

Interviewing Like a Pro

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There is a great deal of information regarding interviews on the internet and on social media sites! You can find good questions to prepare, advice on how to dress and even some tips on body language.

So why another article on the subject?

Well it's simple! In the world we live in today we, as office professionals, will be changing jobs more often than ever before in the history of our profession. Traditionally the executive secretary or PA would occupy the same position with the same boss for many years, but that is no longer the reality for most of us.

What has changed?

The new economic reality means that companies are downscaling and optimizing. You may be retrenched, be asked to reapply for your current position or suddenly be expected to report to multiple bosses (which may force you into looking for a new job).

The other side of the coin is that your boss may abruptly leave the company and this may influence you to put your CV into the market. You may simply work for a large organization and be looking for a new challenge internally.

Perhaps you are currently unemployed or a first-time candidate, whatever the case may be, we all need to know the basics of interviewing like a pro.

Whatever your reasons are, interviewing is usually stressful and the crux of the matter is that if you don't interview well your career path will be extremely limited.

What follows is my attempt to share with you some of what I have learnt over the years about interviewing.

Top tips for interviewing like a pro:

1 Arrive on time

Arriving late is the single worst mistake you can make as a candidate (especially if you



are interviewing for a position as an office professional). How can they trust you to manage someone's diary if you can't be on time for something as important as a job interview? This is a huge no-no!

2 Ensure that you dress the part

It is not the cost of your outfit that is important, what is critical is that you look groomed and professional. Your outfit should never be too revealing or too unique (people do judge a book by its cover). Avoid any item of clothing, jewelry or make-up that could draw attention away from you by being too bright

or jingly. The key here is for you to shine, not for your look to overpower the panel. Don't upstage yourself! Another good tip is to wear something you are comfortable and confident in. If you are wearing shoes that hurt you or a shirt that you keep fiddling with you will come across as uncomfortable or distracted. Stick to a classic and basic outfit.

3 Greeting and eye contact can seal the deal or wreck an interview

As a PA or Executive Secretary much more is expected from us when it comes to greeting, eye contact and body language at an interview

than of any other type of candidate. The panel will look at you and analyze how you interact with strangers (as this will be part of your job in the future). It will be expected when you meet your boss' guests that you are able to make them feel welcome. Coming across as too nervous when being introduced to the panel can have a devastating effect on the rest of your interview. Greet the panel confidently and, if culturally appropriate, make eye contact and acknowledge everyone on the panel.

4 Your voice, accent and elocution is critical

As with your greeting, your voice is also of particular interest when you are being interviewed. If you speak too softly you will immediately create an impression of being timid. If you speak too quickly you come across as overly nervous. Slang is also inappropriate!

The panel will think about how you will sound on the phone and how customers and others will perceive you when they hear you speak. In our profession we are often the first line of contact that the world has with our organizations, so the image you project will be important and you will be rated on it!

5 Think before you speak, take a breath!

As the panel begins to ask questions, take time to think about your answer. They are not grading you on the fastest answer; they are however trying to gauge your intelligence and experience. Don't let yourself down by talking too fast, rambling on or by not thinking about the question and what they are really trying to find out. Try to give each panel member eye contact as you answer, focusing on one person only can alienate the rest of the panel.

6 Be confident, not arrogant

The trick to interviewing well is to come across as competent and confident. Remember that if you don't think you are the best candidate, neither will the panel. You do however need to be careful that you do not project too much confidence (sometimes we over-compensate if we are nervous) and this will translate as arrogance to others. Try to be self-aware and

genuine! This position is yours to lose so embrace the opportunity with positivity and the correct level of poise and confidence.

7 Realize that you have something of worth to show the panel

As you walk into the interview I want you to realize that you would not have been shortlisted and invited if they were not already interested in you. They saw something on your CV that got their attention. Use this as a source of comfort and to ease your nerves. They want to meet you; they want to hear what you have to say. Even if you don't get this specific position you now have more experience of the interview process and you can refine your approach for the next one.

8 Realize that you may not be what the panel is looking for on that specific day

If you are not successful you need to realize that the panel was looking for a specific set of attributes on that specific day for a specific person and you were simply not a match. Don't take this personally; don't allow this to affect your confidence, your energy or self-esteem. The more desperate and despondent you become the less likely you will be to get any position. Don't let a temporary set-back cloud the next opportunity!

9 Bring your CV to life when you are asked questions

Try to avoid cheesy and over-used answers when the panel is asking you questions. Try to make an impression. What is different about you? What do you really want the panel to know? What makes you special? The years of PAs interviewing for positions and trying to be as generic as possible is long gone. There are too many excellent office professionals in the market. You want them to remember you!

10 Do some homework

There are many different styles of interview, an example is Targeted Selection. Try to find out how the interview itself will be structured, how formal/informal? How many panel members? Will there be a case study? Who will be on the panel?

Talk to others who currently work for or have interviewed at the company. It is also essential to research the company/potential new boss and prepare a few intelligent questions from your side (should you suddenly be provided with an opportunity to ask questions)

11 Do a mock interview to prepare yourself

Preparation is the key to anything in life, so too with an interview. Ask your friend, husband/wife or colleague to assist you with a mock interview to get you into the right frame of mind, a dress rehearsal if you will. The more challenging the questions, the more you will think about and formulate good answers. This will assist you when you need to think on your feet at the actual interview and will ease your nerves. It will also allow you to get input from your "interview buddy" about how you are responding and how you are coming across!

12 Do not fake it

Remember to be truthful. Sell only what you are and what you are willing to do. If you don't like working with figures don't say you do! If you have a small child and can't work late regularly, then don't say you are okay with it. Six months down the line when you already have the job you will realize that you should have turned it down and it is not the right position for you (and you may have missed a better opportunity). Be sensible and be truthful, it is easier to walk away from an interview than walk away from a job.

13 Your follow-up

After the interview it is permissible to follow up with the recruiter. Just make sure you let enough time lapse. Don't create the perception that you are desperate. Another great tip is, that if you are unsuccessful ask for feedback so that you can improve your interviewing skills. Most recruiters are happy to do so!

Best of luck with your interviews going forward and remember to walk tall and to shine in your next interview!

about the author



Anel Martin CAP-OM, South African PA of the Year 2011/2012, PA to Tirelo Sibisi, Managing Executive HR, Telkom. Anel currently works in the office of Managing Executive for HR Business Partners at Telkom and was a finalist in the National Office Professional of the 2009/10. Anel has CAP-OM and a Business Management Diploma. She was the Head of the Academy of Excellence Committee of PAFSA (2011/12) and a member of OPSA and the IAAP. She is a Task Team member of the International Year of the Secretary 2014 Planning Committee. Webmistress and content owner of the Telkom Secretaries Toolbox and is also a Telkom Brand Champion and a mentor, she presents regularly across the country, with international speaking engagements confirmed for 2013. Anel writes for *Career Success, A-Z* and *Executive Secretary Magazine* on a regular basis

