produce positive individual outcomes.
- **Action Words**  
A- attain, achieved, acquired, adapted, addressed, administered, analyzed, anticipated, assembled, assisted, audited,  
B- budgeted  
C- cause, create, communicate, calculated, centralized, changed, collaborated, composed, condensed, conducted, constructed, contracted, converted, coordinated, created, cultivated,  
D- direct, demonstrated, designed, developed, devised, discovered, doubled, drafted,  
E- execute, edited, eliminated, enforced, established, evaluated, expanded  
F- forge, forecasted, formed, founded  
G- generated, guided  
H- human capital development, hired  
I- implemented, improved, informed, insured, interpreted, interviewed  
L- launch, lead  
M- maintained, managed, marketed, minimized, motivated  
N- negotiated  
O- obtained, operated, organized, originated, oversaw  
P- performed, planned, prevented, produced, programmed, promoted, provided, publicized, published  
R- reconstruct, recruited, reorganized, reported, researched, resolved, reviewed  
S- spearhead, selected, separated, set up, simplified, solved, surveyed, staffed, supervised  
T- turnaround, taught, tested, trained  
U- used

**RESUME EXAMPLES**

## COVER LETTERS

You should always include a cover letter when sending your resume. It is just as important as your resume and should assist you in getting the interview. Your cover letter should be intriguing and compel the hiring manager to read your resume. The cover letter gives insight into your personality, fills them in on qualities about you that you can't cover in a resume and entices them to review your resume. The objective is to attract the reader's attention and demonstrate that you are well qualified for the position.

Identify the position you are responding to in the beginning of your letter either with a RE: field in the heading of the letter or by putting the position title in your opening sentence. Also, you will want to state your confidence that the skill set you possess and your career successes will ensure your impact on the company. State the message with specific emphasis on the skills you have that matches the company's stated needs.

Choose the format you believe will be the most powerful presentation of the information that you wish to include. If the position description is extensive, you should include the most compelling parts of your background. This letter should be one page and it must enable the reader to quickly identify you as a strong match for the position and encourage the reader to review your resume.

### Letter format

This version often has an introductory paragraph then a second paragraph section, often with bullets. It emphasizes your most relevant accomplishments mirroring the position description and ending with the concluding paragraph. Based on the position description, company research and the strength of your successes in each area listed, decide which of the company requirements and your successes you want to include in the cover letter. Typically the top three to five will suffice. The summation should express confidence in your ability to excel in the position and request a meeting ["you look forward to"]. It should discuss, in greater detail, the talent and experience you would bring to the company and your impact on their continued successes. If appropriate, you may indicate you will be calling the person as a follow-up to the letter. Like the resume, you should customize your cover letter to sell yourself and your best qualities.

- The first paragraph of your letter should state the position you're interested in and why you're the perfect match for it. You can make connections to the specialty, the job itself, or even the company's personality. Use the proactive voice- I can make a contribution or I am looking forward to contributing my talents.
- The second and third paragraphs should summarize your qualifications, both quantifiable and personal. List specifics, using numbers, percentages and quantifiable accomplishments.
- The last paragraph summarizes your letter and indicates that you plan to follow up.

### 5 Ways to open your cover letters with impact

1. Lead with one of your most impressive and relevant successes. "Under my leadership as Director of Annuity Operations at ABC Corporation, there was a there was an 80% improvement in productivity and a 45% decrease in operational costs. I'd like to speak with you about how I can deliver this level of results for your company."
2. Drop the name of the person who referred you. "At the suggestion of Mr. Jones, I am contacting you to express my interest in the open position of Product Manager at your company."
3. Refer to a prior conversation with the hiring manager. "Thanks for taking my call last Thursday and discussing the Billing Supervisor position you have available. I am very interested."
4. Quote your contact directly. If your contact has been interviewed, quote them and show how your philosophy meshes with theirs. "In your recent interview you said, 'Companies succeed by hiring the right people—people who want to make a difference, not just do a job.' When I read this I knew that ABC Corporation was a great fit for my energy and passion as well as my skills as a Sales Director."
5. Quote a recent industry statistic or relevant article. This shows that you've done your homework and are in tune with the latest developments at your target company. "I was interested to read in Smart Money that ABC Corporation plans to expand its financial services division neighboring cities of X and Y. With seven years of experience launching campaigns in new territories, I can help make this important venture successful for you."

### Cover letter tips

- Use high quality stationary and envelopes matching your resume
- Use the same font as your resume
- Prepare and customize a new letter for each position you are applying for
- Make the employer want to read further and invite you for an interview by keeping it succinct
- When possible, address your letter to a specific person
- Don't repeat what's on your resume, enhance and elaborate your selling points
- Make a strong opening but don't be too creative
- Include one sentence about the company that helps establish your familiarity with the goals of the facility and position
- Focus on what you can do, not what you want to do
- Avoid jargons and acronyms as well as complex sentences
- Spark the curiosity of the reader as to how you can meet/exceed their needs
- Be accurate and honest
- Use a positive tone to convey self-confidence, enthusiasm and professionalism
- Three paragraphs and one page is ideal.
- End on a strong note by closing your cover letter with an action that will be taken in the near future
- Don't forget to sign your letter with a legible signature
- Proofread carefully

**Following up**

Follow up within one to two weeks of sending a resume and cover letter and ask for an interview. This is best accomplished by a phone call. Nothing can happen if you don't get together face to face- your most important objective is to secure the interview. Once you get that interview, remember that no matter what, **you want to get the job offer**. No questions about salary, vacation, benefits or bonuses until after you have interviewed and they extend you an offer.

**Dealing with rejection**

If you have been turned down once at a company, don't give up. You will likely find a better fit with another position. Sometimes it is an advantage if you have cultivated contacts during your past interviewing experiences. Look at things in a positive light, as most hiring managers would say it is not personal. Be sure to send a thank-you note after being rejected. You will end things on a good note and that could come into good use in the future. Learn from your mistakes and prepare yourself better for the next opportunity. If you feel comfortable enough, you can always ask for feedback to get some useful information.

**Summary**

You can have a flawless resume, skillfully crafted cover letter and look like the perfect candidate, but you also need the right attitude. Be prepared and know your resume inside out: dates, facts, figures, strengths, weaknesses, and expertise. Most of all, know how they apply to the job you want and how to best communicate that with your interviewer!

## INTERVIEW PREPARATION

### Marketing yourself

Speaking about your experience and achievements are part of the expected dialogue during a meeting with a prospective employer, but in today's competitive job market you need to use every interaction as an opportunity to set yourself apart as the total package the employer needs. The way you speak, dress, and act all affect the interviewer's perception of you. The better you are able to communicate your personality with professionalism and skill, the better the chances are of your getting an offer. Job interviews are business events where your talents are evaluated.

- When selling yourself in an interview, think of your branding statement and reiterate it to the interviewer when answering their questions. Through branding, companies demonstrate how their product excels over the competition. Your products are your skills, experiences and education. To get the job, you must present yourself in the best light and tailor your strengths to the needs of the prospective employer.
- To effectively market yourself you must know your target audience. Job seekers who demonstrate specific knowledge of the targeted company and position in their resumes, cover letters, and interviews leave a much more memorable impression.
- The next step in marketing is to create an effective advertising campaign for yourself. Consider how your skills, experience and education deliver better results to your target audience than your competition, and clearly express these topics in your cover letter and resume. With mass volumes of resumes sent daily, you have only a brief moment to capture your target audience's attention. As a result, you must deliver a clear concise message that leaves a memorable impression. Identify the needs of the company, and show how your experience will bring value and improvement to them.

### Research

Learn as much as possible about the culture of the company (such as casual vs. formal, technical vs. administrative) then tailor your interview style/presentation accordingly. Having the ability to contact anyone you know "inside" can be an effective way to uncover the true essence of the company. Use the internet to thoroughly research the company's specialty/niche. For example if you are interviewing at an insurance company, go online to learn about that company's specialty: For instance, does the company specialize in life insurance only, or have they extended their line of business to include long term care insurance, and disability coverage. Find current articles online about trends and advancements in the company's specialty. Locate background information of the people you are interviewing with. It can be helpful to learn your interviewer's previous positions in the company, any articles they published in their specialty, presentations they have given, relevant contributions they made to the company and their specialty. Having uncovered background information about each interviewer will help you craft questions relevant to their area of expertise. Preparing meaningful questions will show you have taken the time to research and fully learn about the company. For specific resources on researching, click [here](#).

### Know Thyself

- Know your highlighted talents inside out  
Know your skills and qualifications and be able to discuss how specific attributes are closely aligned with the position for which you are interviewing. Know all your accomplishments inside and out, including those not listed on your resume, and be prepared to describe them with impact as the opportunity arises during the interview.
- Summarize your resume  
Re-read your resume prior to the interview, realizing that it acts as the basis for many interview questions. Make sure that the major content of your resume and cover letter is committed to memory, so you can effectively elaborate on each topic listed.
- Know your strengths and weaknesses  
For each strength or weakness, provide examples of times when a strength helped you do your job, and a weakness hindered you from doing your job. If prepared, you will be able to answer immediately, in an open and honest way. Prepare for questions you expect to be asked during the interview and prepare a list of questions you would like to ask the interviewer. For a more detailed explanation of the types of interview questions to ask and how to effectively answer refer to the Answering Questions and Asking Questions sections of this resource guide.
- Practice, Practice, Practice  
The benefits of being as prepared as possible can not be overstated. A practice interview is helpful to all, especially if you haven't interviewed in a long time. The best way to develop strong interviewing skills is through practice. Role play a mock interview with a family member or colleague, with them being the interviewer and you acting as the interviewee. Role play various questions and scenarios that an interviewer might present to you. Consider viewing videos of mock interviews, which can be found in the career resource section of most local libraries.

### Important information to uncover before the interview

- Job description
- Directions
- Parking information
- Number of interviewers, their names and titles
- Bios
- Length of time you'll be there
- How much time you will have with the interviewer
- Who/where to report upon arrival
- Any necessary documentation needed to bring
- Day & time

### **Prepare your interview attire**

The majority of companies across all industries have similar expectations when it comes to interview attire. Candidates should never underestimate the importance of appearance at their interview. The standard protocol is professional dress. High-quality, conservative attire works well.

When the employer interviews you, they are seeing you as a potential co-worker and colleague and evaluating the impression you could make internally and externally. A good measure is to make sure you are more dressed up than your interviewer, but don't go over the top. Make sure clothing is clean, pressed, and fits correctly. When your outfit looks finished and put together, it will communicate how much you have prepared and convey the message that you pay attention to small, yet important, details.

#### Men's interview attire

Suit (solid color navy, black or gray)

Long sleeve shirt

Tie, belt, polished shoes with coordinated socks

Neat, professional hairstyle with little or no jewelry, wear a watch

Neat trimmed nails, minimal aftershave or cologne

#### Women's interview attire

Suit (navy, black, dark gray, other conservative colors appropriate for the season)

If choosing a skirt, the skirt should be proper and long enough so you can sit down comfortably

Coordinated, modest blouse

Conservative, polished shoes with neutral pantyhose

Professional hairstyle with limited jewelry- no dangling earrings or large, flashy items, wear a watch

Light makeup (no heavy mascara or eye shadow. Neutral lipstick is fine.)

Neatly manicured nails and little or no perfume

## ACING THE INTERVIEW

### Interview checklist- What to bring

- A copy of your resume for each person that you will be interviewing with, as well as a few additional copies
- Portfolio and pen
- Your written questions
- Directions and names of interviewers
- List of carefully chosen and impressive references who have been informed ahead of time as to what position you are interviewing for and what important qualities you'd like them to stress
- Letters of recommendation to reinforce your positive qualities and distinguish you from the competition if you have them
- If possible, bring powerful samples of your work to back-up your resume
- Bring phone number of company in case of a delayed arrival

### Tips for the interview day

- On the day of the interview, reread your resume and cover letter
- Take a few moments to check your appearance before entering the interview location
- When entering the office, keep it simple without a lot of bags and luggage
- Have a breath mint, no gum
- Arrive 10-15 minutes early and kindly check in with the receptionist. Go out of your way to be polite to everyone you encounter, smile often
- Turn off your cell phone before entering the building
- Greet the interviewer in a friendly, but professional manner.
- Introduce yourself with confidence
- Use a firm handshake, direct eye contact and a friendly smile
- Remain standing until you are offered a seat
- Be mindful of your non-verbal communication skills and your posture
- Listen attentively and concentrate. Reply precisely to each question that is asked, and never interrupt the interviewer
- Retain the interviewer's attention by varying the tone of your voice and the tempo of your speech and show enthusiasm for the position
- Always speak positively about past employers and managers, even if you weren't treated properly
- Communicate clearly and effectively by always using correct grammar and pronunciation, no jargon or slang
- Keep issues work-related, not personal
- Don't ask about salary, benefits, or vacation time in the interview
- When walking through the office, notice the presence/absence of pictures on desks and other details to gather if the culture is in line with your values
- Practice your answers so that you don't seem rehearsed- you want to paraphrase what you've prepared so that you come across genuine and not canned or impersonal
- Go beyond the job description- showcase examples of your skills and how they can really contribute to the position, not only in the day-to-day job responsibilities, but in the long-term
- Give solid reasons to explain why you left previous jobs
- Remember to ask for the job, at a minimum, what you can do to move the interview process forward
- Always extend a thank you, both at the close of the interview and in your follow-up effort

### Body Language

Body Language is of critical importance. Positive, upright and open body language shows self-confidence and interest. Most of the time we are unaware of our gestures and body movements, but these unconscious forms of expression have a language all their own. Nonverbal communication sets the stage for the interview- from the time you are introduced to the final handshake.

#### How to present yourself

- **The handshake**  
Never give a handshake while seated. When you meet a prospective employer stand up, make eye contact, and offer a firm, but not overpowering, handshake with one or two pumps from the elbow to the hand. The proper handshake should be firm, dry and confident with strong eye contact.
- **Eye contact**  
Making good eye contact is essential, especially as you say hello and smile to greet your interviewer. During the entire interview maintain a moderate amount of eye contact with the interviewer, without staring. If there are multiple interviewers be sure to address each person briefly with your gaze, and then return your focus to the person who asked you the question. Your eyes can also be a window to observing little facts about the interviewer. Look around to notice company literature, bulletin boards, personal mementos, photos, etc. in the interviewer's office. Use these observations to make conversation and break the ice.
- **The greeting**  
While smiling and making eye contact, speak aloud the name of the person you are introduced to. Follow their name up with a "Nice to meet you". Saying the name of the person you are meeting establishes a connection to that person, shows that you are paying attention, and also helps you to remember their name. When entering the room, you want to appear confident.

- After the greeting  
Remain standing, until you are offered a seat. Once seated, sit up straight, leaning slightly forward in your chair. Show your interest in the conversation, by varying your expression throughout the interview. Smile, nod, make positive gestures and show excitement about the opportunity.
- During the interview  
Smile, maintain casual eye contact, lean forward, nod your head, sit erect but not rigid, and show enthusiasm and interest in the position and company.

#### Read the interviewer

By paying close attention to nonverbal communication signs, we can help change the direction of the conversation and leave a lasting positive first impression. The body language applies to the interviewer as well as the interviewee. By recognizing any of the negative gestures, one can then switch gears by asking a question or bringing up a new subject. During an interview decode the following gestures:

- Crossed arms – defensive or reserved.
- Crossed arms and legs – Very reserved and suspicious.
- Open arms and hands – open and receptive.
- Standing with hands inside of pockets – person is not sure or feels suspicious.
- Standing with hands on hips- Receptive and helpful.
- Sitting and shaking one of the legs – feels nervous and uncomfortable.
- Eyes looking downward & face turned away – person is not interested in what you are saying.
- Sitting with palm of hand holding chin – person is evaluating the information being presented to him, and being critical.
- Leaning back in chair with both hands clasped behind head – analytical mood, can also be a gesture of superiority.
- Rubbing or touching one's nose when answering a question – person is not telling the complete truth.
- Maintains good eye contact and smiles genuinely - definitely receptive.
- Rubbing the back of one's head or neck – disinterested.
- Person changes position and sits with feet and body pointing toward door – person wants to end the conversation and leave.

#### Taking cues from the interviewer

- How is the interviewer behaving? If they are smiling, asking questions, and taking notes, these are all signs of interest. If they are checking their watch, not taking any notes, or shuffling papers, you probably have lost their interest.
- Was there a free flowing discussion? The interview should be a natural exchange of information. Things are not going smoothly if the interviewer has to keep referring to a list of questions, or if the candidate answers each question with a five minute monologue. The interview should move forward as a natural conversation.
- The interviewer may use positive verbal cues to encourage you to elaborate with phrases such as, "Yes, go on" or "Interesting, I'd like to hear more" both of which are clues that the conversation is going well.
- The interviewer may interrupt you. If this happens, it is probably time to change direction. To be sure that your answers are covering what the interviewer is looking for, ask clarifiers like "Am I answering your question?" or "would you like me to give you another example?" Questions like these give the interviewer some input on how the interview progresses.
- It is a good sign if the interviewer talks about time frame or availability for making a decision. Hearing the interviewer say "How soon would you be available?" or "Do you have any other firm offers?" signals interest in a potential employee.
- If you met with other people, it is a positive sign. Sometimes, an interested employer may even introduce you to others, right as the interview comes to a close.
- Are you a match? If an employer is interested, they may spend time talking about your role in the company, and they will likely invite you to a second interview.

#### **Calming your nerves**

Having some butterflies is normal and will energize you to perform at your best. But too much anxiety can keep you from your "A" game. To calm your nerves while waiting to be interviewed, put away your resume. Reviewing it last minute will only enhance anxiety.

- While waiting, try eating a breath-freshening mint, which is so small it can be easily swallowed before you enter the office.
- Avoid drinking a lot of coffee or soda before an interview, since caffeine acts as a stimulant increasing feelings of anxiety. Instead, drink water before you interview which will clear your throat and hydrate your body.
- Try deep breathing exercises while driving to the interview, once you arrive, and again before entering the office. Taking a few controlled focused deep breaths will help clear your mind, relax your muscles, and uplift your spirit.
- Plan to arrive ten minutes before the interview is scheduled to start. Take this time before the interview to relax and calm your mind.
- In the interview, sit up straight, don't cross your arms or legs, speak slowly and breathe slowly and deeply. Relax your body and smile appropriately, if you act relaxed, your body most likely will take cues and become that way.
- Don't think about how well you are or are not doing during the interview, instead be in the moment and focus solely on answering the question that you are being asked. Thinking what you should have said on a previous question will only distract you and erode your confidence. Similarly, don't think ahead or try to anticipate the next question.

## **Connecting with different types of interviewers**

### Tactics to effectively communicate with different types of interviewers

- **Unprepared interviewer**  
Many job seekers find themselves being interviewed by stressed out interviewers who haven't found the time to prepare for the interview. If you find yourself in this scenario, it is essential to guide the conversation in a productive direction. Try using the following statement, "Would it be helpful if I give you some information about myself, and share with you what I know about the position?" What follows is a great opportunity to steer the interview by going through the job description, and highlighting the ways that your experience and accomplishments align closely to the position.
- **Overly talkative interviewer**  
Sometimes an inexperienced interviewer will ramble endlessly, jump from topic to topic, or not ask any questions. Without any structure to the interview, some candidates might make the mistake of remaining passive, and then leave without having explained why he or she is a perfect fit for the position. You must be assertive, and whenever the talkative interviewer stops to take a breath, jump in and share one of your work related accomplishments.
- **Distracted interviewer**  
Phone calls, emails, instant messages, and visitors are all a common part of our workday, but some interviewers let these distractions filter into the interview. In dealing with the interviewer who keeps checking his phone messages, or has co-workers who keep knocking on his door, it is best not to show your annoyance. Instead use assertive phrases such as, "If this is a bad time for you, we could reschedule." or "If you need to take a few moments now, I'd be glad to go back into the reception area for a bit". When delicately brought to their attention, most interviewers will try harder to minimize the interruptions during the remainder of the interview.

## ANSWERING QUESTIONS

### 5 things about you that an interviewer wants to know

1. Do you have the qualifications, skills, abilities, expertise, and experience to do the job? This is why detailed preparation of your accomplishments is so important. You do not want to miss any opportunity to highlight your qualifications.
2. Do you have the experience and skill set? When considering your credentials, interviewers may ask you about traits like leadership, team involvement, work ethic, motivation, performance standards, and communication skills.
3. Are you a match for their culture and environment? Positive attitude, dedication, reliability and integrity are critical factors when evaluating your cultural fit. If you do not fit the culture, no matter how talented and hard working you are, you will not be successful in the company.
4. Do you fall into their salary range? An employer will consider your salary requirements and realistically assess if they align with your qualifications and the requirements for the position. It is important not to “overprice” yourself, which in turn could eliminate you from consideration. Conversely, “underpricing” yourself, leaving money on the table, may leave you feeling discontent.
5. Why should they hire you? The employer wants to feel confident you have set yourself apart and can offer more to the position and to the company than other candidates. They are looking to see if you possess something extra, whether it is a unique attribute, or a sought after skill, that sets you apart from the other candidates.

### Traditional questions: samples

1. So, tell me a little bit about yourself.  
Candidates sometimes fear this question because they might be unsure about the context for their response, as this is your moment to show who you are as a professional. Is the interviewer asking about your personal interests and values or does the interviewer want to hear solely about one’s work history and achievements? A well-crafted answer will touch upon all of these topics. A candidate might open his response with an interesting personal fact, as a bit of an “ice breaker” as a way to set a more personal tone. That personal intro should lead into career highlights- a synopsis of career achievements and skills that you possess that are most critical for the position. Tell them something they can’t see from the resume that sets you apart from all the others. The response should be 60-90 seconds long, and should address the big view of your career highlights – not the tiny details. Sell yourself, be honest, and be brief. End your answer by inquiring about the goals and objectives of the position.
2. What is your greatest accomplishment?  
When considering your answer choose an accomplishment that was important to you and benefited the success of the company you worked for. The accomplishment you present is not nearly as significant to the employer as is what your answer indicates about you as a prospective employee. The following parts should structure your response: First, describe the accomplishment. Second, give concrete examples of your action plan, how you carried this out, and how you achieved the desired result. Third, explain the experience, skills required, and what was learned, gained from the experience. Fourth, discuss how this experience has best prepared you for the position. Finally, end with a question such as “Would you like me to give you more details about this accomplishment?”
3. What are five adjectives or short phrases that best describe you?  
The purpose of this question is to measure your level of self awareness. Beforehand, develop a list of 10-12 qualities that best capture who you are. Identify the 6 that most closely relate to the position, and be prepared to discuss these. For example, are you a hard worker, good communicator, team leader, change agent, etc.
4. What is your greatest weakness?  
It is sometimes advised to answer this question by discussing a weakness that is actually a positive trait, or turning a weakness into strengths such as “I am a perfectionist, and I spend countless hours analyzing my work to make sure it is usually of the highest quality.” Interviewers rarely see this as genuine, and it is usually ineffective. When asking this question, the interviewer is not focused on what your weakness is. What matters most is how you handle this question and what your answer says about you. When considering your answer, structure your response with the following parts. First, confidently showcase your strengths for the position. Second, highlight an area that you are just developing in, or want to improve upon (an example could be a new software, an advanced reporting technique, a new financial tool). Third, describe what you are doing to overcome this weakness. Fourth, explain how this new skill, or action, will improve your value and increase your contribution to the company. Finally, end with a question such as, “Did I answer your question completely, or do you need me to elaborate on this?”
5. What is the most significant challenge you have faced in the past year?  
A well-structured answer to this question will first provide a clear understanding of the situation you faced. Then you should tell about three or four actions that you took to address the challenge. Finally, you should indicate the outcome, of the actions taken. The challenge that you choose to speak about should have a positive outcome. Indicate what you learned from the experience.
6. What would you like to be doing five years from now?  
Knowing exactly what you will do in the future is difficult, but have an idea about what direction you want to develop toward and a relevant time table for advancement. In your own way, explain that you want to be the most knowledgeable, most effective person in the given position. Then explain that through continued learning in your position, you will feel fully prepared to take on any greater challenges.
7. Why do you want this position?  
If you are prepared, this question will work in your favor. Use the research you’ve done about the company, to help distinguish you as the best candidate for the position. Explain your desire to be part of a company that provides a valued service, educates a certain part of the population, or advanced technology in their given field. Find something specific about the company and their mission that speaks to you so you can expand upon it in your answer and make it part of your goal.
8. What motivates and inspires you?  
Think about what part of your previous jobs gave you the greatest sense of accomplishment. Use this knowledge to

give at least two examples of what motivates you. These examples should be as relevant to the position as possible. Employers are aware that happy, motivated employees are most likely to be positive, long term contributors. Your answer to this question helps the employer determine if they can realistically provide an environment that will motivate you.

9. What do you like to do outside of work in your spare time? What are your outside interests/hobbies?  
This question uncovers a candidate's quality of work/life balance and reveals character traits that may be highlighted in how one's time is spent outside of work. Keep answers brief and somewhat connected to your professional focus.
10. What have you learned recently?  
Companies strive to hire individuals who are eager to learn. Your answer should address any knowledge, or skill that you have gained in the past few years which is relevant to the position. Present an outline of what you learned and explain how it would enhance your success in the position.
11. How do you react when you are in stressful situations?  
Think about how you react in the workplace under trying circumstances. Explain to the interviewer in a precise, honest and positive manner, how you handle stressful events. Keep in mind that if stress is a repeated topic, it may be a red flag toward an atypical stress level in the position – and something to consider before accepting a position.
12. How much of your time are you willing to commit to the company?  
Putting in extra hours is expected when working on a special project, or meeting a deadline. However, some companies encourage long hours on a continual basis. If a healthy work/life balance is a considerable factor in choosing a position, you must be prepared to address how many hours you are willing to work on a regular basis. Most companies are looking for individuals who are willing to allow for some flexibility in regard to hours, and are able to give a little extra time during a critical time.
13. What common denominators are you looking for in a prospective employer?  
Think about what values are most important to you. Be prepared to explain these, and how they are a match to the values of the company.
14. Have you ever had to discipline an employee?  
If so how did you approach the situation? This is an expected question if you are interviewing for any type of a management/supervisory position. Explain how you used a proactive problem solving approach, with listening skills and mentoring skills to guide the employee. Share the outcome of the disciplinary action. Did the employee's performance improve? If not, explain how you followed the standardized policies and what the end result was.
15. Are you more suited to be a leader or a contributing team member?  
Reviewing the job description helps to determine how much leadership is involved in the position. Embrace your strengths, and be truthful in your answer. Remember it is okay to be a leader but never embellish the depth of your experience.
16. Describe values that are most important to you.  
Employers ask this to learn if a candidate's personal principles are a similar match to the company's culture. Core values include traits such as integrity, honesty, open communication, family as a priority, company profitability, and many others. Look at a company's mission statement (often found on the company's website or literature) which describes their core values.

### **Challenging questions**

Typically, difficult questions are those that could potentially bring up a subject or event that might present you in a less than favorable way. Practice your answers to these questions and make sure that you have created an honest answer with the best possible, positive spin. Write down any questions that you are concerned about so they can be adequately addressed. If you are concerned about the best way to handle a question or a particular line of questioning, make sure to prepare thoroughly. Listen carefully to the question and wait until the interviewer is finished and ask for clarification if needed. Look relaxed and actively listen. The interviewer may give you some clues, as to what is the right or wrong answer.

1. Tell me about the worst manager you've ever had. Again, be tactful, and don't give into the temptation to air any past grievances. Simply say that while none of your past managers were terrible, there were some that you connected easier with, and some who taught you more than others did.
2. Why did you leave your last position? Present the situation in a positive way. An interview is never the place to complain about your former company or manager. Use discretion and give a professional explanation of the circumstances. Some areas of focus for your answer might include: advancement opportunities were limited, a need for more challenging assignments, looking for an company that provides greater support for its employees (training opportunities), desire for more of a leadership role.
3. Why were you laid off? Remember to stay positive. Do not discuss interpersonal conflicts, and limit your talk to economic conditions. Be brief, unless you are asked to explain further.
4. What are your salary expectations? It is okay to share what you are presently earning, adding that salary is one of many factors you are considering. Emphasize that opportunity and responsibility are your major driving forces toward a change. If pressed for a more detailed response, you can also say, "I am currently earning \$\_ and I am sure that if I am the right candidate, you would make a fair and reasonable offer."
5. Can you share an example of a time when your work was criticized? Explain the situation, emphasizing how you addressed the criticism, modified your work, and now it is no longer an issue.
6. Why haven't you found a position before now? Explain that you are more interested in finding the right opportunity, as opposed to finding any job. Geographical location and current economic conditions may also have an impact.
7. If you have ever been fired or terminated from a position, why did this occur? Answer the interviewer in a straightforward way. You should be honest, concise, and professional in your answer. Do not vent your grievances or portray yourself as a victim. Be positive about it in all aspects, especially body language, with strong eye contact. Give a brief but thorough answer that explains the circumstances in which you left the position. Address any measures you took to improve your work performance, if appropriate.

8. What part of your last job did you like least? Prepare for this question beforehand by thinking about the things you are no longer willing to do, parts of your job that you have outgrown, or no longer feel challenged by. Then, present these aspects in a positive way, such as stating how you have confidently mastered all there is to learn in a specific area, and now are ready to experience a new challenge.
9. What would your former employer say about you? Contact your former managers and ask for their input if necessary. Some examples of traits that might be mentioned include, team player, enthusiastic, pro-active, and dependable.
10. Unique/different questions- What is your most prized possession? If you could have dinner with 3 famous people, dead or alive, who would you pick? If you were a tree, what kind would you be? What was the best purchase you ever made? There isn't necessarily a right or wrong answer to this type of question. The point of asking them is to see if you can come up with an answer when put on the spot. Don't think about your answer too much, and trust your instinct. Never be too serious, feel free to laugh and always keep your answers light and somewhat brief.

#### **Inappropriate/illegal questions**

1. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 makes it illegal for an employer to discriminate against any individual on the basis of that individual's race, color, religion, sex or national origin. The Civil Rights Act also created the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, the federal agency given responsibility for enforcement of the Act.
  - It is okay to ask if you are a United States Citizen but not okay to ask if your citizenship is of a national origin.
  - It is discriminatory to ask how one learned to read, write, or speak a language, but it is acceptable to ask the language one speaks fluently, and if one speaks a foreign language.
2. The Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978 prohibits discrimination "because of or on the basis of pregnancy, childbirth, or related medical conditions shall be treated the same for all employment related purposes, including receipt of benefits under fringe benefit programs, as other persons not so affected but similar in their ability or inability to work, and nothing...shall be interpreted to permit otherwise."
  - Everyone should be suspicious if they are asked questions regarding relationships, marriage, children, pregnancy, childcare, marital status or childcare accommodations.
3. Generally an interviewer should not ask your age during an interview. The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 makes it illegal to discriminate on the basis of age against anyone over the age of 40. Some states and local governments also have laws that enforce age discrimination.
  - With rare exceptions, the only age appropriate question they should ask is if you are over the age of 18.
4. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1992 protects qualified individuals with a disability against discrimination in hiring, advancement, discharge, compensation, training or other terms and conditions of employment. It requires that reasonable accommodations be made to the known physical or mental limitations of qualified individuals with a disability, unless to do so would impose an undue hardship on the employer.
  - As a general rule you should not be asked about your use of lawful medication and/or prescription drugs.

#### Sample questions that may be asked

- How do you intend to get to work?
- Do you have the legal right to remain permanently in the U.S.?
- Are you willing to relocate?
- Do you have any family, business or social obligations that would prevent you from working consistently or overtime or prevent you from traveling?
- Can you or are you willing to lift "X" number of pounds?
- Are there any other names under which your employment may be verified?
- What foreign language do you speak, read or write?

#### Sample questions that may not be asked

- What is the nationality of your parents or spouse?
- How did you learn to speak a foreign language?
- What color is your complexion or skin?
- What religious holidays do you observe?
- What parish do you belong to?
- Did you ever have any other name than the one you are using now?
- Of what clubs have you been a member?
- Do you plan to marry?
- Do you plan to have children?
- Who will take care of your children?

#### What to do if you are asked an illegal question

Rarely are interviewers pre-meditated in asking discriminating questions. Many hiring managers are not experienced interviewers or often don't know what questions are out of bounds. Often they realize their question was not proper immediately and retract the question. The objective is to handle the question and its response with professionalism. You have three choices:

- Answer the question. If you don't have any concerns answer the question without any elaboration. Your goal should be to answer quickly and move on.
- Don't answer the question directly. Attempt to find the root of the question and answer in a way that gives the interviewer what they want to know.

- Object to answering the question. You may question the relevance and the legality of the question to the position you are interviewing for. This response should be used sparingly when the question is clearly off limits. By not answering you are likely going to diminish your chances of being a finalist for the job.

### **Salary questions**

In most situations, it is not appropriate to discuss salary, vacations, retirement, etc. The interview is a process and you need to learn more about the employer and the position, not the salary and benefit package.

- If you are asked your salary requirements, your response should be "I currently earn \$\_ and am sure if you believe I am the best candidate you will make a reasonable and fair offer" or "I am sure that if you feel I am the right candidate, you would make me a reasonable offer."
- Know your salary requirements before you start the interview process.
- Never be the first to initiate a discussion about salary/benefits, as it could identify you as a person solely motivated by money.
- Don't tell them your minimum salary requirements.
- If you do provide a salary number, you will be locked in to that number, if you provide a salary range the only number they will remember is the lowest number in your range.
- Emphasize that opportunity and responsibility are your major driving forces towards a change.
- If the employer asks about your current compensation, be both specific and honest.
- The stronger you interview, the higher your value to the hiring manager correlates to a strong offer.

## ASKING QUESTIONS

As part of the interview, you should ask relevant questions to enhance your knowledge and understanding of the company, the role of the position and the overall opportunity. The more you learn, the better prepared you will be to excel in the next meeting. Interviewers can be as impressed with your choice of questions as your experience and skill set. Develop your list of questions and be prepared when the interviewer asks for your questions. If you are extended an offer, you will be in a stronger position to negotiate compensation and make the final decision to accept or decline.

### Tips for asking impressive questions

- Develop a list of insightful, well thought out questions to demonstrate your interest and enhance your understanding of the company and the role this position will play in driving success. Ask, listen and learn.
- Introduce points that you would like to discuss in order to highlight your leadership value and successfully solve a current or future challenge.
- When developing your own list of questions it might be helpful to structure your questions around topics such as the company, the department, the positions history, the responsibilities of the position, the expectations (how & when you will be evaluated), the next step in the hiring process.
- Remember it is important to ask relevant questions during the course of the entire interview. When an employer is about to complete the interview and asks if there are any questions, he or she is generally expecting to close the interview within a few minutes. So, a few quality questions would be most appropriate.
- Limit your use of why or what questions that may put the interviewer in a position of defending situations or decisions.
- Don't ask about salary, vacation, benefits, or anything that makes you seem more interested in the compensation than the company.

### List of typical questions

The questions you ask indicate your level of knowledge and experience. Twenty prepared questions should be a good start. You will most likely not have an opportunity to ask all of them, at the first meeting, but, by preparing a diverse list of questions, you will be able to follow whatever direction the conversation takes. You will want to ask company and position-specific questions, as well as some general ones. Sometimes repeat what you believe to be the gist of the answer in an intelligent way after the interviewer is done. This will help them to see that you understand and are processing it rather than just mechanically asking a list of questions. This will also help you to remember what is important and get any clarifications if necessary.

#### Impressive questions to ask

- What are the short and long term goals for this position/department?
- Describe the most successful person and the least successful person in this position.
- What are the key challenges of the position?
- What are the first three challenges this person should be ready to tackle?
- Describe your corporate culture.
- What impact do you see this role having over the next three to five years?
- What are your criteria for success in this role?
- What has been the greatest success of the company/department over the past year?
- With whom will I be interacting most frequently and what are their responsibilities and the nature of our interaction?
- What is the company structure and how does this department fit in?
- What outside influences affect the company's growth?
- What do you consider to be this company's most important assets?
- What would you add or subtract from the incumbent's performance?
- Describe the interaction between departments.
- What advancement opportunities exist within the company?
- What has been the company's growth over the last three to five years?
- What challenges have you experienced over the past year?
- How many people have been in this position in the last five years?
- How much flexibility do I have in the decision making process?
- Does the company provide training, or any other educational opportunities?
- After six months, or twelve months, how will you know if you've made the right hiring decision?
- What is your management style and how do you approach problem solving?
- Where do you see me contributing most effectively to your success?
- What do you enjoy most about working for this company?
- Is there any travel involved with this position, and if so what percentage and where would I travel to/from?
- Tell me about the intensity level of your working environment, and the frequency of deadline pressures?
- What software will be used most frequently in this position?
- What are the first changes/contributions you envision this person making?
- What can this person do to increase your success?
- May I have your business card?
- Do you have any reservations about my ability to be successful in this position?

#### Specific managerial-style questions

Employees who are genuinely happy on the job more frequently have positive working relationships with their respective managers. If mutual respect and open communication exists between an employee and their manager, the employee will most often thrive in their career. While interviewing, you can determine that you and your potential manager will be a good match by asking questions related to their managerial style and company practices. You can learn a lot by the way the potential manager answers the questions you present to them. If they welcome your questions and take the time to answer them completely, they may be the kind of manager who strives to improve their working relationships and encourage the growth and development of their employees.

- "How do you evaluate achievements in the workplace?" Every employee wants to be successful on the job, so you need to understand what your manager views as success. For example, will they measure your success by the amount that you reduce costs or by the percentage of satisfied clients? What happens once you meet their expectations? What is the standard career plan for an employee who achieves their objectives? Is promotion likely or is there another type of recognition or reward?
- "Can you explain what your ideal employee is like?" The purpose of this question is to determine what will be expected from you and to see if it is in line with the expectations you have. For example, is your potential manager's ideal employee someone who will help develop new, more effective procedures? If so, be ready to take charge and use your creativity. Does their ideal employee work extra hours regularly and volunteer for special projects often? If so, be ready to do the same. Having similar working styles with your manager will foster increased job satisfaction.
- "How do you go about solving problems?" Are they the type of manager who prefers to tackle issues on their own or do they support group input into resolving situations that arise?" Maybe they prefer to have the staff handle problems on their own. Knowing a potential manager's problem solving approach helps reveal his management style.
- "Can you tell me about the people I'd be interfacing with? How long have you worked with them?" Most employees want to work with a manager that really knows and understands their staff. Is the potential manager aware of and proud of their staff's accomplishments? Do they sound energetic and pleased when they speak about their staff or is there a tone of aggravation and dissatisfaction? Note how long they have worked with the employees. Excessive turnover can signal a turbulent work environment.
- "How did you come to work at the company, and do you enjoy working here?" Asking this type of question can provide insight into a manager's background, early career and may reveal what their professional goals and aspirations are. A manager who seems genuinely happy and committed to the company and its mission will likely have employees who generally feel the same way.

## CLOSING THE INTERVIEW

It is important that you leave the interview expressing enthusiasm about the position as well as uncovering any doubts the interviewer has about you as a viable candidate for the position. Below is an example of how to close an interview.

### Sample talking points

- "I'm very interested in the position. Now that we have met, what reservations or questions do you have about my qualifications or ability to do the job?" After asking the question, it is necessary to be patient and wait for a response. The interviewer's response may be all that stands between you and the position that you desire.
- If the interviewer's response is "none," ASK FOR THE JOB. For example, "Great, what else do you need from me to move forward to the next step?" Remember the last impression is a lasting impression.
- If the interviewer states a reservation, respond with a description of actual work experience in your background that may not have been disclosed in the interview, or illustrate a similar work experience. Give a specific example and paint a verbal picture of that experience.
- If they offer you the position, and you want it, accept it on the spot. If you need some time to think it over, be courteous and tactful in asking for time. Set a definite date for giving a specific answer. Don't create the impression you are playing one company against another to drive up the bidding.
- Don't be discouraged if no definite offer or specific salary is discussed.
- Ask for a tour of the offices or facility.

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

Immediately after the interview, expand on your notes from the interview.

### Questions to help you debrief yourself

1. What topics were discussed?
2. What questions were asked?
3. What did you answer?
4. What did the interviewer say they were looking for in a candidate?
5. What are the key success factors for the position?
6. What are the expanded position description details?
7. What are the critical projects / goals / objectives?
8. What challenges are they experiencing?
9. Did you feel comfortable with the interviewer?
10. Could you work well with him/her?
11. What areas do you believe may be problematic?
12. Did you miss an opportunity? You may be able to rectify this in the follow-up letter.
13. What value do you bring to the company?
14. What strategic vision for their future is beginning to come into focus for you?
15. What do they need that you can provide?
16. If hired, what would your initial approach be/projects/changes?
17. Do I see myself working at this company?
18. What are my reservations/concerns?

## INTERVIEW FOLLOW-UP

### Follow up thank you letter

The importance of a thank you letter cannot be overstated. Candidates have dramatically increased their chances of going to the next step with a strong letter, and the inverse is also true. This is a real opportunity to separate yourself from other candidates. Understand that the employer wants to know why you can do the job, not why you would like to. The thank you letter is one of the most important but least used tools in the search process. A poorly constructed follow-up is as damaging as not sending a letter at all.

### Four components to a successful thank you letter

1. Thank him/her for their time
2. Express confidence in doing the job
3. Three detailed reasons why you can do the job, not why you like the job
4. Express confidence in pursuing the opportunity and looking forward to hearing from them soon

### Letter Tips

- The letter should be one page and sent within 24 hours. Your notes from the interview and debriefing are key to constructing a powerful letter. This is usually the first sample of your writing ability and style that the hiring manager will receive; it should be professional and impressive.
- Every person you spoke with should receive a separate letter and they should be different. Each letter should focus on the particular interests, concerns and perspective of the individual. If there was a particular word or phrase that was used in your conversation with this individual, here is an opportunity to reinforce that you are on the same page with the interviewer.
- You want to use this letter to reaffirm your ability to be successful in this position. Your enthusiasm should come through in the letter. Also, if you misspoke or missed an opportunity to highlight an achievement, that would be critical for success in the role, you will be able to include it here. Be creative, but maintain a professional approach.
- Address or reinforce any concerns the hiring manager mentioned about your ability to do the job by stating why you can do the job.

- Three well-crafted bullets or points, highlighting key successes in your career and that will ensure your success in the position. Do not just take them from your profile. You need to reflect in your letter the information you gained in speaking with the person and that you reviewed and considered what was discussed carefully.
- Like your cover letter and resume, proofread and make sure the company name and manager's name are spelled correctly.
- See our [Follow-Up Examples](#) for a sample letter.
- A hand-written letter in flawless penmanship can make a strong lasting impression
- Use simple, clean stationary.
- Translate your experience to fit their needs- link your skills to specific workplace problems you learned about during the interview.
- A hard copy letter sent via overnight courier makes a good impression and keeps you in the immediate consciousness of the hiring manager.

#### **Follow-up call**

Following up an interview with a phone call is a great way to show that you are interested and motivated enough to take the initiative and contact the potential employer. At the end of an interview, a job seeker can directly ask the hiring manager when and how often they should call or email to follow up. Knowing the interviewers timeline for making a hiring decision is another way to determine when to make your follow up call. If the allotted time has past without any response from the employer, call to reaffirm your interest and inquire about the status of the position.

#### **PROVIDING YOUR REFERENCES & BACKGROUND CHECKS**

When the hiring decision has been narrowed down to finalists, references are often the deciding factor. A reference is primarily a person to whom you have reported, has reported to you, or has worked closely with you. Sometimes on your behalf, references can be from outside the company such as (clients, vendors) who might offer additional perspective. As a rule, a reference should not be personal (friend, relative) because they do not offer insight into performance and characteristics on the job. Additionally, references should not come in the form of generic letters.

If you have been employed by the same company and reported to the same manager for a long time, obtaining references may be difficult. In these instances, obtaining a copy of your performance evaluation may be a suitable alternative.

The employer should inform you when they intent to start checking your references. Employers prefer to speak to references directly and ask their own questions. References can be a powerful tool in helping you get an offer, if they are prepared properly.

#### **Reference guidelines**

1. First, provide your reference with the company name, and the name and title of the individual who will be calling them. You could also draft an outline of your prior duties, accomplishments, reasons for departure and the points you would like them to emphasize when speaking to the employer.
2. Obtain the reference's phone number and time of day they prefer to be contacted.
3. Contact your references to make them aware of who will be contacting them and confirm they remain willing to speak on your behalf.
4. Provide your references with a copy of the job description for the position you are being considered so they can highlight relevant experience, characteristics and traits when providing examples.
5. Offer your references some guidance by telling them which of your skills and strengths you would like them to discuss. Highlight those that are essential to the position you are applying for.
6. Be sure that your reference understands why you left a previous position, and explain how they can positively convey any difficult circumstances you may have departed under.
7. Keep your references aware of your successes, as you move up the corporate ladder and achieve new goals.
8. Google search your name, chances are good that the hiring manager will. Be prepared to explain any questions that may arise from their web surfing.

#### **Background checks**

Typically, a background check uncovers criminal and court records. It includes driving records, vehicle registrations and also may include sex offender databases. You must give written consent for a potential employer to conduct a background check on you. If you agree to the check and inquire about the results, the employer must share them with you. You have the right to dispute the findings if you think they are incorrect.

## DIFFERENT TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

### **Behavioral interview**

The basic principal behind a behavioral interview is that it is a means to evaluate a candidate's past behavior as a way of predicting future performance on the job. In other words, it's not what you know, but rather what you did. In a behavioral interview, an employer would first develop a profile of desired behaviors (competencies) that should be exhibited by an employee in the proposed position. (ie. problem solving, planning, communication, interpersonal skills, motivation, teamwork, etc.) Then, the interviewer asks a series of open-ended questions designed to stimulate recollection of a situation that would lead to that desired behavior. In answering a behavioral interview question you would have to give real-life examples, detailing how you handled a situation. The interviewer would then ask some probing questions to verify that what you are saying actually happened.

#### 4 components to a behavioral-based question

1. Describe the **situation** in which you are involved.
2. Describe the **task** that you performed.
3. What was your **approach** to the problem?
4. What were the **results** of your actions?

#### How to prepare for a behavioral interview

Since the behavioral interview process is based on a candidate's desired behaviors, or competencies, you must first determine what competencies the employer is looking for. Reviewing the job description and researching the company can help you in identifying them.

#### Some important questions to consider in identifying competencies

- What are the necessary skills to do this job?
- What makes a successful candidate?
- What would make an unsuccessful candidate?
- Why have people left this position previously?
- What is the most difficult part of his job?

Next, analyze yourself to determine which of the desired competencies for the job you possess. Thoroughly analyze your skills, knowledge, and experience. Then, collect and maintain records of your achievements. These achievements are proof of your competencies. Finally, for each competency, select your best achievement for which you can document and display a particular competency.

#### Components of an effective behavioral-based question

- Focuses on past behavior
- Derives directly from competencies required to do the job
- Is open-ended
- Asks for specific examples
- Is asked one at a time
- Sets up probes or follow up questions, examples following:
  - How did you do it?
  - What did you say?
  - What were you thinking at the time?
  - How did you feel about it?
  - What was the outcome?

#### Sample behavioral questions

- Give a specific example of a time you sold someone on an idea or concept.
- Describe the best/worst team of which you have been a member.
- Tell about a time when you made a bad decision.
- Tell about a time when you were creative in solving a problem.
- Give an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.
- Give an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.
- Describe a situation in which you were able to have a positive influence on the actions of others.
- Tell about a situation when you had to be assertive in order to get a point across that was important to you.
- Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.
- How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?
- What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.
- Give an example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.
- Give an example of an important goal that you had set in the past and tell about your success reaching it.
- Tell about a time in your career where you had to overcome stress.
- Tell about a crisis in your life or job and how you responded or recovered from it.

### **Phone interview**

Phone interviews are often used by companies as a way of pre-qualifying a candidate for interest and expertise. Making a good impression on the phone is twice as hard as it is in person because you can't rely on visual clues. Remember that interviewers will easily hear if you are distracted in your voice. In addition to the tips below, the same interviewing techniques hold true with the phone interview as with the traditional face-to-face interview.

#### Phone interview tips

- Minimize distractions if possible. Isolate yourself from distractions and background noises. If the caller has reached you at an inconvenient time, reschedule the call for another time. Also disable the call waiting function of your phone if possible.
- Sit up straight. Even though the caller can't see you, your voice will project farther, and sound clearer if you are standing or sitting up straight. For best results, stand.
- Dress for success. If you dress professionally, you will act professional and therefore sound professional.
- Smile. It has been found that your voice will convey the warmth of your smile.
- Practice with someone beforehand if possible.
- Prepare your interview area with a pen and paper, as well as a copy of your resume. Write down the name of the person you are speaking with. Remembering the person's name and using it frequently is a powerful tool in establishing a personal connection.
- Mirror the speed and the volume of your voice with that of the person you are speaking with. It has been found that interviewers generally prefer people who speak at the same rate they do.
- Practice active listening. When you're on the phone your interviewer can't see you, so remember to indicate you're listening. Verbal cues such as, "I see" validate that you are listening and interested in what the person is saying.
- Speak directly into the phone and avoid using the speaker function.
- Beware of using yes/no answers. Remember the phone interview is often the employers prescreening tool. Elaborating on your answers and asking some relevant questions will convey your interest and distinguish you from other candidates.
- Taking notes during this initial phone call can help you prepare for later interview questions, as well as develop your own questions to ask and assist you in the creation of your follow-up letter.
- Use reference materials. Have your resume on hand so you can talk about your experience and accomplishments. Avoid reading from a rehearsed script, which can interrupt the flow of conversation.
- Have a list of questions ready and ask them sporadically throughout the interview.
- Ask for an on-site interview or at least find out what the next step in the hiring process would be.
- After the phone interview, follow up with a thank you that recaps your best selling points.

### **Group/panel interview**

Traditional interviews are often stressful, but the group interview, one in which you are being interviewed by more than one person, has the potential to be the most nerve-racking. Many people struggle to make a good impression when they are expected to handle the unique personalities, social styles, and interviewing approaches of multiple interviewers. With several sets of eyes focused on you, and rapid-fire questions directed your way, many feel that the group interview is the most intense.

#### Interviewing strategies

- Remember there are multiple agendas to consider during a group interview. Try to find out who will make up the panel of interviewers, and then get some background information on each person. Knowing the primary role in the company that each individual plays can allow you to anticipate what each person may want to know about you.
- When meeting with a group, placing the business card of each individual in accordance to where they are sitting may help you to keep their names and functions clear in your answers.
- Interviewers may come from different areas of the company, and your answers to interview questions should address how you as an employee would contribute to these areas.
- During the interview, be sure to make eye contact with all of the interviewers. When one person asks a question, make sure to make eye contact with that person, as well as everyone else on the panel to make them feel included.
- Be prepared with three qualities associated with the job description and be able to demonstrate, by retelling a past action or achievement, how you possess them.
- Once the interview begins try to read different personality types in the room. Don't discount the importance of the person who is quietly observing – for they may be the ultimate decision maker. Observe who your interviewers often make eye contact with. (Typically, they watch for their supervisor's reaction/approval of what they are saying.)

### **Human resources interview**

The same interviewing techniques hold true with the HR interview as with the traditional face-to-face interview. If you don't interview well with HR, you won't move on to the next step.

- The reputation of the HR professional is on the line every time they recommend a candidate to move forward in the selection process. If the other members of the selection team meet with the candidate and believe they are poorly qualified, the HR professional will lose credibility. It is, therefore, imperative you clearly communicate your ability to be successful in the job, as well as how you fit the culture of the company. This will enable the HR person to recommend your candidacy to the hiring manager/selection team.
- Your interview with HR typically speaks directly to the position description the HR professional has developed or been given, and any other qualities or needs of the position they are aware of at the time. Be prepared to

communicate specific achievements that address all of the responsibilities outlined in the position description or job posting. Note carefully what other topics are discussed. Those topics are most likely important to one or more members of the selection team with whom you may be meeting eventually and will be discussed in subsequent interviews.

- As with any interview, be sure to communicate the reasons to hire you. These are the reasons to send you forward. You will make the HR person's job easier if you can provide the necessary reasoning behind sending you to the next step. It is necessary to be thoroughly prepared to discuss the significance of all your achievements in case the conversation takes a turn you did not anticipate. If you are well prepared, you will be able to take advantage of each topic that is raised for discussion and not miss an opportunity to highlight your value.
- You will also have prepared questions to ask which will expand your knowledge of the company, the overall role of the position and the corporate culture.

### **Lunch/dinner interview**

The lunch interview is a great way for the interviewer to interact with a perspective employee in a casual real world setting. An interviewee who is courteous and professional should find this interview to be a pleasant and informative process.

#### Interview tips

- Eat a little something beforehand, so you don't come to the interview famished.
- Mirror the interviewer when ordering. If they order an appetizer, it's okay to do so.
- Order the easiest thing to eat. Try to stay away from anything you need to pick up or anything messy like spaghetti. Try to remember to order easily forkable foods. Stay away from anything crunchy or loud, which can be distracting. Stick with neutral foods that won't give you bad breath. Look at what the price is of the interviewer's meal and choose yours accordingly.
- Be aware that people make judgments about what you eat and your manners. Keep your elbows off the table, place your napkin on your lap and treat the staff with respect. Use proper dining etiquette- don't speak with your mouth full, keep elbows off the table, and always use your napkin.
- Eat slowly.
- Absolutely no alcohol, even if the interviewer orders a drink. Stay sharp during the interview.
- If your interviewer orders coffee or desert, do the same. Never let them eat alone.
- Remember your manners with the staff. Always be courteous and respectful, even if you are unhappy with the service
- Don't send the food back, or criticize the restaurant.
- Always thank your interviewer for the meal and the time they spent talking with you.
- Most of the standard protocol for traditional interviews, such as punctuality, and formal business attire, apply to the lunch/dinner as well. Given the unpredictable, less structured atmosphere, be ready to improvise if necessary. Arrive at the interview prepared with some topics for casual conversation. Recognize the interviewer may not address the more intense, job related issues until after dinner. It is important to keep the lunch/dinner conversation flowing, so come prepared with some meaningful questions about the company and position to ask during breaks in the conversation.
- Don't get too casual and let your guard down. Often, that is what the interviewer is looking for: to find out how you act outside the workplace.
- If you are concerned that your confidentiality may be compromised in public, an on-site meeting may be more appropriate.
- Ask for the job- reiterate how much you enjoyed talking with them and how much you want the opportunity.

### **Long distance interview**

Traveling a fair distance for a job interview can be unnerving, especially if you are not used to traveling in general. The bottom line is to think of everything and plan. Some tips follow to help you make your trip successful:

- Make plans to arrive in your destination city as early as you can before the interview takes place.
- Don't be surprised if no one shares in your traveling frustrations. Most people will be unaware of the sacrifices you've made to be there- taking time away from family and using vacation days.
- Leave enough time in each leg of the trip so that if you have any delays, you can make it to your destination on time.
- Arrange for transportation ahead of time. Find out if the city has public transportation or if you will need to get a rental car/taxi for getting around.
- Don't take a chance at lost luggage- hang your interview outfit, all pressed and cleaned, in a garment bag and take it on the plane with you.
- Be at the interview site at least an hour early- just in case you have problems getting around the city.
- Bring your resumes, samples, and references in a portfolio or case where they will stay unwrinkled and in good shape for your interview.
- Find out before you leave what portions of the trip the employer is willing to pay and what they may reimburse you for. Make sure you hang onto your receipts, if not for the employer, than for your own tax purposes.
- When traveling for an interview, you can almost always be sure you will be meeting a lot of people- so be ready.
- Be prepared to spend the bulk of your time at the company, not visiting with friends/family or sightseeing.

### **Second/third interviews**

- Subsequent interviews mean you will be meeting new interviewers for the first time. These interviews should be conducted just as your first meetings. They have heard positive feedback about your candidacy and expect you to be

a strong candidate. The key is they still have to be convinced you are the candidate. Don't assume they have been briefed about you in any detail. Be prepared to have your skills and personality scrutinized more closely.

- Interviewers with whom you have previously met have different expectations and are more comfortable with you. The expectation is that you will be more knowledgeable about their company and be enthusiastic about the opportunity.
- You will likely interview with co-workers, potential managers and other team members.
- More attention will be given to your interpersonal skills and ability to fit into the company culture.
- Use this opportunity to ask the balance of your questions.
- Don't get too comfortable or casual.

**“Rubber stamp” interview**

A rubber stamp interview doesn't exist. You may think it is just another final meeting to iron out details, but every meeting counts, and provides the employer the opportunity to evaluate you or move onto another candidate, so always be prepared.

## EVALUATING THE OFFER

You've done your homework, crafted your cover letters and resumes, interviewed (probably multiple times), sent follow-ups and you have now received an offer. It's not unusual for an company to take longer than you expect to make an offer of employment. When you are made an offer, accept it only if you are ready and feel comfortable. You seldom have to accept an offer on the spot.

- If you get an offer but are waiting on another company to see what they will do, try and buy some time. Tell them you'd like some time to evaluate the offer and discuss it with family.
- Look at the big picture: culturally, time-wise, and most importantly, function-wise. If your job is doing something you like doing with people you get along with, chances are you will succeed and the money and opportunities will fall into place.

### Questions to help you make your decision

- Will this position be a logical fit for your long-term plans? Will it take you in the direction you want your career to go?
- Does the TOTAL compensation package make good economic and career sense? (The offer is more than just salary- you should put into consideration health/dental insurance, time off, benefits like telecommuting or working from home, if applicable.)
- Is the position in synch with your strengths? Will you be doing things you enjoy doing professionally?
- Is the environment right in terms of company culture and values?
- Has there been a history of growth or downsizing?
- Does the opportunity offer the responsibilities and challenges you'd like? Will it provide an increase in your responsibilities?
- If it did not work out, will it have an irreversible alteration on your chosen career path?
- Will you be able to make a contribution that will have a significant impact in this department or in the company overall?
- Do you like the people you would be working with?
- Do you click with your immediate supervisor?
- Are turnover rates low?
- Is the company's mission statement aligned with your values?
- Is the commute a reasonable one?
- Does the company provide the equipment and support you need to do your job effectively?
- Will the position enhance or complement your personal/family commitments?

### Important components of an offer

- Position title
- Base salary
- Bonus: sign-on and/or incentive (based on performance of you, the company or a combination of both)
- Reviews- when are you eligible for first raise?
- Medical benefits- employee cost for family/single plan
- Life insurance
- Vision plan- employee cost for family/single plan
- Dental insurance: employee cost for family/single plan
- Disability insurance: short and/or long term
- Tuition aid- when eligible, percent covered, books and expenses?
- 401k/403b- matching?
- Savings plan
- Profit sharing
- Scheduled hours vs. actual hours worked
- Flex-time/schedule
- Health club membership
- Parking
- Vacation- amount and how earned?
- Paid time off: sick days, personal days and holidays
- Relocation package- house hunting trip(s), moving expenses, assistance with sale of current home, assistance with temporary living arrangements

Click [here](#) for a printable list.

## NEGOTIATING THE OFFER

This can be the most important part of your job search. Be reasonable- don't expect to make an unreasonable leap in compensation and realize that the offer is more than just the salary. Companies seldom offer you their highest offer on the first go-around, most assume you will negotiate for a better offer, so don't be afraid to respectfully negotiate further. Be prepared to back up your negotiations with reasoning. This is part of the process many people miss out on because they feel out of their comfort zone. It's usually smart to negotiate the terms of an offer; the trick is to know your limits.

### Tips to salary negotiation

- Remove the emotion from the situation.
- Ask questions if you don't understand a component of the offer.
- Don't give a minimum salary; it's all you will receive.
- Don't be intimidated, even if you don't have a lot of negotiation experience.
- Know your bottom line before you start discussions.
- Negotiating isn't about winning; it's about coming to a mutual agreement on terms that will satisfy you.
- Time kills deals. Don't delay your answer if you receive an offer. The longer time you take to answer, the greater chance of the offer being withdrawn.
- You seldom have to accept a position on the spot.
- Be collaborative- you don't want to sour the relationship before you begin.
- Don't overprice yourself, the offer may be withdrawn.
- Negotiation is give and take.
- Your overriding goal is a win-win for you and the company.
- Research salaries using a variety of methods: online salary tools, data collected from professional associations, and alumni career service offices: think about what you absolutely need for a base salary and then what you need to enjoy life.
- When negotiating, always do your homework to back up your position.
- When thinking of the offer, keep benefits and time off policies in mind. Perhaps the cost of benefits is less than what you are currently paying. Also, soft benefits such as these may be easier for your prospective company to negotiate than salary.
- Make sure you receive a written updated offer after negotiating.

## GIVING NOTICE

Giving notice and making a good lasting impression at your current employer is as important as starting off successfully at your new employer. Inform your supervisor that you plan to leave the company with a letter that indicates why you are leaving and shows appreciation for the good experiences you've had. Also include the length of notice you are giving. Depending on the position, a period of two to four weeks is appropriate, but they may need you to stay longer. Be honest in giving reasons why you are leaving.

Take it upon yourself to finish what you started in terms of projects and, if applicable, prepare a guide for the new-hire that will take your place. You may be asked to help train a new or interim person and you should be willing to do whatever you need to do to leave the current employer in the best way possible.

Don't let emotions get in the way with your manager. If you need to offer constructive criticism, do it in an exit interview with a HR representative. You never want to diminish your chances of getting a good reference at your current employer, which could affect you down the road. Always be positive with your co-workers, and be sensitive to your manager if he wants to tell the other people in the company of your departure. You never know whom you will end up working with in the future, so act professionally.

### Tips for giving notice

- Before giving your notice, make sure you get your new job offer in writing and accept it. An oral offer can be disputed or withdrawn much easier than a written one.
- Don't resign until you have passed any physical, drug test, and your references have been checked.
- You don't have to wait until a Friday or Monday morning to give your resignation- the sooner you resign, the sooner you can wrap up your current employment in good conscience.
- You may want to take off a few days or possibly a week for yourself before starting your new position. Factor that in when designating your start date.
- Be ready for your supervisor's reaction. They may be disappointed and frustrated, as your resignation can be seen as a reflection of their competence as a manager.
- Many employers keep your exit letter on file and pull it out when they are asked for a reference. Be prepared to make the best impression that you can with your letter.
- If you think that you will be escorted to the door and asked to leave, make sure you are prepared ahead of time, deleting personal information from your workstation and gathering your personal belongings.
- After speaking with your manager, go to your HR department and make your plan for continuing health care and retirement investment management when you leave. You can use COBRA for health insurance for up to eighteen months after you leave your company. (You are responsible for the premiums.)
- Your 401k/403b rollover will happen after you have left your employment.
- Keep in contact with people to maintain good relationships and add them to your professional network.
- Be humble when describing your new position, obviously people know you are leaving for a reason.
- People will always think highly of you if you act professionally and leave on a professional note.

### Your Manager's Mindset

#### Some things that may go on in the mind of your manager after you give notice

- You're quitting at the worst possible time.
- I just lost a valuable team member.
- Who will do the job after you leave?
- I don't look favorable in my manager's eyes because I lost a valuable employee
- I have to go through the advertising/interviewing process again, in addition to my job's responsibilities.
- It's easier to make you a counter offer than to replace you.

### Counter Offers

#### Some things to consider

- Any situation in which an employee is forced to get an outside offer to be given a raise or promotion is suspect.
- No matter what the manager says when making the counter-offer, the candidate who stays will almost always be questioned in terms of loyalty. They will usually be considered first when the company needs to let someone go, on their terms, not yours.
- Will you need to threaten to quit anytime you want a raise or a promotion?
- Counter offers are nothing more than stall devices to give the employer enough time to find a suitable replacement.
- A candidate's reasons for wanting to leave an employer still exist, but are just a bit more tolerable because of the conditions of the counter-offer.
- Decent companies don't make counter-offers, as they won't subject themselves to blackmail.
- Statistics show that if you accept a counter-offer, the probability of voluntarily leaving in six months or being let go within one year is extremely high.

#### Managers who make counter-offers say things like

- This raise was supposed to go into effect next quarter, but we'll start it the first of the month instead.
- The VP has had his eye on you and has really had you in mind for some expanded responsibilities.
- I've been meaning to tell you about our plans for expansion but it's been confidential until now.
- The President & Vice President want to have dinner with you tonight before you make your final decision.
- You're going to work for Who?

- I'm really shocked. I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you. Let's discuss it before you make your final decision.

#### GETTING OFF TO A SUCCESSFUL START

You may feel anxious and uncertain as the new employee, but the following tips can help you make a smooth transition into your new position in the first few weeks as a new employee.

- Talk less, observe and listen. It takes time—at least a few weeks—to learn the company culture, the inner workings and the issues of the company. Use past experience, but don't assume the way your previous company did things is the correct way to do things now.
- Be on time and don't be absent. As your managers and co-workers are forming an impression of you, it is imperative to have a good attendance record. Put in a full day at work, arriving early and staying a little late each day. Try not to be absent at all during the first two to three months.
- Ask intelligent questions related to your job—it shows a desire to learn and seek guidance from others.
- Take the initiative with new assignments to show your motivation and willingness to pitch in.
- Observe how your co-workers communicate- whether they text message each other, only talk personally in certain areas of the office, have open- or closed-door policies, etc. Keep your online communications professional- don't send inappropriate or personal emails, like jokes or forwards. These are corporate culture practices, so follow your co-workers' examples.
- Dress professionally. During your first few weeks you should dress a step above what is expected. Keep in mind that your attire reflects upon your work ethic and character.
- Have a positive attitude. Smile--let your excitement for being a new part of the group show to everyone you meet.
- Take pride in your team. Realize that you are now a part of a team working together to achieve positive results. Express your loyalty to your co-workers and during your first few weeks, share any recognition you get, giving credit to the team.
- Know whom you are working with. Learn the names of your co-workers as quickly as possible. This simple gesture will help them view you as one of the team, not a visitor.
- Talk about the present and the future, not about your past jobs. Keep an open mind to new ways of doing things and save your opinions for a few weeks, until you have settled into your new position, unless people are looking to you for improvements and constructive criticism.
- Be cautious about office gossip. Be aware of the office grapevine, which can be helpful in revealing the true office culture, but don't contribute to it. If you take part in talking about others, especially when you are new, you risk damaging your reputation and trustworthiness.
- Keep your desk organized and professional. When starting a new position, don't turn your desk or office space into a showcase for your personality and interests. Limit personal items such as photos and plaques to one or two items. Additionally, devising an effective company system for papers and supplies right from the start will help prevent clutter and chaos down the road.

