

# INTERVIEW TIPS

For many individuals, the interview process is a stressful situation. Whether you're a seasoned professional or a butterflies-in-your-stomach, sweaty-palms-rookie, a little preparation can make the experience both positive and rewarding. Remember, they wanted to talk to you! Your background and experience helped get you in the door, where you'll have the chance to make a positive first impression with a magnificent introduction, thought-out and sincere answers, and a critical closing statement, moving you on your way to a great offer. Smith Hanley Consulting Group would like to help you. Listed below are key points to help you prepare for your next impressive interview.

## Preparing for the Interview

**Develop a strong professional statement.** When interviewers begin with the awkward "Tell me about yourself" question, they don't want to know about your personal history, hobbies, and personality, but how you can benefit their organization. To make that magnificent introduction, prepare a professional marketing statement that convinces them you're the one for the job. You can easily develop this phrase by breaking the statement into three parts.

- › **Your career history.** Put together a one-sentence summary of your career history (yes, you need to condense your entire career into a single sentence).
- › **Your accomplishments.** Next, write a one- to two-sentence summary of a single accomplishment that you are proud of that clearly highlights how you have impacted the bottom line.
- › **The value you bring.** Last and most important, prepare a one-sentence summary outlining what you can do that matches the needs of the job and the company. Prepared properly, this can be used from interview to interview.

Combine all three statements to form a short, succinct paragraph that will start the interview off on the right foot. When you're asked the "Tell me about yourself" question, you can respond with something like: "I have been in the customer service industry for the past five years, most recently handling incoming calls in the high-tech industry. In my last job, I formed several significant customer relationships that resulted in a 30-percent increase in sales in just six months. I am now looking for a company that values customer relations, where I can join a strong team and have a positive impact on customer retention and sales."

Not only will this leave a positive first verbal impression, it will also put you in a confident frame of mind, and will force the interviewer to get past the icebreaker questions and on to how you can benefit their company.

**Learn about the company.** It's important to go into the interview armed with as much knowledge as possible. Conduct research on the company's web site to better understand their industry, products and /or services, and competitors. Try other online search engines like [www.hoovers.com](http://www.hoovers.com) and [www.google.com](http://www.google.com) for other pertinent information, such as articles and news releases.

**Locate the company.** If you are unsure about where the company is located, use an online service such as [www.mapquest.com](http://www.mapquest.com). Allow yourself plenty of time to arrive for the interview, accounting for delays, such as traffic and road work.

**Study the position description.** Your Smith Hanley representative will provide you with a position description. Identify your strengths and weaknesses relative to the position and prepare for a discussion on how your experiences can be applied. When it comes time to talk about it, don't overstate your experience. It is better to state your lack of experience in a specific area than to be proven otherwise once you begin the job.

**Interview questions.** Take time in advance of the interview to review and prepare answers to the [Frequently Asked Interview Questions](#) found at the end of this guide.

## Day of the Interview

**Dress the part.** When you look good, you feel good. Make a great first impression with clean, neat, professional appearance. Here are a few tips that may help:

- › Don't wait until the last minute to press your suit, trim your hair, or shine your shoes.
- › Dress and accessorize in conservative and neutral, rather than wild and loud. You don't want to take the attention away from the product, which is you and your skill set! In the same regard, avoid excessive jewelry or items that may not be widely accepted, such as tongue rings.
- › Use perfumes and colognes in moderation.

**Dress for success.** Even if the company dress code is casual, only formal business attire is appropriate for an interview. Men should wear suits and ties and women should show up in pants or dress suits.

**Gather samples.** Take along your portfolio with non-confidential samples of your work to share during the interview.

## The Interview

**Be on time.** Whether your interview is by phone or in person, you should arrive 20 to 30 minutes early to allow for possible traffic delays. However, you shouldn't enter the building until 10 to 15 minutes before your interview.

**Project confidence.** The volume of your speech conveys a strong impression. Whether the interview is over the phone or face-to-face, you should speak with enthusiasm and energy.

**Take a deep breath.** Say to yourself "I am a success, going somewhere to happen" and get that offer!

**Smile.** Greet the interviewer with a firm handshake and introduce yourself: "John Doe, it's a pleasure meeting you."

**Sit up straight.** Whether you're sitting or standing, make yourself as tall as possible with your shoulders back and your head held high.

**Watch what you say.** Avoid slang and words like 'um', 'like,' and 'uh.' The words you choose will say something about you, as well as your knowledge of the industry. It's important to use their words and talk their talk.

**Listen.** Most candidates are so nervous about answering interview questions correctly that they forget to listen. By focusing on what is being said, you can gather valuable information that will help you formulate better, more intelligent answers, as well as questions of your own.

- › Listen through eye contact; stay with the person.
- › Listen with nonverbal expressions; nod and show you're interested.
- › Listen until the speaker is finished; do not interrupt.
- › Stay focused and answer the question asked in less than two to three minutes. Don't ramble.
- › If the interviewer asks general questions about your experience, answer with specific technical or project detail. General answers can make you seem less experienced.

**Take brief notes, if permitted.** Should you want to take notes, ask the interviewer if they mind. Your note taking should remain brief to ensure you are not distracted from listening to the interviewer.

**Be careful of what you ask.** Although the purpose of an interview is as much about finding the right fit for them as it is for you, you don't want to appear self-centered. As such, steer clear of what's-in-it-for-me questions.

**The Almighty Dollar.** Rate and/or compensation questions should be referred to your Smith Hanley representative. If the topic is pressed by the interviewer, we recommend you respond with something along these lines: *"If you decide that I am the right person for the job, I am confident a fair and reasonable offer will be extended."*

**Stay positive.** Avoid negative comments about former and / or current colleagues, bosses, or companies.

**Ask for the job.** If you're interested in the job, express your desire to join the team. A statement such as the following will leave no doubt in the interviewer's mind that you want to work for them: *"I really appreciate you taking the time to speak with me about this position. I am confident I can do the job and look forward to working with you and your team. I truly hope to receive an offer."*

**Close.** Thank the interviewer for their time and shake their hand. Smile, after all *"You are a success, going somewhere to happen."*

## Frequently Asked Interview Questions

### **What can you do for us?**

What makes you unique? This will take an assessment of your experiences, skills, and traits. Summarize this concisely: *"I have a unique combination of strong technical skills along with the ability to build strong customer relationships. This allows me to use my knowledge and break down information to be more user friendly."*

### **What would your previous boss say about you?**

Pull out old performance appraisals and review bosses' comments. Brag about yourself through someone else's words, such as: *"My boss told me that I was the best analyst he ever had. He said he knew he could rely on me, and he liked my sense of humor."*

### **What do you think of your last boss?**

Be careful and positive. Respond concisely in a way that indicates your respect for authority and your ability to get along with superiors.

**What are your weaknesses?**

This is one of the most dreaded questions of all. Handle it by minimizing your weaknesses and emphasizing your strengths, stating how you overcame weaknesses in your actions. Stay away from personal qualities and concentrate on professional traits, with a statement such as: *"I am always working on improving my communication skills to be a more effective presenter. I recently joined Toastmasters, which I found to be very helpful."*

**What are your goals?**

Sometimes it's best to talk about short-term and intermediate goals rather than locking yourself into the distant future. For example: *"My immediate goal is to get a job in a growth-oriented company. My long-term goal will depend on where the company goes. I hope to eventually grow into a position of responsibility."*

**Why did you leave (or why are you leaving) your job?**

State your reason for leaving in a positive context, such as: *"I managed to survive two rounds of corporate downsizing, but the third round included a 20-percent reduction in the workforce."* Focus on what you want in your next job. Follow an example like this: *"After two years, I made the decision to look for a company that is team-focused, where I can add my experience."*

**When were you most satisfied in your job?**

The interviewer wants to know what motivates you. Share a job or project example that makes you excited and proves your success: *"I was very satisfied in my last job because I worked directly with customers helping to solve their problems, which is an important part of the job for me."*

**Why do you want to work here?**

The interviewer is listening for an answer that indicates you've given this some thought and are not sending out resumes just because there is an opening. You must have done your homework about the company and the position to answer this question correctly. For example: *"I've selected key companies whose mission statements are in line with my values, where I know I could be excited about what the company does, and this company is very high on my list of desirable choices."*

**What did you like least about your last job?**

This can be tricky because it's easy to answer the question negatively. Be careful and positive. If you haven't given the subject some thought, you may blurt out something inappropriate about your boss or the company, and talk yourself right out of a job. One of the purposes of this question is to find out if you're going to be satisfied in the job you're interviewing for. If you were dissatisfied before, you may be dissatisfied again if the circumstances are similar. When you answer this question, focus on tasks rather than company politics or people. Create a statement that shows how you handled a task you did not like. A good response would be: *"Overall, I've been very satisfied with my jobs. I've been able to work with really interesting people and complete tasks that give me satisfaction and fulfillment. However, I once had a job that required an inordinate amount of paperwork. Because working with people is my strength, the paperwork really bogged me down at times."*