

The 7 Deadly Sins to avoid at job interviews

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DEBORAH BARIT

BEd (Syd) Grad Dip Personnel Mgt and IR (UTS)

Introduction...

Whether applying for a promotion or your very first job there are a number of steps you must take to be ready for that all important interview. When the email or SMS comes to invite you to the interview, you will have very little time between the invitation and the “thank you for coming” response. Here are the key tips to make sure you are prepared.

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Chapter 1

How to tell what the employer really thinks of you



The ability to think like an employer is the most important aspect of preparing for job interviews. This applies to all candidates, whether you are seeking an entry level position or the role of a CEO.

As an employer I want to employ the person who fits my skill requirements, the culture of the organisation, and who really wants my job. Your job at interview is to demonstrate how you match the requirements of my job, the culture of the organisation and your genuine interest in working for my company.

To ensure you meet these specifications you need to do the following;

Start by thinking from the employer's perspective – if you were on the selection panel what skills, experience and personal attributes would you want the candidate to demonstrate for you to say – "THIS IS THE ONE"? This is truly the key to being successful at interview. Remember it is all about sales and marketing the only difference - THE PRODUCT IS YOU. When you have changed your perspective like this, you are ready to start your practical preparations.

- Re-read the advertisement and your application carefully and do not skim.
- Re-read selection criteria if applicable.
- Find out about the organization, its products and markets, culture and plans for the future.

- Take careful note of the language used on the website and use some of the language at interview.
- Now think about what key skills, experience and personal attributes that you bring to this position, which closely meet the requirements of the role. Not all your skills and attributes are essential for the job. Focus only on those which are essential and desirable or which give you the edge in a competitive labour market.
- If you are an internal applicant remember to prepare for the position from the perspective of an outsider. Focus on the role and not the personalities of those involved.
- Treat each job and employer as unique.

Remember always sell your skills and experience from the perspective of what the employer wants to buy.

Chapter 2

5 things that cost you you the last interview



Did you know that first impressions really count because most decisions about your suitability for a position are made within the first thirty seconds of meeting you?

Not much time for you to impress the interviewer with your knowledge, skills and experience. The first impression you make is based on personal presentation and body language, how you walk, smile, make eye contact, shake hands and dress.

This is when the recruiter decides whether you will fit the organisational image.

These first impressions are carried through the interview. Subconsciously, the interviewer will filter your responses through this lens.

Here are five key messages you need to demonstrate in the first 30 seconds:

Fit the image

When selecting your outfit, choose an outfit that is comfortable, professional and meets the image of the organisation so that the interviewer can visualise you fitting into the position.

Confidence

When invited in smile shake hands firmly with each member of the panel if appropriate and wait to be asked to sit down. Sit straight, leaning slightly forward. If you have brought a bag, briefcase or portfolio to the interview, put these at your side and not the table in front of you. If you have brought a laptop to demonstrate some of your work, check that it works properly before you leave home.

Congruence

During the interview it is essential to ensure that the language you use (active language) is consistent with your body language. Moving around, leaning backwards in the chair, playing with your hair, folding your arms or touching your face is an indication in body language terms that you are not confident and /or telling the truth. This may not be the case, however will be how your body language conveys a message.

Chapter 2 cont...

5 things that cost you the last interview

Involvement

It is very important to maintain eye contact with the interviewer or interview panel. The accepted practice is when a member of the panel asks a question, is to maintain eye contact with them. As you proceed to answer the question make sure you look at each member of the panel and as you complete your answer you should be making eye contact with the person who asked the initial question.

Integrity

What do you do if you don't know the answer to a question? **DO NOT MAKE UP AN ANSWER.** Be honest and say you don't know. For example if you are asked to provide an example from work experience and you really have never faced this sort of situation, tell the interviewer that and then go on to say what you would do if this situation arose. If you are making up an answer it will be easy to see from your body language. Maintaining your integrity really matters.

REMEMBER

You don't get a second chance to make a good first impression!

Chapter 3

Do you sound like one of the team?

Do you take note of the language you use at interview? Does it sound confident, like your application and the language used by the company?

Well you should. Language is the way to build common ground at the interview and improve your chances of success.

The following are the 3 key things to focus on when preparing for an interview:

- Sound confident by using positive language/ action words. Use “I.” This denotes ownership, achieved, that you were responsible for, etc
- Sound like your application. This is very important, particularly if your application has been prepared by a professional,
- Know and use the language of the industry and organisation

NB

- Words not to use – maybe, perhaps, probably, possibly. These are the words which indicate lack of confidence.

- When the word “you” or “had” to is used as part of a response at an interview, the interviewer translates this as “I do not take responsibility.”
- Do not use jargon in your answers as it may not mean the same thing to other people.

REMEMBER

Be clear, concise and to the point in the way you answer questions, the interviewer translates this to how you will work.

So choose your words carefully and think before you speak.



Chapter 4

The 7 things you need to know about your prospective employer

Do you always prepare for interviews by learning about the company? Do you know about their vision, mission, goals, markets, products, culture and issues? Are you prepared to answer the following questions?

- Why do you want to work for us?
- What do you know about our organisation?

If you can't give a tailored answer to the above questions, you have lost the job before you have even entered the interview room.

Wondering how to start? Well here are some suggestions:

Website and internal publications

Most organisations have a website. Read their mission statement. These outline its values and culture. Look for the most recent annual report and read the executive summary. Read some recent press releases

Ring the contact person

Ask them some questions about the reason for the position being available, whether it is a new

expansion, the person left or was promoted? Ringing and talking to the contact person will demonstrate to them that you are really interested in the position. Be selective with the questions.

Internet

Do a general search on the organisation and its market sector. This may bring up interesting facts or issues that may not be covered on the organisation's website.

Newsletters, journals and professional publications

Your local library will have a good selection of these. Seeing how an organisation is reported in the media says a lot about its performance and reputation.

Networks

Use your networks: talk with friends, family, work colleagues, even neighbours

You will be surprised by what people know. It is also useful to know how other people view the organisation you want to join.

Chapter 4 cont...

Recruitment consultant

If your initial interview is with a recruiter, find out about the recruiter, their clients and the types of positions or industry they specialise in. This will give you an idea who the company is likely to be.

Union websites

These can be useful for current issues.

NB

The depth of your research will depend on the role you are seeking and time available to you. The more senior the role, the greater the depth of knowledge will be expected of you.

Remember to make notes and keep them with the application. When you are called for the interview you can quickly refer to all your documentation.



Chapter 5

Are you qualified?

How do you know that you have the skills, qualifications and personal attributes to fill this role?

Without this knowledge how can you impress the interview panel?

Here are some simple tips on how to compare your skill set to the requirements of the position.

Step 1 – Take the copy of the advertisement and all the information about the role. On the left hand side list the skills, attributes, and qualifications required. Also, include the implied skills and attributes.

Step 2 – Against each one, list your experience etc and also at least two examples which clearly demonstrate your suitability for this role.

Step 3 – Make a clear note of where your strengths are and also where your gaps are so that you have a realistic understanding of your suitability.



Step 4 – Also have some examples of things that did not work and what you learned from this experience.

Step 5 – Take the time to clearly work through your examples so that they will effectively demonstrate the points you would like to make.

This exercise will take some time. Do it anyway as the results will provide the core to any answer you are asked at interview.

Chapter 6

Seven key things you need to for interview success and then some

Are you flexible in your preparation for interviews?
Do you prepare for different styles and approaches employers have to interviews?

Did you prepare for all these possibilities?

If not, you may well missed your opportunity to shine at the interview.

There are many ways of conducting recruitment exercises depending on the role, the number of positions or number of applicants.

- Group interviews – usually designed to assess your ability in leadership, team work, problem solving and fit into a new environment,
- Phone screening – intended cull applicants, who are not suitable for the position for various reasons, save time or overcome distance.
- Initial interview with a recruiter - designed to check your skills, assess your real interest in the position and whether you will fit in with the culture of the organisation.
- Psychometric, psychological or personality testing - some corporations use this style of testing to establish if your application will move to the next phase
- Video conferencing - becoming more common

- Interview with the employer – usually smaller organisations will do the recruitment themselves, however they may do more than one interview before making the final selection.

Question Styles

These are a number of styles of questions, however the most common are:

- Straight – an example what would you do if you discovered that you made a mistake?
- Behavioural – Tell me about a time you made a mistake what did you do?

Structuring an Answer

Straight Question

There are 3 main parts to a good answer however the answer needs to flow as follows:

Part 1 Give an overview – set the context for the interviewer. For example using the above question you could start with “If I discovered that I made a mistake I would do the following things...”.

Part 2 Best practice – this is the section where you need to describe your thinking process of how you would resolve the situation. It is essential to provide the panel with your thinking process.

Chapter 6, cont...

Part 3 Give an example – the final part is to give an example from experience. It demonstrates how you actually dealt with the situation.

Behavioural Questions

Part 1 Give an overview – set the context for the interviewer. Using the above question you could start with “when I was working in the position of... this is what happened”.

Part 2 Use your example to demonstrate how you dealt with the situation. As part of this description you need to explain your reasoning for choosing your course of action.

It is important to remember that the interviewer is looking at the process you use to make decisions.

Here are other types of processes you may encounter:

- Being supplied with questions before the interview
- Given an exercise to complete after the interview
- Delivering a short presentation
- A role play as part of the interview

Key points to remember

- Take a few seconds to structure your answer — don't forget the overview

- Most interviews have a variety of question styles, so be prepared for all styles
- If you have the questions — take the time given to focus on the key issues
- Prepare for telephone interviews in the same way as for a face-to-face interview; be dressed and smile when you speak on the phone.
- Group interviews — be an inclusive, considerate and active participant
- Be congruent in body language
- Be punctual



Chapter 7

Great answers to 6 interview questions

Do you walk into an interview with prepared answers to commonly asked questions? If you do it is your first major error. While there are commonly asked questions there are no model answers for these. The answer depends on:

- The role
- The skills required
- Culture of the organisation
- You may not hear the question

Here are some commonly asked questions and what you need to consider when framing your response.

What interests you in this position?

This is a frequently asked question because employers have a preference for employing candidates who want to work for their particular company and in this job. Therefore, your answer needs to combine reasons for your interests with the skills you bring to this position. In answering the question, start from what is in it for the employer.

Tip

Your response needs to combine employer expectations with your skill base and show some enthusiasm.

What skills and experience do you bring to this role?

We all have many skills and personal attributes. However, for this question you need to select the skills, experience and attributes which are required for the specific position. These will include both specific and implied skills. For example, note the advert for the role.

Chapter 7 cont...

Tell us about a project that did not go according to plan. How did you deal with the situation?

When answering a question which directly asks to discuss something that didn't work. BE BRAVE. It is intended to assess a number of things

- Honesty – we have all had some failures
- Taking responsibility – where did things go wrong
- Problem solving skills – how did you resolve it?
- What did you learn?

When describing your example you need to state what you learnt from the mistakes or how have you changed your process/preparation/thinking so that you don't make the same mistake again.

Tip

Make sure as part of your interview preparation you choose something that didn't work not just achievements

What do you know about our company?

The key to answering this question is to have done your research and understand how the role fits into the organisation. Also know about

their products, markets, customer base and goals/culture.

Tip

It is important to know something about the company as this clearly demonstrates they are your employer of choice.

What are your strengths and your weaknesses/limitations?

In nominating strengths, it is important to choose them based on job requirements. Not all attributes that we consider strengths may fit the needs of the role.

When discussing weaknesses, keep the weakness list short and choose your weakness or limitation on the basis that it does not significantly impact on your work.

Tip

Choose a personal weakness that you are working to improve.

Do you have any questions for us?

If you choose to ask questions, they need to be related to the broader picture such as about future goals for the organisation, the scope of the role especially if it is a new position, career opportunities, etc.

Chapter 7 cont...

Tip

At the initial interview do not ask questions that sound like 'What is in it for me'

For example: how much sick or study leave, flex time, holidays, etc.

Senior Roles

When preparing for senior roles the interview will be structured a little differently. They are more conversation style and will cover such areas as management/leadership style, human and resource management, business acumen, financial responsibilities, issues, vision and ideas for growth, knowledge of the markets, products and competitors, salary expectations, etc.

Remember

Prepare by focusing on key points you need to address and clear examples to demonstrate your experience.



Good Luck



About the Author

Deborah is passionate about training and assisting clients to achieve their career goals and she established Impressive Interviews in 1999 to do just that.

She specialises in preparing clients for job interviews, training individuals and groups in interview presentation techniques. Her clients range from experienced professionals and senior managers to school leavers and new graduates.

She has developed and delivered training programs for community based organisations working with long term unemployed people to assist them to re-enter the workforce. She taught short courses for school leavers, as well as specialist training for medical, legal and public sector candidates.

Deborah's professional activities range from selection and recruitment in Australia and overseas, including chairing interview panels, labour market research, report writing and evaluation of government-funded programs through to operations manager of four medical practices and working with disability employment services.

Before establishing Impressive Interviews, Deborah

worked in the Commonwealth public service dealing with professional employment issues.

Deborah holds a Bachelor of Economics Degree from the University of Sydney and a Graduate Diploma in Personnel Management and Industrial Relations from UTS. In 2002 she also completed the Women in Business Mentor Program and regularly attends professional development courses.

She is an Associate of the Employers Network on Disability, an organisation dedicated to educating and training the corporate and public sector on how to recruit and retain people with a disability, as well as providing specialist advice on disability employment issues.

Deborah was a Board Member of TEAM NSW, a community based organisation that provided skills training for people who are long-term unemployed.

Her other work includes assisting clients in developing their CV's/resumes, preparing application letters, editing public sector selection criteria and providing selection advice to businesses.

To find out more about these services, please visit her website at

<http://www.impressiveinterviews.com.au>