

# Pure Resourcing Solutions

## Interview Technique Guide

This guide has been produced to provide you with tips and guidelines to maximise your chances of gaining your ideal next role. It has been produced as a result of many years of collecting feedback from a wide range of organisations.

### Overview

Most organisations consider that the recruitment of the right staff is of the utmost importance and will have an allocated amount of time to find out as much as possible about each candidate in the time available.

It is important to remember when you are preparing for an interview that you will almost certainly be competing against other candidates. Whatever your qualifications and experience prospective employers will be looking to see how you present yourself at the interview and will be determining your team and culture fit for their organisation.

The average interview time is about 1 hour but this will vary and it is not uncommon for there to be a series of interviews with potentially, more than one interviewer. It is also not uncommon to be given an aptitude test or personality profile. At Pure Resourcing Solutions we have examples of various tests which allow you to practice beforehand and there are also a variety of websites which give you an insight to a variety of tests.

### Step 1 - Research your company

Your consultant will brief you on the type of company and the person who will be interviewing you. If they have a website please visit it. This usually contains the history of the company, their beliefs and goals. Trade press and local news may also be worth checking for any relevant and interesting material. In addition if they produce a product or service where appropriate you should sample the product or services.

It is a good idea to plan your route to the interview and where possible make the journey to the location prior to the interview. Take the company's telephone number in case you are delayed.

### Step 2

As soon as you arrive you will be making an impression so conduct yourself accordingly in reception.

Try to arrive a few minutes early. This will give you time to compose yourself and to gain a general overview of the organisation. There may be employee news letters, annual reports or a collection of press cuttings which it would be useful to review.

### Step 3 - The Interview

Generic interview question preparation:

If you have an important interview, it's natural to worry about being unnerved by tricky questions. Fortunately, since many interviewers use the same basic questioning techniques, you can plan impressive replies ahead of time, therefore, increasing your confidence. The key to anticipating questions is to treat the interview as an opportunity to exchange information and to sell yourself without being arrogant. The employer is like a buyer - he needs to find someone who can slot neatly into the organisation's culture.

As a candidate you should act like a sales person: you must 'sell' your natural abilities, skills, experience, qualifications, and equally important, your personal preferences for type and quality of work. The aim should be to give positive information that shows what you can do for the employer, not what the employer can do for you. Remember, be as natural as possible, as an act is easily seen through.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. Tell me about yourself

Here, your ability to think on your feet is being tested with a deliberately vague and open ended question. Simply outline several of your strong points and accomplishments and don't be disconcerted if the interviewer remains silent when you pause.

If you get really stuck think how your best friend would describe you! If you are relatively new to the job market, tell them about your educational achievements. Excellent grades, academic prizes or winning a scholarship are all good qualifications. Extra-curricular activities can also be selling points for some jobs.

When you've run through your strong points, briefly sum them up then stop talking. If the interviewer continues to pause, stay silent and patiently wait for the next remark. He or she may be mulling over what you've said, or be testing your reaction to stress.

### 2. What qualifies you for this job?

Employers are looking for a fluent description of your background. To impress the interviewer with your quickness and intelligence memorise the key facts and dates on your CV, then prepare some success stories for each and drop them in casually as though they were spontaneous thoughts. Always make your opening line your most major achievement - it is often what makes the biggest impression.

### 3. Why do you want to work for this organisation?

Being unfamiliar with the organisation will spoil your chances with 75% of interviewers, according to one survey, so take this chance to show you have done your preparation and know the company inside and out.

You will now have the chance to demonstrate that you've done your research, so reply mentioning all the positive things you have found out about the organisation and its sector etc. This means you'll have an enjoyable work environment and stability of employment etc...everything that brings out the best in you.

### 4. Why do you wish to leave your present job?

Never say anything negative about your present employer and don't mention money as a motivator either. The interviewer will reason that if you're prepared to leave one organisation for money, you might leave his/her company if another waved a bigger pay cheque in front of you. The safest track to take is to indicate a desire for greater responsibility and challenge, or the opportunity to use talents you feel are under-used. Make sure your abilities are relevant.

### 5. Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?

Replying 'in your chair' is dangerous!

A few managers might be intrigued or amused but many will be annoyed by your arrogance or intimidated by the fact that you may be right. Mentioning any specific goal can be risky as it may not fit into the career path in that particular organisation, or may cause concern that you'll be discontent until your goal is achieved. Instead, frame your reply along these lines "I would hope that by then my hard work and enthusiasm would have led to increased recognition and responsibility within the organisation".

### 6. What sort of salary are you looking for?

When you're talking about money, never describe your salary demands as what you actually need but rather as what the job is worth. Always give a range i.e. £40,000 to £45,000. If you're unsure of what the job should pay give your current salary and state "but money isn't my motivation for changing jobs". Since organisations use your current salary as a guide line as a basis of what to offer remember to include bonus, annual raises if you are about to receive one etc.

7. What are your weaknesses?

The best “weaknesses” are disguised as strengths, such as “I dislike not being challenged at work”. Another good approach is to mention an irrelevant weakness. Try to keep these to one weakness, explaining why you think it is a weakness and what you are doing to overcome the problem.

One common variation on this question is to ask about any problems or failures you’ve encountered in previous positions. In describing problems, pick ones you’ve solved and describe how you overcame it. Show yourself to be a good team player by crediting co-workers for all their contributions. To distance yourself from failure, pick one that occurred earlier in your career when you were still learning. Don’t blame others - simply explain how you analysed your mistake and learned from it.

8. What’s the worst problem you’ve ever faced?

Here the interviewer is offering you the two ways to trip yourself up. First of all, the question doesn’t confine itself to the workplace, so there is temptation to reveal a personal problem. Don’t! Restrict yourself to employment matters only.

Second, you are being asked to reveal a weakness or error again. You must have a good response ready for this question, one which shows how well you reacted when everything depended on it.

Always show a problem you have solved and concentrate your answer on the solution not the problem.

9. What are your strengths?

Your answer should highlight the qualities that will help you succeed in this particular job. (Back up each point with something specific). Give examples and quantify how your strengths benefited your previous employers. You should also demonstrate reliability, and the ability to stick with a difficult task yet change courses rapidly when required.

10. How would you describe a typical day in your current job?

You are eager to look good but don’t make the common mistake of exaggerating your current position. Mentioning some of the routine tasks in your day adds realism to your description and show that you don’t neglect important details such as paperwork. Put yourself in the interviewer’s place as your answer. When you’ve been doing a job for years it becomes second nature to you, and you must be aware of all the tasks you undertake. You should spend a few days making notes of your activities at work to regain an outsider’s perspective. Try to show that you make good use of your time, that you plan before you begin your work and that you review your achievements at the end of it.

## Points you do and don't want to convey

In the course of an interview you'll be asked many questions, like those above, all designed to highlight preferred personality traits, control, confidence, ability to think under pressure and verbal communication. The biggest mistakes interviewees make are:

- Displaying lack of preparation through failure to answer obvious questions easily
- Waffling i.e. not keeping questions to the point
- Answering a question that wasn't asked
- Not listening to the question properly

In considering your answer to every interview question, try to include points which indicate to the interviewer the sort of person you really are. Rarely will you be given the chance to list your strengths and attributes directly - attempt to weave them into your responses.

The points you will want to put across will include:

- **Talkative** - You can communicate at all levels but you don't waffle.
- **Confident** - You appear in control but are not arrogant.
- **Motivated** - You get things done, you are enthusiastic, you are not afraid to ask.
- **Energetic** - You are someone who always gives more than the basic minimum in your work.
- **Determined** - When the going gets tough ... So do you!
- **Reliable** - You always ensure the tasks get done, and done well.
- **Analytical** - You consider the alternatives before reaching a conclusion.
- **Dedicated** - No matter what it takes, you'll put in whatever is necessary to do the job.
- **Listener** - You know that the more you listen, the more you understand.
- **Honest** - The buck stops with for your own actions, and you're not afraid to own up to bad decisions as well as accept praise for good ones.
- **Ethical** - You make decisions in the best interest of your employer, not yourself.
- **Efficient** - You don't waste money, effort, resources time.

## Competency Based Interviews

An alternative type of interview may be a competency based interview. A competency interview (also referred to as a situational, behavioural or competency based interview) is a style of interview which is increasingly used by companies.

Companies are using competency based interviews as part of the selection process for experienced recruitment, as it can give valuable insights into an individual's preferred style of working and help predict behaviours in future situations.

Questions about your industry experience will not be part of a competency interview. Instead interviewers will pose questions that ask you to demonstrate that you have a particular skill or a "key competency" the firm is looking for. You will be asked to do this using situational examples from their life experiences, to illustrate your personality, skill set and individual competencies to the interviewer.

Competency interviews may also feature questions that probe candidates on their knowledge of the company and industry applied to. This type of interview question tests candidates on their motivation and commitment to career.

*"Describe two situations where you have had to work as part of a team."*

When asked a question like this, you should be able to talk for several minutes about your participation to a particularly strong team you have been part of in the past and how your sense of teamwork helped lead a task or project to successful completion.

You should have an idea before the interview of the experiences from your most recent role that you could use as examples to demonstrate the key competencies of the role to which you are applying. You are likely to have to provide at least two examples for each competency during your interview.

It is quite acceptable to ask for and to use a few moments of thinking time before answering competency questions. When you have thought of a good example to use, continue with your answer.

The following would be an example of a competency based question:

*"Tell me about a time when you failed to complete a task or project on time, despite intending to do so?"*

In your response your interviewer will want to find out how you manage your time during difficult tasks and the reason why you failed to meet your deadline on this occasion (and consequently a reason why you may fail to meet deadlines in the future).

Interviewers using behaviour-based interviewing techniques such as competency questions are likely to probe for additional details during your responses. Always make sure you provide concise, highly specific answers that are well explained, thought out and detailed.

Although your interviewer will at times ask you to give examples of past failures (such as the question above) rather than achievements, you must adequately justify why you failed to complete tasks, and defend the reasons for your failure. It is a good idea to justify failure by giving examples of positive personality traits. Consider the following answers

- Describe a time when you used initiative to resolve a particularly difficult problem.
- Give an example of a time when you made a decision without having all the necessary information. What was the outcome?
- Give me an example of an important goal you achieved and how you delivered it.
- Describe the most difficult project you were involved with and the obstacles you overcame.
- Give me an example of a difficult situation you faced with an employee, and tell me how you solved it.
- Tell me about a time when you showed good leadership.

We have outlined below some example competency based questions:

#### **Leadership**

- Why are you a good leader?
- What type of leadership style do you adopt?
- How would those you have lead describe you?

#### **Delegating**

- Explain a mistake you have made in delegating- what were the consequences?
- In what instance would you delegate a task?
- What are the advantages of delegating?

#### **Conflict & Pressure**

- Give an example of an instance when you have had an argument with someone at work? What was the outcome?
- How do you react if your boss asks you to do something which conflicts with your own deadlines?
- Team Work
- Do you prefer to work alone or in a group?
- When you joined your last company, how did you get on with your co-workers?

#### **Staff Motivation and Development**

- What makes a good manager?
- How you motivate staff?

#### **Personal Motivation**

- What are the three most important events in your career to date?
- What are your standards of success in your job?

#### **Decision Making**

- What is the toughest decision you have had to make while at your present company? Tell me about it. What alternatives did you consider?
- What has been the effect of your decisions on others and what was the wider impact?

## The Interview Itself

### Arrival

Make sure that you know the address of the organisation concerned and the name of the person whom you are to meet. Check the location on a map in advance; it may be useful to make the journey to the company prior to the interview in order to avoid any embarrassing and damaging late arrivals.

Try to arrive a few minutes early. This will give you time to compose yourself and to gain a general overview of the organisation. There may be employee newsletters, annual reports or a collection of press cuttings that might be worth a quick glance.

Be particular in your personal appearance. As the saying goes "First impressions last!":

- Wear your smartest most conservative suit
- Your hair must be smart (and trimmed if facial!)
- Keep jewellery to a minimum
- Go easy on the perfume, ladies and men avoid the after shave!
- Don't smoke or drink before the interview
- Make sure your nails are clean and neat
- Your shoes should always be clean and shiny!

It is also worth noting that secretaries and receptionists may well be asked subsequently for their impression of you and should therefore be treated with warmth and politeness.

It helps when sitting in reception to breathe deeply and slowly for a minute or two. You'll find this reduces your tension. Remind yourself about the good things you're going to say about yourself and their organisation. Tell yourself the interview is going to go well.

### Meeting The Interviewer

Make sure you look at the interviewer when you are introduced, and that your handshake is firm.

Beware of overdoing the charm and flattery. Admiring objects in the room in the hope of enticing the interviewer on to a favourite hobby horse can be dangerous. Interview rooms are often borrowed and pictures on the wall, are in any case, often placed there by property managers not the interviewers!

#### Always:

- Make eye contact throughout the interview
- Be aware of your hands and arms
- Take an upright posture
- Communicate and try to convey your interest in the position you are being interviewed for

When asked if you have any questions remember the interview is a two way process and you must weigh up the position so that in the event of you receiving an offer you may decide firstly whether it would suit you, and secondly how it compares with any other offers you received. If the interviewer does not cover these matters in his/her talk you may care to ask:

- What is the most important element of this position?
- What is the most important thing you are looking for from the successful candidate?
- What characteristics do you need to be successful in this role?
- Who would I be reporting to?
- How many people would I be working with/supporting/managing?
- How does this role fit in within the business?
- With the hope to do my best in this role, what would be my long term potential in this company?
- Could you describe the general company culture?
- Is time allocated for, or encouragement given to undertake further training?
- How is performance measured? Are staff given copies of their review?
- How often are salaries reviewed, and on what basis?

## The Conclusion

"Anything else to ask?" is usually a sign that the interview is nearing an end. This is the final chance to ask questions that need answering and which at the same time allow you to emphasize your strengths and show your interest in the post.

Make sure you don't leave the interview without knowing when you will get a decision or if there will be further interviews.

Remember, it was only an interview. By remaining calm and collected you've done well. If you were unsure of the answers to a question - don't panic. It's always better to admit you're unsure of something but that you will now do your best to address the issue. Honesty is always the best policy. Being positive, confident and pleasant means you will have done your best!

### Finally, Good Luck!

Please remember to ring your consultant following the interview to give your feedback. It is very important that we speak to you as soon as possible so that we can convey your interest on to the client.



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