

Leicestershire Partnership



NHS Trust

# INTERVIEW SUCCESS

INTERVIEW GUIDANCE

AND

PREPARATION TIPS

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### PREPARATION

First of all, congratulations on securing the interview! Now it is your chance to show how your skills, experience and personality make you the best person for the job. Remember: interviewing is a skill, so you will get better with preparation and practice!

#### Be prepared!

Most interviews are successful or otherwise based on preparation, therefore it is crucial you put in the effort.

There are four key areas you need to think about before the interview:

- Know yourself (your goals, strengths, weaknesses)
- Know the organisation
- Know the role
- Know the Industry

#### Know yourself!

- Research yourself. Don't talk yourself into the job and don't interview for the role you don't want. Be honest and ask yourself how the position you applied for fits into your personal goals and career development. Think about where you see yourself in few years' time and what you need to do to get there. Having a clear idea of what you want to do and how you plan on getting there conveys confidence and drive. Scattered interests and vague plans, on the other hand, send the wrong signals.
- Ask yourself what your objectives are on the following table:

Where do I see myself?

	Now	2 to 5 Years	5 Years +
Career			
Personal/Family			

- The interviewers will use your Application Form as a basis for the meeting so you need to be comfortable talking the employer through it and elaborating fully on each statement. Know why you have included each statement as the employer may want you to explain how each skill and experience you list are relevant to the role.

- Many interviews start with a “tell us about yourself” question. Be prepared to break the ice with a short story explaining why and how you got to the point you are in today.
- Be aware how you portray yourself online. Employers increasingly look at social media profiles, so make sure you are happy with the way you portray yourself. While you might use it for social purposes, it is an important business tool as well, so make sure your online presence is adequate.
- Be prepared for questions you hope they won't ask (e.g. career gaps, previous unrelated experience). Be brief and factual in your responses, not defensive.

### **Know the organisation!**

- Good research is the single most powerful thing you can do to improve your chances of getting the job. It distinguishes well prepared interviewees from others and you can be sure that poor knowledge will harm your chances of getting a job.
- Take time to research the organisation - visit websites, news articles and profession websites. Make sure your research is relevant – it's not about how many sites or how many employees - it's about understanding what challenges and opportunities there are for the future, what the organisation is doing and how your role fits into the plan.
- Search the organisation and your interviewers on LinkedIn to understand their backgrounds, establish common interests and possibly mutual contacts.

### **Know the role!**

- Before every interview you would have received a job description either within the original advert or as a separate document. This information will enable you to connect your experience and skills to the job requirement and maximise your chances of the employer seeing you as the right person for the job.
- Rather than going into the interview and listing all the skills and experiences off your Application Form, use the job description and briefing to relate your experience and skills to the role. This will not only cover basic facts but also demonstrate that you understand which transferable knowledge and skills you can apply to the role. For example instead of saying *“I like working in teams”*, say *“I am well suited to work in a small team with your organisation because I have worked in a similar environment with my previous employer and I enjoyed it for the following reasons.”*
- Job Descriptions and Person Specifications will highlight qualities we are looking for - a team worker, a good communicator - so it's up to you to think of examples of how you

can demonstrate these skills. Be ready to talk about your knowledge, experience, abilities and skills. Have at least three strong points about yourself that you can relate to the company and job on offer.

- Another simple and very helpful exercise to prepare for an interview is to create a matrix, listing your skills on one axis and the employer's requirements on the other to see where they match.

What the organisation wants	What I can offer and what examples I can provide for each requirement?

### THE INTERVIEW

#### First impression counts!

- Be punctual and presentable and you are off to a good start.
- Always plan to arrive a little early. Allow time for unanticipated travel delays.
- Dress codes vary according to organisation, but always be conservative in your choice. A smart casual approach is good. By making an effort in your appearance you are demonstrating that you are interested in the job. Don't feel uncomfortable if you are dressed more smartly than the people you are meeting.
- We often see people get dry mouthed in an interview; it is therefore advisable to have a glass of water to hand.
- Greet your interviewer with a smile. Give and maintain eye contact.

#### Be Positive!

- Adopting a positive mind set is an important factor in the interview. Apart from showing that you have the right skills and experience for the job, you should use it as an opportunity to show that you are motivated to get the job done and have the right personality to succeed. Focusing on positive attitude to work, excellent communication skills, confidence, flexibility and self-motivation will make you a difficult candidate to disregard.

- Your interviewers will be thinking about what it would be like to work with you, so the last thing they'll want to hear is you complaining about your boss or current colleagues behind their back. Interviewers like to see someone who enjoys a challenge and is enthusiastic.

### INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

#### What to expect?

What kind of questions should you expect? This can be the hardest question to answer. In the course of your job search you may have met calm and skilled interviewers and others who seem as nervous as you! In some organisations interviewers will use a standard schedule of questions, and will be rating candidates on a standardised scale. At other organisations, a committee with no pre-assigned questions may interview you. Interviews differ by sector. The good news is that, whatever the skills of those who interview you, your own careful preparation will be rewarded. Your enthusiasm and thoughtful answers will make the tired or bored interviewers sit up, and help the nervous interviewer relax and listen.

It has been suggested that there are four types of interview styles: Gut-feel, Conversational, Trait and Behavioural (often called the Competency Interview). Most human resources departments use behavioural interviewing in the belief that the best way to predict someone's actions in the future is to know how they did something in the past. However, if you are interviewed by other people in the organisation, they may rely on one or more of the other interviewing styles.

**The best preparation for any interview is to prepare for a behavioural interview where you give examples of how you solved problems in the past.**

An ideal way of preparing a response to a question from interviewers is to **adopt the STAR approach**. **STAR** is an acronym. **STAR** stands for **Situation, Task, Action, Result**. Using this strategy is particularly helpful in response to competency focussed questions which typically start out with phrases such as, "Describe a time when..." and "Share an example of a situation where...."

**STAR** is an acronym for four key concepts. Each concept is a step you can utilise to answer a behavioural interview question. By employing all four steps, you should be able to provide a comprehensive answer. The concepts in the acronym comprise the following:

**Situation:** Describe the context within which you performed a job or faced a challenge at work. For example, perhaps you were working on a group project, or you had a conflict with a co-worker. This situation can be drawn from a work experience, a volunteer position, or any other relevant event. Be as specific as possible.

**Task:** Next, describe your responsibility in that situation. Perhaps you had to help your group complete a project within a tight deadline, resolve a conflict with a co-worker.

**Action:** Then describe how you completed the task or endeavoured to meet the challenge. Focus on what you did, rather than what your team, boss, or co-worker did. (Tip: Instead of saying, "We did xyz," say "I did xyz.")

**Result:** Finally, explain the outcomes or results generated by the action taken. It may be helpful to emphasise what you accomplished, or what you learned.

Prepare **specific** examples that demonstrate your strengths and relate them to the job. Don't be tempted to make sweeping statements about your past behaviours! Instead of: *"in the past I always managed my teams this way"* say *"last year I was charged with a new 8 person team to manage and I did the following..."*

Also during your preparation note down several key points which link your skills and experience with the job. Prepare to raise these positive points if the interviewer doesn't raise questions in this area.

### Common Questions

On the next page is a list of questions that are commonly asked. Read them through, and consider how many of them are open-ended. Open-ended questions give a well-prepared candidate the opportunity to tell interviewers just what makes them an outstanding candidate.

As you prepare answers, remember that you will stand out from the other candidates if you can **validate your claims** and describe specific situations, your actions and the results that highlight your selling points. Any candidate can claim to be well organised and detail orientated.

Interviewers will often ask whether you have had a negative experience, or what you consider your weaknesses. A good answer will always be honest but brief; keep the description of the downside to a minimum, avoid gratuitous criticism of others, and end on an upbeat note.

### Be Specific

Many people give vague and general answers to behavioural questions. Give specifics of the issue, how you dealt with it, and be ready to give more than one example.

### Be Concise

However good you are at thinking on your feet, in the pressure of a job interview it can be easy to ramble if you are caught by surprise, wasting precious interview minutes, so practice your answers aloud and time yourself.

These days very few interviewers are looking for a year by year account of your life and career, so keep answers relevant to the role you are being interviewed for.

### **Frequently asked questions:**

- Tell me about yourself. (NB The most professional reply is to very briefly describe your personal/family circumstances and conclude with 'and I am currently working for ..... as a ..... ' (or if unemployed ' and I am a ..... with ..... years' experience). Do not take this question as an invitation to give a year by year account of your life and career.)
- What are your strengths and weaknesses? (Make sure you can list several of the former).
- How would you describe yourself?
- What is the procedure you go through to make a decision?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- How do you organise your time?
- What do you do in your spare time?
- What are the most important things for you in a job?
- What's your greatest achievement?
- What achievement that is not on your application form are you most proud of?
- How would you approach this job if you were appointed?
- Explain your decision to pursue a career in this sector after "X" years of unrelated work.
- Why are you interested in this industry?
- Why did you choose to go to an interview with this company?
- What did you do to prepare for this interview?
- What qualities do you think make someone successful in this industry/organisation?
- How do you think you could contribute to the objectives of our organisation/company?
- What experience do you have in managing others/projects?
- What qualities make a good/poor manager?
- How do you feel about travel, overtime and demands of the industry?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this position?
- What did you like most, and least, about your previous positions?
- Where do you see yourself in 5 years? 10 years?

### **Common Behavioural (Competency) Questions:**

- Can you give me an example of a time when you displayed leadership?
- Give me an example of a time when you had a team member who did not contribute to project?
- Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task or project on time, despite intending to do so?
- Tell me about a difficult scenario at work and how you dealt with it?
- Give an example of when you've overcome a problem at work.
- Give an example of when you've excelled yourself at work in the past.

- Describe a situation where you inspired others to meet a common goal.
- Give me an example of how you dealt with a difficult situation that required extensive communication.
- What is the toughest decision you have ever made? Why was it so difficult?
- Give me an example of a time when you told a lie.

### **Questions to the employer – your last chance to show off!**

The organisation will also expect you to have questions for them. Below are some suggestions to help you think about what you might ask. Remember that questions about salary, benefits, starting date, etc are always best left until you are nearer to the offer stage.

- What do you see as the strengths of the organisation/department/team? What do you see as the greatest challenges?
- Tell me about the work environment/company culture or philosophy and values.
- How is the department organised in which I would work?
- Does management encourage promotion from within the organisation?
- What would be the goals for the first six months I was here?
- Why do you enjoy working here?
- If you could introduce, change or modify three things about your organisation over the next year without additional resources, what would they be? (You will find that people reveal a lot about the organisation in this exercise).

Take notes or remember the answers, so you can list them in your thank you note and say what you would do to address them.

It also looks impressive if you have your questions typed or written down, rather than trying to remember them (this demonstrates preparation).

Also remember not be overly questioning, it is not an opportunity for you to “grill” your interviewer back; you may feel like you have scored some points but you are unlikely to be offered a job.

### **AFTER INTERVIEW**

#### **Afterwards**

After an interview, always sit down and make some notes on how it went. If there were questions that surprised you, or that you wish you had answered differently, write them down now, and when you are relaxed, go back to your notes and prepare the answer you would like to give next time.

#### **Follow up**

Send a follow up thanks you note. This should be as formal as a note on paper. Address the reader as Dear ....., not Hi ....., Keep the letter brief, thank the interviewer for their time, and indicate your continued interest or otherwise. This is also an opportunity for you to maybe elaborate on an answer you felt was weak at the interview.

Please keep in mind that interviews are 2 way conversations and you need to satisfy yourself that the role is for you just as much as the interview panel need to satisfy themselves that you are right for the role and organisation.

*Good Luck with your Interview!*