



Gardner Resources Consulting: Guide to Interviewing

The following outline will help prepare you for the interviewing process. Most people make the mistake of not understanding that successfully interviewing for a job requires a completely different skill set than being ultimately successful working in a job. You should go into every interview with one goal in mind: *Get the job offer*. You can always turn down a position that is not appropriate for you. However, there is no worse feeling than to go into an interview with mixed emotions and to realize after the interview that it turned out to be a perfect position for you and know that you did not put yourself in a position to get an offer.

It is important to remember that interviewing is really quite simple. Like any other skill in which you want to excel, this one requires preparation and practice. Spending time using this guide to prepare yourself before every interview will pay enormous dividends.

Most interviews follow the same pattern:

1. You are introduced to the hiring manager
2. The employer tells you about the company as well as the current job available
3. You tell the employer about your background and what sets you apart from other candidates
4. You are asked a number of questions
5. You ask a number of questions
6. You thank the person for their time and express your interest in the position

This guide will look at each step and expand upon it so that you can better prepare yourself to go in and get the job offer.



The Introduction

Instead of just introducing yourself by name to your prospective employer, take it one-step further and show your enthusiasm. In most cases, the candidate with the best personality and the most enthusiasm will get a job over someone who is more qualified from a technical standpoint. Remember, we all want to work with winners and people with a lot of positive energy...showing these traits from your initial introduction is key. A successful introduction goes like this:

“Hi, Mike. I’m Sandra. It’s nice to meet you. You know, before we even get started, I just wanted to let you know that based on what I’ve heard about this opportunity, I’m really excited to learn more about it and more importantly, I’m looking forward to letting you know what I can do for you and your organization.”

The Client “Sells” to You

With an introduction like this, the employer will be excited and anxious to share more about the position with you. He will also begin to tell you about the company. Any research you can do before the interview can be shared with the employer at this time. For example, you might want to say something like this:

“Mike, I had done a little surfing on the Internet before I came here and I noticed”

It is important to listen intently to what the client is telling you, as they are most likely using key buzzwords to describe their ideal candidate. You want to be able to process this information and then “sell” it right back to the client using the same key terms they’ve used.

You “Sell” to the Client

After the employer is done telling you about the job and company, it is your turn to tell him about yourself. Put on your selling hat! Now it is time to talk about what you have done from a technical standpoint as well as your specific skills and experience that will help the client achieve their goals. You want to present the following information to the client:

- The name of the company and industry for your most recent consulting engagement
- Your job responsibilities
- Your accomplishments



You should repeat this for all jobs you have held. This is what it might sound like:

*“My most recent assignment was for **XYZ Company**. They are a health care insurance organization. My role was to act as a Business Systems Analyst on the redesign of their claims processing system. I interviewed the end users of the system to determine their needs when working with this system. I met with employees in a number of departments including billing, provider relations, customer service, Medicare and claims processing. I drafted a functional specification document based on my research. After that was completed, I worked closely with representatives of their I.T. department assisting them in their drafting of a technical specification document. At that point, my assignment was completed. I am proud to say that I completed the task 6 weeks early. That put the project on track to be completed 3 months ahead of schedule. Prior to this, I worked for....etc.”*

When you are done with your work history, use this “bridge” to enter the second phase of your “selling presentation” which concentrates on what you can do for the client:

“In a nut shell, that’s my work history. Let me now tell you what I think I can do for you and your organization. First and foremost...”

Now you want to talk about six or seven of your strengths. Remember to address as many strengths as possible that coincide with the skills the client feels are important for a candidate to possess. Here is a list of possible strengths:

1. Organizational skills
2. Attention to detail
3. Strong work ethic
4. Ability to work independently but also as a member of a team
5. Flexibility
6. Adaptability to different environments
7. Ability to troubleshoot
8. Ability to prioritize
9. Self-motivated
10. Quick learner
11. Interpersonal skills
12. Oral and written communication skills
13. Positive attitude



The important thing to remember when talking about your strengths is that you need to develop them. Never give one-word answers. The following example takes a particular strength, in this case organizational skills, and really expands upon what that means:

“My organizational skills are definitely my greatest strength. I’ve found that I’m able to get more done in the course of a day than others at my level and I’m certain my organizational skills are one of the reasons for that. I know what I’m going to do on Wednesday because I prepare for it on Tuesday. I can come in the morning, grab my cup of coffee and hit the ground running.”

Again, be prepared to give detailed examples of six or seven strengths.

Responding to Client Questions

It is now the clients turn to ask questions of you. Anything is possible. Be prepared to talk about your accomplishments as well as what you like and dislike about current and past employment situations. In addition, your technical skills may be tested. The following questions are frequently asked and often difficult to answer. Here are some tips:

A. What is your weakness?

Most candidates really have a hard time answering this and often forfeit a job offer because they have answered it incorrectly. The best answer is to take a strength and turn it into a weakness...but obviously one that won't hold you back from getting the job offer. For example:

“I know a moment ago I told you that one of my strengths was my work-ethic. On the other side, because I give 150%, I often feel like I have a hard time shutting work off at the end of the day. I find that I think about work on the commute home and often on the weekends as well. I’d love to be able to tell you that I have a 50/50 balance between work and play, but I’m not quite there yet.”

Another example might be:

“I find that I set very high goals for myself. Therefore, I think I have the tendency to be somewhat hard on myself. I also find that I feel frustrated when others don’t put their best foot forward.”

B. What are your compensation expectations?

As your representative in this engagement, Gardner Resources handles all compensation questions relating to your hourly rate. Please defer all questions to the account executive.

However, if this is a contract to hire position, your annual salary expectations are a legitimate question. The key is to never, ever give the client an exact figure. Doing so can be dangerous for two reasons: you may give a number that is out of their range and therefore price yourself too high, conversely you may go too low and receive an offer below the market for your level of skill and experience. The best solution is to tell the client that based upon your research (this research will be provided to you by Gardner), you believe that the market for the role pays between X & Y. Based on that assumption, you are prepared to move forward with the process. Do not allow them to pin you down on a specific number. It is the hiring organization's responsibility to make you a job offer rather than your responsibility to tell them what is acceptable. You can say something like:

"I believe the market rate for a project manager with my level of experience is between \$90,000 and \$130,000. Based on that information, I am anxious to continue the process here. The most important factor to me is the opportunity. If I'm the candidate of choice, all I would ask is that you make me a fair and reasonable offer."

If the client asks you to be more specific and indicate what "fair and reasonable" might be, you should say:

"Again, I haven't given a lot of thought to a dollar figure because, as I already mentioned, the opportunity is really what is going to make the difference to me."

C. Where do you want to be in 5 years?

Giving the client a specific title (i.e. CIO) is not recommended. If the client does not feel that this type of role would be available to you in his or her organization, they may not hire you because they may think that you will eventually leave the organization to pursue that role elsewhere. A better answer is:

"I'm looking for a place where I can make a difference. I'd like to look back in five years and see that I've made a positive contribution to this organization."



Asking Appropriate Questions

Now is your chance to ask questions of the client. These questions will serve two purposes: the first is that it will show the client that you have done some preparation work and thought about some good, sophisticated questions to ask prior to the interview. The second is that by asking these questions, you can use the answers to help determine whether you want to work for this organization. The most important thing to remember here is that you should never leave the interview without asking at least three to five good questions. Some ideas:

1. How would you describe the ideal candidate? (Listen carefully to their answer and reiterate that you possess the skills they feel are necessary to do the job.)
2. Why is this job open?
3. How would you describe your management style? (Ask this directly of the hiring manager.)
4. How long have you been here? (Remember, people like to talk about themselves...if you take an interest in them, they are likely to take one in you.)
5. How would you describe the environment in the department?
6. Prepare several questions that will demonstrate your level of knowledge and understanding of the job responsibilities.
7. What do you like best about the company?
8. Who is your competition? What advantages do you have over your competition?
9. Where do you see the firm strategically five years from now?
10. May I have your business card? (Make sure you collect these from every person you meet).



Closing the Interview

You will intuitively get a sense as to when the interview is ending. Remember it is crucial to keep your enthusiasm level high as you draw things to a close. The way to end an interview on a high note is to say this:

“Mike, I really want to thank you again for your time and let you know that I am extremely interested in pursuing this. Is there anything else I can tell you that will help me to get a second interview (or, the job)?”

This final question gives you one last chance to fill in the blanks and more importantly, to sell yourself.