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# Interviewing Strategies

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## Interviewing Strategies

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Interviewing is the most widely used method for selecting employees. The interview enables the employer to evaluate a candidate's personality, strengths, educational and work experiences. It has been described as a "mutual exchange of information", because it also affords the candidate an opportunity to gain information about the position, and to evaluate how these match his/her own skills, interests, and career goals.

An employer takes into consideration many factors when evaluating the qualifications of a candidate. Thus, an applicant increases his/her chances of being hired if adequately prepared for the interview.

Interviewers are continually amazed at the large number of candidates who come into job interviews without any apparent preparation. Lack of preparation guarantees that the interview will go poorly and decreases the likelihood of receiving a job offer.

If you effectively prepare for an interview, you will be confident, your confidence will make the interviewer comfortable with you and this, in turn, will lead to positive interaction. Complete preparation should include not only an understanding of your own goals and abilities but also an understanding of the practice or organization's services and philosophies. The following outline will help you do both.

# Interviewing Strategies: Preparation

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## Prior to the interview

- Have the correct name and title of the interviewer (dentist, office manager, human resources)
- Have the correct name of the practice or organization and the address (location of interview, if different)
- Have the interviewer's phone number with you in case you need to contact them
- Have the exact time and date of the interview
- Have your references written down on a separate piece of paper

## Personal Information

- How do your interests, values, skills, personality, and goals match the organization or job description (e.g., desire to work with people/public relations)?
- How do your education and experience relate to this position?
- What are your achievements, accomplishments?
- What are your personal strengths, weaknesses?
- What type of job do you want? (e.g., treating children geriatric patients, general dentistry, research, front office, office management)

## Characteristics of the practice or organization

- What services do they offer?
- What is their organizational structure? (if more than one dentist in practice)
- How long has the practice or organization been in operation?
- What are its plans for growth in the future?
- What achievements or accomplishments have they had?

## Guidelines for Making a Good Impression

- Role playing with a friend or counselor; practicing in front of a mirror. By practicing, you may be able to change or reduce distracting mannerisms, such as fiddling with one's hair, staring at the floor or ceiling, or punctuating your remarks with "UH" and "like."
- Your appearance must be neat and clean. Clothes must be clean, pressed and free of perspiration odors; males should be clean shaven, mustache and beards well groomed.
- Dress in good taste. For males, a suit or sport coat, shirt, tie and pants. For females, a suit (skirt or pant suit), dress or skirt and blouse. Keep the hem lines at an appropriate length.
- Arrive at least 15 minutes early for the interview in order to acclimate yourself.
- Take an extra resume or CV to the interview

# Interviewing Strategies: The Interview

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## The Interview

Most interviewers expect applicants to be slightly nervous, so try not to worry about it. Employers use different interviewing styles and may be inexperienced at interviewing. If the employer fails to ask questions, attempt to interrupt TACTFULLY, using the employer's statements as a springboard.

If a problem question is asked (see "[How to Handle Sensitive Questions](#)"), try to respond briefly but honestly.

Speak confidently and positively about yourself. If an employer asks about your shortcomings, answer candidly without making excuses or blaming others. Employers look for personality, poise, and enthusiasm as well as work experience and academic accomplishments.

## Negative Interview Factors

1. Poor personal appearance
2. Late for interview
3. Limp handshake
4. Sloppy application
5. Discourtesy
6. Tactlessness
7. Immaturity
8. Passive or indifferent manner
9. Poor verbal communication
10. Poor grammar
11. Overbearing, conceited tone
12. Vague responses to questions
13. Lack of confidence and poise
14. Defensive response to criticism
15. Narrow interests
16. Strong prejudices
17. Cynical attitude
18. No involvement in extracurricular activities.
19. Wanting job for a short period of time
20. Just shopping around
21. Unwilling to start at bottom
22. Condemnation of past employers
23. Overemphasis on money
24. Little or no interest in organization
25. Lack of career focus or goals

## Helpful Interview Techniques

- Be energetic and alert. In brief, be a person of interest. Never be just an applicant or just another job seeker.
- Show your self-confidence with a firm handshake.
- Do not chew gum or smoke, even if offered. Do not smoke prior to the interview as smoke odors cling to clothes and hair.
- Be pleasant, friendly, courteous, and tactful.
- Try to be relaxed, cool, and calm.
- Always maintain good eye contact. Follow the interviewer's eyes.
- Listen carefully and answer the questions asked. Don't go off on tangents.
- Keep your answers short and to the point, unless you're asked to elaborate.
- Use facial expressions and gestures to help communicate your thoughts and convey your personality.
- Restate your interest in the position at the close of an interview.

## **Questions You Might Ask**

Areas to cover if not already brought up by employer are:

- Where does this position fit into the organizational structure? (employee vs. independent contractor etc., associateship leading to partnership)
- How will the work be evaluated?
- What kind of supervision will there be?
- What are the office policies?
- Are there any long-range plans for the practice or organization?
- What is the opportunity for future growth in the position?

## **Closing the Interview**

If you sense the interviewer is trying to close the interview and you are interested in the position, briefly highlight your relevant skills and, if you have any pertinent questions, ask them at this time. However, questions about benefits or information can be covered in a second interview or meeting, should you be offered the position. Before you leave, ask what the final selection process will be. Follow up your interview with a thank-you note. In this note, you may refer to specific issues which were discussed, express your thanks, and re-state your interest in the position. Also, provide whatever credentials, references, or employment applications may have been requested by the employer. If you do not hear from the employer in the specified period of time, you should contact the employer with a phone call.

## Interviewing Strategies: Sensitive Questions

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### What to do about illegal questions

There are several questions that employers may not legally ask applicants. These include questions about race, religion, national origin, marital status, children, relatives, age, birthplace of applicant or relatives, prior record, and labor union activities. If you are asked a question that you feel might be used to discriminate against you in the selection process, you can refuse to answer and point out that the question is illegal, or you may wish to answer the question and tactfully state that the information has no bearing on your ability or eagerness to perform on the job. Many times, illegal questions are innocently asked because the interviewer is inexperienced at interviewing. Remember, most dentists are not professional recruiters.

**Note of Caution:** Employers are perfectly within bounds in asking questions about prior work, experience, academic background, GPA, and how you financed your education. They are required to make all employment decisions in a manner which ensures that discrimination does not occur. It is improper to ask handicapped applicants about their disabling condition. In order to determine whether a handicap will affect a person's performance, questions should be asked in regard to the person's ability to do activities that are job-related. Therefore, it would not be appropriate to ask a job applicant if he has impaired vision, but it would be permitted to ask if an applicant has a valid driver's license (if such is required on the job). Make sure you know whether a question is illegal before you question the interviewer about its appropriateness.

### How to handle sensitive areas such as low GPA, unemployment, and having been fired

There are weaknesses in almost everyone's background. In job interviewing, the best thing to do is to be honest about major problems and present your case in a positive manner. For any sensitive area, you must honestly explain the circumstances and avoid blaming others (e.g., if you blame a professor for failure, an interviewer will assume you'll also blame a boss for failure).

### How to handle questions about salary

Questions about salary should be handled with care. If you have a legitimate salary concern (e.g., some minimum requirement that cannot be altered), tactfully ask the interviewer if he/she knows the salary range. Usually, salary information will be discussed in subsequent interviews. If asked about your salary requirements, be prepared with an acceptable, realistic salary range.

## Questions Most Commonly Asked at Interviews

1. What are your long-range and short-range goals and objectives, and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?
2. What specific goals, other than those related to your occupation, have you established for yourself for the next ten years?
3. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
4. What are your long-range career goals?
5. How do you plan to achieve your career goals?
6. What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?
7. What do you expect to be earning in five years?
8. Which is more important to you, the money or the type of job?
9. What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?
10. How would you describe yourself?
11. How do you think a friend or colleague who knows you well would describe you?
12. What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?
13. How has your education prepared you for a career?
14. Why should I hire you?
15. What qualifications do you have that make you think that you will be successful?
16. How do you determine or evaluate success?
17. What do you think it takes to be successful in a dental practice like ours?
18. In what ways do you think you can make a contribution to our practice?
19. What qualities should a successful dental professional possess?
20. What two or three accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction? Why?
21. What led you to choose your current position?
22. What academic subjects did you like best? Least?
23. Do you enjoy doing research?
24. What have you learned from participation in extracurricular activities?
25. Do you have plans for continued study? (Specialists may be asked: Why did you decide to pursue an advanced degree?)
26. In what kind of a work environment are you most comfortable?
27. How do you work under pressure?
28. Why did you decide to seek a position with this practice?
29. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
30. What criteria are you using to evaluate the practice for which you hope to work?
31. Do you have a geographical preference? Why?
32. Are you willing to spend at least three months on a trial basis?
33. Why do you think you might like to live in the community in which our practice is located?
34. What major problem have you encountered and how did you deal with it?
35. What have you learned from your mistakes?