

PREPARING FOR INTERVIEWS

Preparing for Interviews

As most of your chapter members well know, an interview can be a defining moment in a manager's professional life. Everything you do — networking, researching, résumé and letter writing — leads to this moment, which, in turn, can land you a job. This face-to-face meeting is a mutual examination, but since a decision by an employer is often formed within the first three to five minutes of the interview, it is crucial that all aspects of preparation for the interview be perfected. The good news is that interview techniques can be learned and since the average job search consists of numerous interviews, strengths can be determined and cultivated. Although most chapter members will likely have experienced the interview process, either as an interviewer or an interviewee, it is very beneficial to review physical, mental and emotional preparation techniques.

The first of the three areas that requires focused preparation for an interview is physical appearance. Appearance counts and certain appearances command the interviewers' attention. Although it seems basic, good grooming is vital for an interviewee to be considered desirable. Employers look for a certain amount of self-confidence in applicants, and dressing well can help. Employers generally take a liking to people similar to themselves, so choose clothes that reflect what you know of the prospective job and workplace. As a rule, moderation is best for job interviews. Applicants should avoid excessive accessories and heavily scented perfumes and colognes. Despite what the everyday attire at a particular club might be, business attire is the most appropriate for interviews. Men should follow the rule of wearing navy or gray suits and the preferred black shoes and matching belts. Although slacks are becoming more acceptable for women, skirts and dresses accompanied by a tailored jacket are more appropriate. Neither sex should wear anything too trendy or flashy; try to be on the conservative side while keeping your own individualism so as not to appear stiff or out of place.

The easiest way to prepare mentally for an interview is through research and practice. Not only should applicants review their own strengths, knowledge, education and experience, but they should also be examining the prospective job responsibilities and requirements. Interviewees should learn as much as possible about the organization to properly relay how their assets can apply to the desired position.

Interviewing is essentially salesmanship so it is important to be brief and target-oriented. Employers tend to judge the applicants on their negative aspects rather than their positive aspects, so it is important to find ways to answer questions about these qualities prior to the interview.

Preparatory research can also include jotting down key figures, ideas, points and questions on a 3" x 5" card and reviewing the cards just before the meeting to ease your mind. Another means of practice can be to attend a preliminary, "less significant" interview prior to the primary interview. Calling ahead, making arrangements for transportation and arriving early can also help to alleviate any apprehension about appointment times and tardy arrivals. Finally, to prepare mentally for an interview, make a checklist for before and after the interview, including items such as calling ahead, bringing extra résumés, references, IDs and writing a thank you letter.

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Preparing emotionally for an interview will be a very different experience for each interviewee. Relaxation is essential to maintaining peace of mind. Relaxation techniques include walking, breathing, meditation and visualization. When preparing for an interview, it is not necessary to eliminate nervousness completely. It is more beneficial to channel that nervous energy into positive energy and use this positive energy to develop an upbeat attitude, especially after rejections from prior interviews. Whatever techniques are utilized for emotional preparation, they are sure to have a positive impact on your interview.

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Interview Dos and Don'ts

1. Call Ahead and Confirm the Appointment. Calling ahead to confirm an appointment accomplishes two things: it eliminates the possibility, however remote, that you and the person interviewing you got your signals mixed when setting the time and date; and it sends a message to the interviewer that you are someone who pays attention to details.

2. Dress Appropriately. The rule of thumb when dressing for a job interview is to play it safe. Your goal, is to look professional, not to make a splashy fashion statement; to blend in, not stand out.

3. Arrive Early. Always give yourself more time than you actually need to arrive at an interview on time, and take into account any contingency – heavy traffic, for instance – that could affect your arrival time. If the interview is in a part of town you are not familiar with, make sure you know how to get there – even if it means driving there the day before. Should you arrive well ahead of schedule, use the extra to relax, collect your thoughts, and give yourself a final once-over in the bathroom. Plan to show up at the interviewer's office about five minutes before the interview is scheduled to begin.

4. Arrive Alone. Never bring anybody with you to a job interview. If someone has come along for the ride or has given you a ride, have the person wait outside.

5. Watch Your Reception Etiquette. Don't do anything while you are waiting in the reception room that might draw attention. Keep in mind that you are being evaluated from the moment you enter the lobby. More often than you might think, receptionists comment on the comportment of candidates to people in the company who have a hand in making hiring decisions. Especially taboo are the following behaviors:

- Applying cosmetics
- Smoking or eating
- Listening to a personal stereo
- Using a cellular phone
- Reading any book/magazine whose subject might be controversial to the average person
- Any nervous mannerisms (humming, drumming your fingers, pacing)

6. Don't Offer Opinions on Sensitive Subjects. Sensitive subjects – including religion, politics and sex – don't usually come up in a job interview. But if they do, keep your opinions to yourself.

7. Don't Criticize Former Employees. Even if you think you have been given license to do so (the interviewer volunteers a negative remark, for instance), never say anything even remotely negative about the company or people for whom you worked.

8. Don't Talk About Your Problems. Even if the interviewer invites you to talk about how tough things are in the job market, don't allow the interview to turn into a therapy session. You are not looking for sympathy. You are looking for an offer. Be upbeat.

9. Don't Name-drop. Mentioning important people you know or have worked with is okay as long as the mention is relevant to your background. Otherwise don't do it. It turns most people off.

Excerpt from *50 Ways to Get Hired* by Max Messmer

THE INTERVIEW

Have Winning Interviews and Get More Job Offers

The interviewing process can be a very tense experience for both the prospective employer and employee, as this is the last major step before a final decision.

BEFORE THE INTERVIEW

1. As a potential employee, you should consider several things. When you arrange the interview, be sure that you both have a firm understanding of who is responsible for expenses incurred, such as travel costs, hotel expenses, meals, etc. Generally, clubs pay any necessary travel expenses, and if the interview necessitates overnight accommodations, they may also be responsible for these.

2. Conduct a thorough investigation. Find out as much as you can about the club and the position offered. Review the original openings notice and try to determine what the club requires. Talk to people who may have firsthand knowledge of the operations. This could include other managers, chapter officers in that area, or club members you might know. If is possible to find any written information, do so. Obtaining a copy of the club newsletter and annual report can help you form a picture of the club and its atmosphere.

3. Determine what you want or don't want in a job. Know which requirements are most important and which ones you could compromise on. This way you will be less likely to make an unwise decision.

4. Formulate any specific questions you might wish to ask the interviewer. Keep these questions to a minimum, since you are the one being interviewed. It is a good idea to save these questions until the end of the interview, since they may very well be covered in conversation.

5. Do not apply and interview for a position that you do not plan to take — this not only wastes your time and theirs, but leaves a poor impression for you and CMAA.

6. Be aware of your appearance. Make sure that your wardrobe is appropriate to the position and to the dress code of the club. Clothes should be clean and in good condition with shoes shined and hair neatly groomed. Club managers usually have highly visible positions, and you must at all times present a well-groomed image.

7. Practice. There is an art to interviewing, as with anything. The more practice, the better you get, the more at ease you will be. Visit with a friend or another club manager and “act out” an interview. Ask for advice and constructive criticism.

DURING THE INTERVIEW

1. Let the interviewer set the tone. Be positive, friendly, smile, sparkle, act enthusiastic and interested and above all, be honest. Present your strengths and abilities and don't hesitate to mention a particularly strong area or to admit to a real weakness. If you are questioned about a former employer or job, don't be harsh or overly critical. Be dignified and polite and show a genuine interest in the job if you think that it sounds like one you would like.

2. When the interviewer terminates the interview, thank him for his consideration and ask when you may hope to hear from him.

3. Be sure to preview the CLUB MANAGER EMPLOYMENT CONTRACT (see the General Manager/COO Concept section).

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If you are offered the job and decide to accept, come to a general understanding of basic conditions of employment, such as contracts, salary, starting date, etc. If you decide not to accept, let the club know as soon as possible, leaving the best impression possible and opening the door for another CMAA manager.

The personal interview is a major opportunity for you to shine. Here are some “dos” and “don’ts” for making the most of this opportunity:

DO:

- Be gracious and courteous, even if you must fill out numerous forms.
- Project enthusiasm, optimism, warmth and friendliness.
- Remember that body language counts. Lean forward in your chair, face the speaker, make eye contact and nod or speak at appropriate times. Watch the interviewer’s facial expression and gestures for cues of how he or she is reacting to you.
- Ask the interviewer if he or she minds if you take a few notes. This shows that you are seriously interested in what the interviewer has to say. Your notes will also help you remember details so that you can accurately evaluate the club, the position and your performance during the interview.
- Listen carefully to what the interviewer says so you can understand the questions.
- Think before you speak, forming a general idea of the area you intend to cover in your answer. A short pause while thinking over an answer will make you appear careful, considered and intelligent.
- Phrase your answers positively, rather than negatively.
- Make your answers short, sincere, specific and straightforward.
- Let the interviewer control the direction of the interview, which questions to discuss next and which to leave until later.
- Ask questions that show your interest in the club and its management and that clarify the responsibilities and duties of the manager at this club.
- Bring up your strong points, even if the interviewer doesn’t ask you about them. Just say, “Before we finish, I think it’s important that you know...”
- If you are invited for lunch, accept. But don’t drink, at least not unless everyone is — and then limit yourself to one.
- Find out, if possible, what other steps are to be taken, what the time frame for filling the position is, and when you may expect further word.
- Ask for the job! Most candidates overlook this seemingly obvious gesture. Try something like, “You have a great operation here, Mr. Jones. I’d like very much to work for you, and if you choose to hire me, I won’t let you down.”
- Thank the interviewer for his or her time.

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DON'T:

- DON'T approach the interview hurriedly or emotionally.
- DON'T smoke.
- DON'T seem overly familiar.
- DON'T show irritation with interruptions or delays.
- DON'T respond to the general question, "Tell me about yourself," with information that is irrelevant to the club manager position.
- DON'T exaggerate or distort facts about your experience and background.
- DON'T ramble, use clichés or repeat yourself.
- DON'T rush to answer every question immediately. Quick answers to difficult questions will make you appear overeager and careless.
- DON'T be concerned if you simply have no answer for some questions. Simply reply that you do not know, or that you need time to think over your response. No one knows everything.
- DON'T dominate the interview or interrogate the interviewer while he or she is asking you questions.
- DON'T speak negatively about former employers or your reasons for leaving your current or past jobs. Never express anger or blame.
- DON'T bring up salary during the first interview. Let the interviewer introduce this subject. If the interviewer presses you for information before you're ready, give only a range based upon your total compensation including benefits. You don't want to lose your leverage for future negotiations.
- DON'T prolong an interview, or attempt to obtain a reaction from the interviewer on "how you did" during the interview.
- DON'T assume that you have been eliminated from the competition if you are not hired during your first interview. Important decisions cannot usually be made on the basis of only one personal meeting.

Whether your initial feeling is one of confidence or despair, take time to evaluate your performance objectively. This process can help you in future interviews, and help you follow up the interview to your benefit.

As soon as possible, check the accuracy and thoroughness of your notes about the organization and the job. This record will help you compare different prospects.

Evaluate your performance as though you were the interviewer. Grade your appearance, poise, self-confidence, alertness, voice and expression, and organization and clarity of responses. Make notes that will help you correct any problem areas before your next interview.

If you realize you failed to mention some of your most important "selling points," make a note to cover those briefly in your follow-up letter. (See Cover Letter section for samples)

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The Follow-up

Write a follow-up letter to thank the interviewer for showing an interest in you and taking the time to talk to you. You'll make the best impression by writing and mailing this absolutely essential letter the same day as the interview.

A good follow-up letter sets you apart from the general field of job candidates. It also provides the perfect opportunity to:

- Restate your interest in the job.
- Remind the interviewer of your qualifications and emphasize the match between you and the job.
- Cover topics or strengths that you failed to state clearly.
- Supply information that was not available to you during the interview.
- Show that you can communicate effectively in writing, as well as in person.

You might want to mention the names of some of the staff, officials or members to whom you were introduced. This makes your letter more personal and memorable. Keep your letter formal, however, unless you are certain that you and the interviewer established more of a relationship than just a good rapport.

A sample follow-up letter appears in the Cover Letter section.

If both you and the prospective employer show continuing interest in each other after the initial meeting, you will need to continue your research efforts. You'll want to know the marketplace and salary range for someone with your background and experience, and you'll want to learn as much as possible about all aspects of the club and the job.

At this point, you may begin inquiring about specifics that will have a bearing on whether or not you would accept the position if it were offered to you. During a second interview, you may want to ask more specific questions about:

- The duties and responsibilities of the job.
- To whom the club manager officially reports.
- The organization's management structure.
- The budgets for different departments for the current year and for the last few years.
- Long-range plans for the club and the facility as a whole.
- The regular benefit package and what else may be negotiated.

DECISION TIME

Eventually, you will receive an offer or a rejection. Either way, your emotions may run strong. It's essential to keep a level head regardless.

Dealing with Rejection

Don't take it personally, and try not to feel discouraged. You're not any less qualified or attractive as an employee or human being. Remember that many factors influence an employer's final decision.

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Show your strength of character and respect for the interviewer by writing a follow-up note. Thank the interviewer for considering your application, and ask for help in developing additional contacts. Re-affirm your capabilities but demonstrate total respect for the interviewer's decision.

If you were a top candidate for a particular job that went to someone else, keep in mind that the person who was hired may not work out, or another job may open. You might call a few weeks later and say, "I hope everything worked out with the person you hired, and I wonder if you could recommend me to one of your colleagues at another club (provided that no current CMAA member is in the position you seek)." At best, your call may be a godsend to someone who was perhaps embarrassed to contact you. At worst, you'll probably add to your list of networking contacts.

Handling a Job Offer

If you receive an unexpected offer, be careful not to make a hasty or tactless reply. If you are at all unsure about your answer, it's appropriate to ask for more information or more time to make your decision.

Share any reservations or reasons for hesitation with the interviewer, along with your positive feelings. If you ask for more time, set a definite date — no more than a week away — when the employer will receive your answer. Then notify the employer promptly of your decision. If you're considering another offer, explain your situation without wielding the other offer as a negotiating tool. Such unprofessional bargaining could damage your reputation.

You may decide to decline a job offer if you foresee problems that would make it difficult for you to fulfill and enjoy your duties. Before saying no, make sure the problems you foresee couldn't be overcome fairly easily in time and do really present a major barrier to job satisfaction.

If you decide to accept an offer, don't let your urgency to get the job prevent you from trying to get what you're really worth. The employer will probably expect a counter-offer from you.

Start by expressing your genuine interest in the position. Let the employer know that, based on your experience, skills and track record, you are worth X dollars.

Be flexible and keep the negotiation open at all times. Remember that the negotiating may cover much more than just salary. You may also be able to negotiate benefits, perks, title, starting date, decision-making authority, support for continuing education and association activities and so on.

INTERVIEW STYLES

Information/Networking Interviews

This particular interview style should be conducted with friends, relatives, acquaintances, etc. While these individuals may not have a job opening in your area of interest, they do have resources of information, advice and networks which can benefit you. These "interviews" give valuable information about particular jobs/careers as well as the skills and experience necessary for particular jobs. The goal of the information interview is not to get a job with these people — only to gather useful information. According to the authors of *Interview for Success*, never ask for a job; always ask for information, advice and referrals. As a result, you will acquire useful information as well as receive invitations to interviews which may result in job offers.

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Screening Interviews

This is the first form of interview contact when there is an actual job opening. The interview is typically conducted by telephone; however, it may take place face-to-face (search firms, placement offices). The interviewer will call you to inquire about your employment status, to gain more information on qualifications and identify clues regarding matching experience/qualities for the position. A positive “screen” will bring you to the next level.

Hiring/Placement Interviews

This interview, the actual hiring interview is conducted in greater depth than the screening interview. The interview will be directed by either the personnel office (asking general questions), or department managers and middle/upper management (asking specific job-content questions) depending on the position level.

Series Interviews

As the hiring/placement interview is typically face-to-face with one person, the series interview consists of meeting with several individuals within the same organization throughout the day. Following the interview, the individuals you meet with will get together to compare notes and make a collective hiring decision. It needs to be stressed that you need to treat each successive interview during the series as if each one were the first; after all, it is the first interview for this particular interviewer.

Panel Interviews

This is the most infrequent of interview styles and one of the most stressful. In a panel interview, you are interviewed by several people at the same time. CAUTION, when favorably answering one panelist’s question, you may lose the support of another!

Group Interviews

This is another infrequent interview style. When you find that you are being interviewed along with several other applicants, this is a group interview. An employer uses this style to gather/uncover information (interpersonal skills, peer interaction) not revealed in the hiring/placement interview style. Employers are looking for the one who exhibits the most positive leadership abilities — one who can take charge and be a leader in the workplace.

Stress Interviews

Conducted in the panel format, questions are posed in succession allowing little time for you to pause. The purpose of this interview is to determine how you handle stressful situations. If you encounter this interview style, keep calm; do not allow the interviewer to upset you. Answers should be complete, concise and to the point.

Common Interview Questions

It is impossible to list all the questions that could possibly be asked in the course of an interview. It is possible, however, to select a sampling of interview questions that are felt to be representative of the kinds of questions that are representative of the types of questions you are likely to encounter. The following questions, in addition to being fairly common, are also among the more difficult and thought provoking. They should prove a good warm up exercise for helping to fine tune your interviewing skills. (Adapted from *The Complete Job Search: Interviewing Power; How to Win the Interview*)

THE INTERVIEW

Early Background

These are representative of the questions that might be asked concerning your childhood and family background:

1. Tell me about your early childhood?
2. What major events occurred during your childhood that had the greatest impact on your life?
3. In what ways did these help to shape your life?
4. How would you describe your early family life?
5. What important values did you acquire during your early years?
6. How have these affected your life?
7. Who most influenced you during your early years?
8. What impact did this person have on you?
9. What do you consider to be your most significant accomplishments while growing up?
10. Why were they significant?

Education

1. What were your reasons for choosing _____ college?
2. What were the factors that led to your decision to select _____ as a major?
3. How did your college education prepare you for life?
4. How did your college education prepare you for your current career?
5. What were your most significant accomplishments in college?
6. Why were they significant?
7. What kind of student were you?
8. How might you have improved your effectiveness as a student?
9. What were your favorite courses? Why?
10. Which courses did you like least? Why?
11. How did you make use of your spare time?
12. What leadership roles did you assume while on campus?
13. How effective were you as a leader?
14. What results demonstrate your effectiveness as a leader?
15. What did you learn as a leader?

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Work Experience

1. How did you decide to select _____ as a career?
2. What were the factors that most influenced this decision?
3. Of the past positions that you have held, which one did you like most? Why?
4. Which past positions did you like least/ Why?
5. What were the factors that lead to your decision to join _____ club?
6. What were the events and factors that lead to your departure from _____ club?
7. What were your most important contributions and accomplishments in your position as _____ with _____ club?
8. How would you compare your position as _____ with _____ club to your position as _____ with _____ club?
9. Which of these positions did you like most? Why?
10. Which of these positions did you like least? Why?
11. If we were to contact your current boss for a reference, what would he say about you?
12. What would he describe as your strengths? Why?
13. What areas would be identified as needing improvement? Why?
14. What are you doing to improve these areas?
15. What could you do to improve your overall performance in your current position?
16. What do you like most about your current job? Why?
17. What do you like least about your current job? Why?
18. What major projects have you undertaken in your current job that are beyond these normally required for this position?
19. How satisfied have you been with your career progress to date?
20. What could you have done to accelerate this progress?
21. Why didn't you do this?

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Personal Effectiveness

1. How would you describe yourself?
2. What kind of adjectives would others use to describe you?
3. What are your strengths?
4. In what areas do you need improvement?
5. What are you doing to improve these areas?
6. How have your past supervisors described you?
7. What have historically been cited as your major strengths?
8. What have historically been cited as areas in which you need to improve? Why?
9. What major changes and improvements have you brought to your last job?
10. Why were these important?
11. How could you have been more effective in your past job.
12. What additional things could you have done to improve your overall impact and performance?
13. Why didn't you do these things?
14. Tell me about your last performance evaluation.
15. What was your last performance rating? Why?
16. If I were to contact each of your past bosses, what would they tell me about your past performance?
17. What plans do you have for improving your effectiveness?
18. In your last job, beyond your normal job responsibilities, what major projects did you undertake?
19. How did these extra projects come about?
20. What were the results?
21. In your career to date, what do you consider to be your most significant accomplishment? Why?
22. What was your second most important accomplishment?
23. Why was this important?
24. What is the single most important thing that you could do to improve your overall effectiveness?

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Managerial Leadership

1. How would you describe your management style?
2. What are the methods and techniques that you employ when managing others?
3. How effective are these?
4. What results have you gotten?
5. How would your subordinates describe you as a manager?
6. In what areas would they be complimentary?
7. What areas would they likely cite as areas in which you could improve your effectiveness as a manager?
8. What would they say about these areas?
9. How would you describe your management philosophy?
10. What do you see as the major role of management? Why?
11. What is the proper balance between managerial control and employee independence?
12. How do you motivate employees? What kinds of things do you do?
13. What methods do you use to monitor and direct department results?
14. How do you deal with employee performance issues?
15. What methods do you use?
16. Describe your management planning process.
17. How do you go about planning for department results?
18. Who is involved in your planning process?
19. In what ways do you involve them?
20. On a scale of one to ten (ten, high), where would you rate yourself as a manager?
21. How could you improve your overall managerial effectiveness?
22. Tell me about two or three significant management challenges during your career.
23. Does your management ability reflect greater strength toward club construction, or routine maintenance?
24. How often would you like to have contact with committee chairman? What kind of contact do you feel is most useful? What kinds of information are most important to exchange?
25. What type of environment enhancing activities have you been involved with in the clubhouse?
26. What kinds of projects do you think should be handled by outside contractors? Why?