TIPS TO PREPARE FOR A SUCCESSFUL INTERVIEW

The Competitive Job Candidate
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Before the Interview:

Prepare your answers/performance in advance.

- Anticipate questions you might be asked; prepare answers. List obvious questions, such as: why you want the job, your strengths and weaknesses, why you are the best candidate, what you will do in your first week/month, etc.
- Prepare a general review of your bio and experience.
- Make yourself an outline, with bullet points that you want to cover.
- Prepare your opening remarks, some sort of answer to the question “Tell us about yourself/tell us why you want this job.”
- Prepare a list of questions to ask, in priority order. You’ll usually have a chance to ask your questions at the end of the interview. General questions you might ask include the following. You’ll also have other questions that are specific to the position.
  - What are the museum’s goals for the department/position in the short and long term?
  - What will be the most important things you will be expected to do in your first months/year?
  - What are the challenges of the position?
  - Who are the key people you’ll be working with, if there are more than the person(s) who are interviewing you?
  - How the department and museum are structured, if it is a large department/museum.
  - How will you work collaboratively with other departments and with your supervisor.
  - If it is for a Director position, ask all the big picture questions about vision, long-term plans, finances, board structure, etc.
  - Don’t ask about salary or benefits at the first interview (unless the interviewer brings it up).
- Be prepared to state salary that you would find acceptable, since you may be asked. Usually giving a range and adding that you can be flexible depending on the benefits package will work. Interviewers ask this question because they want to know if your range and theirs are close, not because they want to pay you the lowest amount that you will accept.
- Prepare your closing comments (a response to “is there anything else you would like us to know/anything you want to add?”) or a similar question.
- Have a family member or friend rehearse with you – do a role-playing exercise, with them asking you some of the questions you think you might get.
  - Make notes on what to improve, where you stumbled.
  - Time yourself, so you don’t spend more than 5 minutes on a question.

Do your homework about the person/people and the museum

- Visit the museum in person, as an anonymous visitor, if possible. You’ll get to see it the way the average guest sees it, which may be different from the way you see it on tour with the people interviewing you.
- Know about the person(s) you are talking to – Google the name, check the museum’s website, look at LinkedIn and YouTube.
- Make sure you have his/her/their contact info, cell number, etc.
- Re-read the job description and any other information you have about the museum and the position.
• Re-visit museum’s website, so you’ll be familiar with the latest exhibitions, programs, what’s upcoming. Look especially closely at the section(s) that are most relevant for the position.

Consider the specifics of the job, place, and interviewer
• Based on what you know from previous contacts and from your research, consider what the person or team that is hiring would like or not like. Imagine, or try to determine from the style of the interviewer, whether this person would want short crisp answers or lots of detail and stories.
• Be prepared to explain how you meet the professional and personality needs of the position.
  o Example: If job description says seeking someone collaborative, be prepared with examples of how you have collaborated on projects.
  o Example: If this is a large museum and you have only worked at small museums (or vice versa), be prepared to explain what other experience has prepared you to function in an organization of a different size.
  o Example: If the position involves getting gifts from individuals or collectors, be prepared with your success stories – and make clear how they would translate to this job and place.
  o Example: If you know they want a strong background in art history, American history or educational theory, and your degrees are in anthropology, ethnology or literature, be prepared to substantiate your knowledge in the field they seek. Express a willingness to learn the fields/skills that you are not as strong in.

Plan how you will address any illegal questions that you might get.
• Most interviewers these days know what questions they can and can’t ask, but occasionally you may get a question that is outright illegal. It’s better to know ahead of time how you’ll answer than to stammer or stutter at the interview. If you are asked an illegal question, you can:
  o Point out that the question is illegal and decline to answer (although this will probably mean that you most likely won’t get the job).
  o Politely say that you don’t feel the question is relevant and ask the interviewer to focus on questions that are directly related to the job and your ability to do it.
  o Answer the question because you are really interested in the job or you feel that the interviewer doesn’t know the question is illegal and is simply making small talk.
  o Figure out why the interviewer is asking the question and address what is behind the illegal question. This is probably your best option.
    ▪ Example: “Do you have/plan to have children?” The interviewer probably wants to know if childcare or a lengthy maternity/paternity leave will interfere with working. Answer with something like “My family life won’t interfere with my ability to do the job.”
    ▪ Example: “Do you go to church/temple/mosque?” The interviewer probably wants to know if you can work weekends. An answer like “I am available to work weekends” or “I can work any time other than Friday evenings” is fine, or you can simply say that your personal beliefs won’t affect your ability to do the job.
    ▪ Example: “You have an interesting accent. Where are you from originally?” The interviewer probably wants to know if you can work without having to get an H-1B visa. You can answer something like “I have been working in the US for x number of years and have the appropriate paperwork,” or “I’m a US citizen.” If you have a family or immigration story that you want to share, it is fine, but you don’t have to.

At the Interview
• Know what it takes to relax yourself, and do it in advance, so you’ll be as relaxed as possible.
• Dress professionally. For a man, usually a jacket and tie, or at least a dress shirt without a tie, and for women a nice top with skirt or dress pants. For a director or other high profile position, go with a skirt or pants suit (women) and definitely wear the tie (men). It is better to be over-dressed than to appear too casual. You can still express yourself by wearing creative/unusual jewelry, tie, or other accessories. Don’t wear jeans, tee shirts, or flip-flops!
• Never be late. Be at the interview site 10-15 minutes before the scheduled time. Use the extra time to relax yourself.
• Smile and shake hands with everyone present.
• If you don’t already know, ask how much time you will have for the interview, and ask the interviewer to let you know if you are speaking too long, or if more detail is desired.
• Watch the interviewer’s face(s) and body language for their reactions. Take the clues.
• Don’t bring a big portfolio, but if you have 1 or 2 sheets such as a news article about you or a positive review of an exhibit or program, that is fine. The interviewer(s) want to talk to you, not look at your brochures.
• You can also bring a copy of your resume in case the interviewer doesn’t have his or her copy.
• Bring paper to take notes.
• At the end, ask what the next steps are and what the timing for the process is (when you might expect to hear from them again).
• Say thank you, shake hands again, and smile as you leave.

For a Skype interview
• Make sure you know the interviewer’s Skype name and have added it as a contact in your Skype program. Also make sure they have added your Skype name to their account.
• Make sure your camera and microphone are working.
• Check the video to see how you look on camera.
• Wear business attire; dress as if it were an in-person interview.
• Sit in a straight non-rolling chair at a table or desk, the same way you would be sitting if it were an in-person interview.
• Make sure the background is business-like. A blank wall with a work of art is ideal, or an uncluttered bookcase or paneled wall.
• Close doors to any rooms that are visible in the background.
• Avoid having windows behind you; they can cause glare or a reflection. If you do have a window, pull the curtain or shade.
• Have lights in front of you rather than above you if possible. Frontal lighting tends to be more flattering than overhead lights.
• If you have the chance, practice with a relative or friend. Ask that person to look at the background, lighting, how you fit into the frame. Have the person ask you some questions and let you know how you look and sound when you are answering.
• For the actual interview:
  • Be ready at your computer 10-15 minutes before the call is scheduled. Some people call ahead to test the system.
  • Adjust your settings so that you can see yourself in a small window on the screen while you see the other person(s) full screen. Seeing yourself can help you avoid leaning forward or back too much, moving out of camera range, etc.
  • Have water nearby in case you need it.
- Have your list of questions ready to ask the interviewer(s).
- Have a copy of your resume and any other relevant information in case the interviewer refers to it.

For a telephone interview
- Be prepared and by the phone 10 – 15 minutes in advance.
- Make sure you have the phone number of the person calling you so you can call back if you get disconnected.
- Make sure you won’t be interrupted by another phone ringing, people entering the room, TV, etc.
- If you are at home, get dressed the way you would for work; it will make you feel more professional than sitting around in sweats.
- Be ready to take notes, either with pen and paper or on your computer or tablet.
- If you have a phone with a headset, use that so your hands will be free to take notes. If not, you can try speaker phone.
- If it is a group call/conference call, it is fine to ask who is speaking at any given time if you don’t recognize a voice. Knowing who is asking what questions is important.
- Have a copy of your resume and any other relevant information in case the interviewer refers to it.
- Have your list of questions ready to ask the interviewer(s).
- Have water nearby in case you need it.

After the Interview (in-person, Skype, or telephone)
- Send a thank you within a day of the interview. (E-mail is fine, but if you want you can also send a hand-written note.) In it you should:
  - Thank the person/people for their time and the opportunity to interview.
  - Address (briefly) any areas that you may think you didn’t cover well or that might be perceived as weaknesses. (For example, if you don’t have a lot of experience in a particular area of the job description, express interest in taking a course or attending a workshop.) You can also briefly make any key points that you didn’t get a chance to mention at the interview.
  - Express your continued interest in the job and why you would be a good fit.
  - Say that you look forward to hearing from the person again.
- If it was a group interview and you have e-mails for everyone present, it is fine to send the thank you to everyone. If not, ask the person to whom you send it to please share it with the group.

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