

## Network to Work Meeting – June 2019

### RESOURCE DOCUMENT

## PREPARING FOR A JOB INTERVIEW – TIPS AND QUESTIONS

### *Interview Tips for Older Workers*

For an older worker, it can be daunting to head for an interview, especially if it is your first interview in a long time. How have the interview rules changed? And what kind of candidate is the interviewer looking for? The hypothetical perfect candidate in the interviewer's mind is often a *hard-working, eager-to-learn, street-savvy, not-set-in-one's-ways type, who is half your age.*

This situation, of course, can be quite discouraging for the older job seeker who remembers his or her long ago, youthful working self. This discouragement can easily turn into a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure. So, in order to avoid such self-sabotage, ***the key is to present yourself as an optimal combination of what you are and what the employer is looking for: an energetic, lifetime learner who knows his or her field, keeps up with technology and can communicate effectively with colleagues of any age.***

Here's how to prepare to make the best impression at your interview.

#### **1. Assess your Attitude**

"Attitude is the maker or breaker in an interview," says Sarah Hightower Hill, CEO of Chandler Hill Partners, a career search strategies firm. "A combination of ego and fear most often causes older job seekers to fail." Be careful not to let your ego show with an attitude or words such as, "I've done your job before, so you won't have to tell me what to do".

Conversely, to overcome the intense interview anxiety you may feel, you need to realistically evaluate your standing in the labor marketplace while also taking pride in your skills, talents and all that you offer. Keeping your focus on this – rather than your age difference – should help you to feel confident as you interview. Also, you can find confidence in looking at the commonalities you may share with the interviewer, regardless of your ages. Your online research may have revealed some areas of common interest or experience.

#### **2. Research the Company's Needs**

Before you go on a job interview, it's important to find out as much as you can about not only the job, but also the company. Company research is a critical part of interview preparation. It will help you prepare to both

**answer interview questions** about the company *and* to **ask the interviewer questions** about the company. You will also be able to find out whether the company and the company culture are a good fit for you.

Learning about your prospective employer will also allow you to speak about how your experience will bring maximum value to the company. Older workers aren't always savvy about the need for, and ways to conduct a deep search for relevant information about the position, the company, the industry and even the interviewer. Thankfully, many diverse resources are available on the Internet. Here are a few:

#### Employer web sites

Your prospective employer's web site is the best place to see the organization as it wants to be seen. In addition to the company's annual report – if they have one - also look for a "press room" or "company news" page that links to recent news releases. As you take in all this information, think about how the open position, as detailed in the job posting, relates to what you are learning.

One of the most valuable things you can do is to use the website's search function to look up information on the hiring manager and other identified interviewers. You may find biography pages or press releases that give you insight into their most visible activities at the company or elsewhere. Here you may find some things you have in common with these interviewers.

#### Independent Sources

General-interest and business publications and web sites can also be researched to see what they are writing about the employer and your field of interest. Search national publications for news on major corporations; use hometown newspapers to learn about small businesses and how big businesses interact with their local communities. Local newspapers for every state can be accessed via "Refdesk" at <http://refdesk.com/paper.html>.

#### Google

Doing a Google search is one of the quickest ways to find information on a company. It might reveal something you would have otherwise missed. On the results page, be sure to click on the "All" results category as well as the "News" results category. And to fine tune your search, put the full name of the organization in quotes.

It's also not a bad idea to Google yourself as well. Your interviewer will most likely have Googled you and looked for your activity on social media; this way you will have a heads up on what s/he may have read.

### **3. Find out the Interview Process and Format**

#### The Interviewing Process - What to Expect

The interview process can vary widely based on industry, occupation, employer and position. Generally, the higher paid the job, the longer and more rigorous the interviewing and selection process:

- a. **Hourly Wage Positions** (*administrative, clerical, labor, skilled trades, personal service, or technical*)  
Be prepared for a "phone screening" interview followed up by an in-person interview at the employer's facility. The interview could include skill, capability and "personality" tests. You may interview with a Human Resources recruiter, your potential supervisor and possibly co-workers. It would be unusual to be asked to do follow up interviews, but it could happen.

- b. **Salaried Positions** (professional, senior technical, sales, supervisory, or managerial)  
Expect a lengthier phone screen and interview schedule including follow up interviews at a later date. There could be some knowledge and skill testing and an increased likelihood for "personality" testing. You could encounter "panel" interviews with two or more people on the employer's side of the table. This could be for efficiency or to gauge your ability to speak to a group.
- c. **Higher-Paid, Salaried Positions** (senior professional, upper-management, or executive)  
You should expect rigorous, lengthy and repeated interviews spanning several visits.

#### The Interview Format:

Interviews can be conducted in a number of different ways. There are telephone interviews and screenings. Initial interviews. Behavioral interviews. Panel interviews. Brainteaser interviews. Therefore, it's helpful to understand the interview format in advance. Ask the employer, "What can you tell me about the interview? Who will I be interviewing with? Will I meet with them individually, or in a group?"

**The Initial Phone Conversation** - Increasingly, employers may first want to speak with you on the phone. The call may be as simple as confirming your interest and continued availability or it may be a rigorous screening interview. Often, it may be simply to schedule an in-person interview.

If the employer contacts you for an initial interview over the phone, don't feel obligated to launch right into the conversation then and there unprepared. You don't want the recruiter to think you have just been sitting waiting for their call. It's perfectly fine to say "I don't have the time for a lengthy conversation right now but would be available ("later today" or "perhaps tomorrow morning").

During this initial phone interview, take the time to ask some questions and get your bearings about the follow up, in-person interview. Here are some good examples:

- a. What did you find of interest in my application?
- b. Who will I be speaking with? (Get their name, title, address, phone and email)
- c. How much time will be needed?
- d. Will there be tests or on-the-job trials (i.e. Text editing, keyboarding, business math, etc.)
- e. Where and when will the interview take place?
- f. What's the appropriate attire?
- g. What is the interviewing and screening process?
- h. What would you recommend I do for preparation?

**Personality Tests** - Some employers use standardized testing to evaluate personality, personal attributes and even behaviors (at the extreme, some employers use handwriting analysis.) There are often no absolutely "right" answers to such tests. Be honest, be yourself, but most importantly, think what answer the employer would prefer - the most socially acceptable answer.

You can find tips on how to prepare for the different types of interviews at <https://www.monster.com/career-advice/article/prepare-for-different-interview-types>.

#### **4. Review the Job Posting, your Application & Cover Letter, and your Resume**

An important part of interview preparation is to take the time to analyze the job posting, if you have it. Make sure the elements and requirements of the job are clear in your mind. As you review the job description, consider what the company is seeking in a candidate. Make a list of the skills, knowledge, and professional and personal qualities that are required by the employer and are critical for success in the job.

Then, make a list of your skills and talents and match them to the job requirements. Pay careful attention to how you presented yourself in your application and cover letter. What skills and experience did you promote? How did you sell yourself and your past work experiences as the solution to the organization's needs? How does your Summary of Qualifications on your resume match the job description? Having a solid handle on this information will allow you to speak confidently and solidly about the value you will bring to the organization and why you are the ideal candidate.

#### **5. Prepare Questions for the Formal Interview**

Prepare questions you want to ask during interviews. Focus on positives such as "Will I be able to use the wide range of my abilities in this position?" or "I see from your website that you encourage internal advancement - would there be opportunities for me to grow with you?"

*(Examples of good interview questions can be found at the end of this Resource Document.)*

#### **6. Practice Interviewing**

Review common job interview questions and think about how you will respond to them. Then, take the time to practice answering these interview questions with a friend or family member; this will help you to prepare and practice answers and to feel more relaxed going into the interview.

Also, be ready to engage the interviewer. You want there to be a give and take in the conversation, so you're building a relationship with the interviewer rather than just providing rote responses to questions.

*(Examples of common interview questions can be found in the next segment of this Resource Document.)*

#### **7. Can you Speak the Interviewer's Language?**

One important way to showcase your value is to reinforce the experience you already have in this particular job field. Using the language and lingo of that industry in your interview demonstrates your knowledge and initiative. To stay up to date, read industry publications and go on informational interviews.

#### **8. Look the Part**

Older workers know physical presentation matters, so take a look in the mirror -- literally and imaginatively -- before heading out for that first interview. Pay close attention to your hair, grooming, interview clothes, posture, handshake and smile.

Be neat, tidy and well-groomed. Dress "one click" above what the employer tells you is appropriate attire. Make sure that your clothes fit well, are age appropriate, and aren't dated. If you look sharp, you'll feel more confident - and it's a difference that will impress interviewers.

Prepare your interview outfit the day before, making sure that it is clean and ironed. Regarding your hairstyle and makeup, be mindful that they, too, are part of the impression you will make. If possible, reduce or eliminate the gray in your hair.

## 9. Interview Day Basics

- a. **Rest** - Get plenty of rest and eat well before the interview - maybe a little exercise the day before.
- b. **Promptness** - Get there early; never be late or "just in time". To ensure your timeliness, scope out the location and print out directions in advance. If possible, do a dry run in advance to confirm how long it will take to get there.
- c. **To bring or not to bring** - Prepare a small three-ring binder with material about the employer, extra copies of your resume, a list of references, a list of questions to ask, copies of your work, credentials, certificates, and other items from your Employment Portfolio. Also, don't forget something to write with.

Don't go in with a big bag or briefcase, lunch bag, newspapers or other "stuff". Also, don't bring and leave out a cup of coffee or other beverage, gum, or your cellphone. If you do have your cellphone with you, be sure it is turned off.

Remember, simple, efficient and organized is the sense you want to convey.

- d. **Job # 1 - Connect with the interviewer!** Don't jump right into the interview. Find a topic or use small talk to get at ease with the interviewer and vice versa. Ask them something about their background - it can be very flattering.
- e. **Demonstrate Good Etiquette** - Proper interview etiquette is important. Remember to greet the receptionist, your interviewer, and everyone else you meet politely, pleasantly, and enthusiastically. During the interview, watch your body language; shake hands firmly and make eye contact as you articulate your points. Pay attention, be attentive, and look interested. This is something you can work on in your practice interviews.
- f. **"Would You Like Something to Eat?"** - If offered a beverage, it's most polite to accept (and it slows things down a little). If having a meal during an interview, pick something easy to eat and never, ever an alcoholic drink.
- g. **Know Who You Spoke With** - Don't leave the interview without the name, title, address, phone number and email of every interviewer, even people you meet briefly. Ask for a business card.

## 10. Follow up with a Thank You note

Follow up a job interview with a thank you note reiterating your interest in the job. Send a separate note to each individual interviewer. Consider your thank you letter as a follow-up "sales" letter. Restate why you want the job, what your qualifications are, how you might make significant contributions, and so on. This thank you letter is also the perfect opportunity to discuss anything of importance that your interviewer neglected to ask or that you neglected to answer as thoroughly, or as well, as you would have liked.

# The Tough Questions often Posed to Older Workers

Older job seekers are often anxious about age-related questions. Well, if you got the interview, they're probably going to meet you and despite your best effort to come across as age 39, it's time to face the music. Our advice? Be proud of your age, your lifetime of achievement and wealth of capabilities. Here's how to address some classic unsettling questions:

## 1. Do you think you're overqualified?

This question could—but not necessarily—mean you're too old for the job or hint that you want more money. Another possible thought behind this question could be that you've held bigger positions and you might leave once you find a better job. Or it could imply that you'd get bored with this job within a few months.

The point here is that you simply cannot answer this question before finding out what the interviewer is actually after. So, your answer might be, *"I'm glad you raised this issue. It gives me a chance to deal with it objectively."* And then you can say, *"I suspect you mention this because you may think that [list here some of the possibilities mentioned earlier]."* Make sure you end your sentence with *"Is that it"?*

The interviewer's answer will reveal the intention behind the question. Now that you know the intention, you can provide an answer or an example of a success story from the past that is relevant to the question. *Keep the focus on your capabilities, knowledge, skills and achievements. If appropriate, explain why you want this job and will not jump to a more challenging or better paying job.*

## 2. Why do you want to work?

This is a popular question. Tell the recruiter precisely what your motivations are to secure this job and state the number of years you plan to work (ideally at least five).

## 3. Where do you hope to be in 5 years?

The honest, if unspoken, answer might be: *"Alive and playing on a beach somewhere with my grandkids."* While the question is intended to assess an applicant's ambitions or evaluate their attitude toward company loyalty, it is pretty much one that reeks of ageism.

A more appropriate answer is something like, *"I am driven to be the best at what I do, and I want to work someplace where I will have opportunities to develop my skills, take on interesting projects, and work with people I can learn from."*

## 4. Why are you unemployed?

Be ready to answer this. The best answer is always *"I am looking for growth"* or *"our company had a staff reduction"* or *"I took an early retirement package and want to do something new."* If you were terminated, answer truthfully but carefully.

## 5. What pay are you looking for?

Answer with something like this. *"I am certain you have a pay structure and you are concerned about internal equity. I am confident that if you make a reasonable offer, I will be inclined to respect the proposed salary."* If they repeat the question, tell them your lowest acceptable salary - consider yourself stuck. The alternative is to say *"I believe it is premature to talk about pay level"*.

## 6. Are you in good health?

This is an illegal question. If you have a visible chronic illness or disability, let them draw their own conclusion. Focus on your motivation, stamina and energy.

## 7. How old are you?

This question violates the Age Discrimination in Employment Act, yet there are hiring managers unfamiliar with the Act who still ask candidates their age. There are a few ways to respond:

- a. Try to shift the focus back to your experience, but focus on your recent experience, not your entire working career. You might say, *"I don't think age is important, so let me explain how my experience makes me a great candidate."*
- b. You could say, *"Can you help me understand how my age is relevant to the job requirements?"* There may be a plausible answer, such as the fact that the job requires heavy lifting, which you could then address directly.
- c. If the interviewer persists in asking the question, you could be direct about the law, but a confrontational response could negatively impact your chances. You could say something like, *"As a person with lengthy work experience, I know many organizations have concerns about older employees, but asking about age is prohibited by the ADEA. Is there something more relevant to the job that you are interested in knowing?"*

## 8. What year did you graduate from college?

This question is an indirect effort to determine a person's age, and is not illegal. In your answer, try to focus on your education, not your era. *"As you can see on my resume, I graduated with a bachelor's degree in communications. Would you like to hear more about my studies?"*

## 9. Why do you want to work here?

The truthful answer might well be: *"Because after two years of being unemployed, I'm about to lose my mind . . ."* However, view this question as a test of your knowledge about the company. *Speak in specifics about the company's values, mission, reputation, product, etc.* Avoid saying things like *"The office is super close to my house,"* or *"I really could use health coverage."*

## 10. How do you see yourself fitting in to the company culture?

For older workers, this question is an eye-roller. Not since kindergarten has *"works well with others"* counted for so much. Today, it is a prominent part of the hiring process as employers look for workers who will collaborate and work together as a team. And how that plays out in reality is unfortunately this: ***If the corporate culture doesn't value experience, older workers have no currency to trade.*** If most of the company's workers are young and single, few have kids and like to end the day schmoozing around the free beer taps, and if management threw a 65-year-old man into the mix, would it be like hanging out with Dad?

So, before you show up for a job interview, figure out the corporate culture and consider how you might adapt to it. How do the executives and managers dress? One of the worst feelings is being interviewed by someone younger than your kids. Hold your own, but understand the stakes.

#### **11. What are your strongest skills?**

Here the interviewer may be testing you on whether you're up to speed with today's rapidly changing technology. In your answer, stress the computer skills you have and – if this is true - how extensively you've been using technology skills at your past jobs or training.

#### **12. How have you kept your skills fresh?**

Use this question as an opportunity to showcase your skills and sell yourself. Talk about specific things you have done to upgrade your skills. This might include taking online courses, obtaining certifications, subscribing to e-newsletters, following industry leaders on social media, attending networking events, or volunteering.

#### **13. Do you know how to use (this) state-of-the-art technology?**

A good answer is something along the lines of, *"I'm very comfortable learning and using new technology."* If you don't know a particular software program, say, *"I'm not familiar with that software, but I'm a rapid learner. I'm confident I can pick up whatever it takes to perform the job."* Be sure to share an example of how you have recently learned or applied technology.

#### **14. What can you tell me about yourself?**

Obviously there is much you could say, but the key is knowing exactly what the interviewer is asking for. A recitation of your resume? A description of your hobbies? You could ask for clarification, but you could also use this question as your opportunity to set the tone of the interview and to emphasize the points you most want the interviewer to know about you. So, don't recite your resume or discuss your hobbies, but rather *provide a concise, enthusiastic response that summarizes your big-picture fit for the job. Here is the time to share information about your proudest achievements and goals.*

#### **15. What are your interests outside your career?**

This question could be intended to assess how active or energetic you are, so try to speak to both intellectual activities *and* physical ones. A good answer might be something like, *"I enjoy intellectual activities such as reading or watching TV, but above all, I jog on a regular basis, and I bicycle on weekends."* Physical activities prove vitality and high energy.

#### **16. A lot of our employees are fresh out of school. Does that bother you?**

If you are interviewing at a startup or other company with many young professionals, you should be prepared to explain why you look forward to being a senior staff member. Here's a good response: *"Quite the opposite: that thrills me. I welcome the chance to work alongside and learn from younger people, and I have a feeling they'll learn from me as well. I know that requires some humility, and I'm comfortable with that."*

Another good response is this: *"I know that diverse teams with respect to age, culture, and gender perform better, and I enjoy being part of a high-performing team."*

#### **17. Do you have any questions for me?**

This is the time to ask "what's next?". What is the process, what else might I expect, how long will it take? Express your gratitude for the interview, enthusiasm for the position, and when you will be available to begin. Do NOT ask about benefits.

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## Questions Candidates Should Ask in Job Interviews

Interviewers will be focused on finding out if you're a right fit for the position, but it's also important to decide if the company is a right fit for you. Have a list of questions ready to help you through your next interview:

### ***Your role***

Be careful not to ask questions already answered in the job description. It's important go beyond those general duties to understand everything the job entails.

- Can you offer specific details about the position's day-to-day responsibilities?
- What would my first week at work look like?
- What do you hope I will accomplish in this position?

Proceed with caution: If rather than going into detail about the primary responsibilities listed in the job description, the employer rambles off many more duties — they may be asking you to take on more than you initially thought.

### ***Getting to know the interviewer***

Most likely, the interviewer is the first contact you'll have at this company — they could even be your future boss. Asking questions can help you understand their attitude, company values, and where the company's future is heading.

- What do you enjoy most about working here?
- What goals do you have for the company, yourself, and employees over the next five years?

Proceed with caution: Be wary of leaders who have trouble opening up or don't seem passionate about their company and team.

### ***Management's style***

What type of management style do you need to reach the height of your potential? Now's the best time to see if the company's leaders align with your expectations.

- How do leaders encourage employees to ask questions?
- How do leaders set employees up for success?
- How does employee feedback get incorporated into day-to-day operations?
- How does management deliver negative feedback to employees?

Proceed with caution: Employers who can't list how they encourage employees and set them up for success may not deliver the support you're looking for in a company.

### ***Company culture***

From benefits and perks to the ways employees interact with each other, not meshing with a company's culture can put a roadblock on your path to success.

- What is your work culture like?
- How would you describe the work environment here?
- What benefits and perks does the company offer?
- How frequently do employees make themselves available outside of normal working hours?

Proceed with caution: Listen closely to how the interviewer describes the company's benefits and environment to be sure it's the right culture for your personality and working style.

### ***Company reputation***

After doing some research, you should already know a few things about the company's reputation. Now it's time to dig a little deeper to make sure this is a place where you'll thrive.

- What's your mission statement?
- Why do most employees leave the company?
- How would employees describe the company and its leaders?
- What are the company's biggest problems? How are they overcoming them?
- What do you want the company to be known for among employees — past, present, and future?

Proceed with caution: Quality leaders will be the first to admit that their company isn't perfect. Interviewers who claim they would change nothing might be failing to grow and make positive changes.

### ***Performance measurements***

Knowing a company's expectations and how they measure goals before accepting a job offer helps you decide if their style matches with what motivates you.

- How are employees recognized for their hard work?
- How involved are employees in the structuring of their own goals and tasks?
- How often do you evaluate employee performance?

Proceed with caution: Wanting constant updates and control over employee tasks are warning signs of a micromanager.

### ***Future co-workers***

The employees at this organization could be your next team. Make sure you're positive this is a group you want to be a part of.

- Can you tell me about the team I'll be working with?
- How competitive are your employees?
- How do you develop teamwork skills among employees?

Proceed with caution: A competitive environment can be fun and motivating, but a lack of teamwork in the office could point to a cutthroat company.

### ***Opportunities for growth***

What is your ultimate career goal? Set yourself up for success by finding out how far this new position could take you on your career path.

- What type of educational/training opportunities does the company offer?
- What advancement opportunities are available?
- How do leaders promote employee growth and success?

Proceed with caution: If an interviewer is unable to share how you can advance within the company, chances are you might not be able to grow at the rate you want.

### ***Moving forward***

Don't leave the interview with any questions unanswered — for you or the interviewer. This is your final opportunity to make sure you're both on the same page before you walk out the door.

- What's the next step of this process, and when can I expect to hear from you?
- Is there any other information I can provide you with?
- Would you like to see more examples of my work?

Proceed with caution: Interviewers who don't have a lot to offer on next steps may already have another candidate in mind or might not be in a big rush to hire. Remember to stay positive and continue to job search until you're officially hired.

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### **Adapted from:**

"The 45 Questions you Should Ask in Every Job Interview", from *Glassdoor.com*, by Heather Huhman, January 25, 2018  
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