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This booklet is for anyone who would like to improve their confidence and skills in preparing for and performing well in job interviews.

Getting invited to an interview means that you have passed the first hurdle – your application must have made a good impression. Now you need to prepare yourself for the interview to make sure that you do not waste the opportunity.

Countdown to the interview

The employer will be looking for someone who cannot only do the job, but someone that shows a real interest and commitment to the organisation itself. You may have applied to several organisations for different roles, but you need to show to the employer who has invited you for an interview that it is *this* role and *this* organisation above all others that you want to work within.

Do your homework...

In order to be fully prepared for the interview, it is important to research and get as much information about the organisation and the role itself. This will prepare you for any possible questions that you may be asked. As a result, this will help you feel more confident attending the interview. This research also helps you determine whether this is an organisation and a role that you would like to work within, if you were successful in being offered the job.

Many organisations will send additional information about the company at the application stage or sometimes with the interview invitation. You can also look online at the company website if they have one or obtain company literature. Two websites that you can use to help with your research is www.kellysearch.co.uk or www.kompass.co.uk. You can also use resources within large libraries.

At the application stage, most organisations will provide a job description and a person specification so that candidates have a full break down of the roles and responsibilities of the job and the skills, experiences and qualifications that the successful candidate will have. Re-read this information as well as your application form / curriculum vitae so that you are fully prepared.

Try this exercise...

After gathering this information, try and find the answers to the following questions:

What does the organisation provide / make / sell?

Who are their customers / users?

What will the job involve?

What sort of person do you think they want?

How best would your own skills fit into this role?

Then think about the interview itself...

You should be notified at the time of your invitation to attend an interview if there is anything they would like you to bring with you or if there are any tests to take. Depending on the role that you are applying for, you may be asked to demonstrate some of your skills on the day. Examples could be short presentations, typing or other IT tests, telephone skills tests, numeracy and literacy tests, problem solving exercises or other practical work based skills assessments. Prepare in advance what is being asked of you, but if unsure contact the organisation before the day to get further clarification.

Consider also *who* may be interviewing you. If it is your prospective manager, the interview may be more detailed and questions may be more specific to the role. If the personnel manager is interviewing you, it may be less direct or detailed about the role itself, but may be equally as testing. There may be more than one person interviewing you, or a small panel of interviewers. Do not panic. The interviewer will know that you will feel nervous and will want to put you at ease to get the best from you. Maintain eye contact with the person talking to you at that time. Remember also that the employer(s) who conduct the interview themselves may not do so often, so are likely to be equally as nervous as you are.

Prepare for interview questions you may get asked...

By using your research, prepare answers for some questions you may get asked. The interviewer is going to want to know not only whether you have experience and skills in particular areas, but also *examples* of when you have used these skills before. Think of examples from your working life, home life, studies and voluntary work. Particularly think of examples and instances where you have worked as part of a team, organised your time effectively to meet a deadline, a time where you have coped with pressure and what you did. If you have thought beforehand of some examples, it will help you not to panic during the interview itself and will help you appear more confident.

Possible interview questions & some suggested responses...

- **Why do you want to work here?**

You may want to mention the good reputation of the firm and that the job itself will give you the opportunity to progress in an area of work that interests you.

- **What did you do in your last job?**

Describe the main duties of your position and summarise your key achievements within the role; including any promotions and extra responsibilities you volunteered for.

- **Why did you leave your last job / why do you want to leave your current job?**

A suggestion of a suitable response could be that although you enjoy(ed) your last or current job, you are now seeking to develop or progress further in your career. Alternatively you could say that you are seeking a new career direction that you wish to transfer your existing skills to, and that this particular role interests you. Do not be tempted to talk negatively about your previous employer – remain positive about your experiences. If you did leave a job for health reasons, explain how you are now able to carry out duties effectively for this role. If you were dismissed from your last employment, say that you have taken responsibility for your actions and have learnt from the experience.

- **What experiences have you had that make you suitable for this position?**

Summarise similar jobs you have held and how those skills already developed will be advantageous for this role. Draw upon relevant experiences from your employment history, voluntary positions, study or experiences from your home life.

If this is a new area of work for you, emphasise your interest in the role and your enthusiasm and commitment to learn.

- **What do you do in your spare time?**

Try to avoid mentioning activities that may put you in a negative light; such as nightclubbing, or going out drinking with friends. Consider how a potential employer may perceive what you say about yourself.

- **What makes you a good team member? Can you give an example?**

Describe the skills you consider make an effective team player; such as good communication skills, ability to listen to others, flexibility, ability to help others and ask for help yourself. Give an example that demonstrates when you have worked effectively in a team.

- **How do you cope with pressure? Can you give an example?**

Describe a situation where you have felt under pressure and what you did to effectively cope in that stressful situation (such as keeping calm, communicating your concerns to others around you, asking for help, prioritising tasks effectively).

- **Can you recall a time where you have dealt with a difficult person?**

You could give an example of a difficult customer, or colleague and what you did to try and make the situation better (such as keeping calm, listening, acknowledging their anger, calling on a manager or supervisor to help, discussing your concerns with a line manager to help find a solution). An employer will want an employee to be able to calm difficult situations down and communicate effectively with others.

- **What are your main strengths and weaknesses?**

Talk confidentially about what you consider your strengths to be. This is your chance to sell yourself, so summarise what you consider your best points to be.

In terms of your weaknesses, do not run off a whole list of what you consider yours to be. Likewise, do not say that you do not have any weaknesses – everyone does! You need to demonstrate how you have turned a weakness into something positive. An example could be that in the past you have taken work home with you as you put pressure on yourself to fit too much into one day. However, by recognising this you are now more able to prioritise tasks effectively within the working day and you can effectively communicate with your line manager and fellow colleagues if there are any problems with the completion of daily tasks. This sort of example also shows that you are a hardworking person and would be an asset to their organisation.

- **Where do you see yourself in 5 years time?**

Explain that you would ideally like to be working for the same company but to have developed within it.

- **When would you be available to start?**

Mention your notice period with a current employer, but do not put any other barriers in the way. An employer will usually want you to start as soon as possible.

- **Do you have any questions?**

Always ask one or two questions as it shows you are interested in getting the job. Try not to ask questions relating to pay, holiday entitlement, or perks of the job, as it does not demonstrate a commitment to the role. Some examples of questions that would be suitable to ask include asking about the availability of training and development within the organisation, how the company carries out performance reviews and how soon you might hear about whether you have been successful in the role. If your mind does go blank if asked if you have any question, you could say that all your questions have been answered already during the interview.

Plan your journey...

Consider a 'dummy run' before the day of the interview itself. Remember to take into account the time of day the interview is and allow for more time if you need to travel during peak times. If necessary, ask the employer for directions / bus routes / details of parking. Again, this will help calm any nerves by knowing exactly where you are going and how long it will take.

What to wear...

This may depend upon the sort of job you will be doing, but in general you need to dress smartly and be well presented. Prepare clothing the day before the interview so you are not panicking on the day itself. If you look good, it will help you feel more confident.

Final preparations...

Before the day, gather together all your written information that you need to take to the interview – directions, interview letter and any tests asked to do. It is also a good idea to have with you a copy of your CV, references, certificates and record of achievement if you have them.

...And try to get a good night's sleep!

The day of the interview

Aim to arrive approximately 10 minutes before the time of the interview. Smile and be polite to everyone you meet as they may be asked their opinion of you.

When you arrive give your name to the receptionist or whoever is there to greet you and who you have come to see.

Try to relax and keep calm, chat to the receptionist, or whoever greets you before going into the interview; this will help calm you. Take deep breaths to help calm your nerves.

Things you should do during the interview...

- enter the room confidently
- shake hands firmly and introduce yourself

- smile
- be polite, friendly and look the interviewer in the eye as soon as you enter the room
- Sit down only when invited to
- Sit in an upright smart position, but as comfortable as possible
- check that it is fine to use cue cards or notes during the interview (if you have them)
- try to maintain eye contact with the person or people you are talking to
- look interested and ask questions as well as answering
- answer questions as fully as you can, avoid just saying 'yes' or 'no'
- provide examples to prove your skills and achievements
- tell the truth
- ask if you don't understand a question
- speak clearly
- sell yourself - get your good points across and be positive
- listen
- answer questions with examples
- keep your answers brief and to the point – do not be tempted to 'waffle'
- come prepared
- appear confident

Things you shouldn't do in an interview...

- sit down until the interviewer asks you to
- fidget or slouch in the chair or fold your arms
- swear - even mildly
- criticise your past employers
- interrupt
- draw attention to your weaknesses
- lie or be too enthusiastic - stay calm and stick to the facts

Other types of interview

An employer may use various ways to assess you for a job; it is important to be aware of how you can be assessed so that you can prepare fully for each type of interview and have the best chance of success.

Competency based interviews

Competency based interviews are designed to allow you to show your skills and experiences in the main areas of the job. You may be asked to discuss examples of your previous work and achievements. The examples you give should expand on, or be different from, those on your original application form. Before the interview, you will need to list the skills and experience

needed for the job. You should also think about what you have done that you could use as an example for each one.

Group interviews

Your interview may even be in the form of a group interview, where all the candidates are put together to perform certain exercises together as a team. You are likely to be given certain problem solving exercises. Remember that the main aim of any of these exercises is to see *how* you perform within a team. Do not be tempted to rush in and take charge of the task and the group. Be confident and not aggressive. The observer will be looking at *how* you interact with everyone, *how* you ask questions and most importantly *how* you listen to everyone else and take on their thoughts and opinions as well as your own.

Telephone interviews

Some employers may carry out a first interview over the phone. Be prepared for this by having all the job information to hand, as well as your CV. Prepare answers beforehand of possible questions (as seen earlier in the booklet). Even though the employer cannot physically see you, it is still a good idea to wear attire as you would if going to a job interview in person. This will focus your mind and help you feel more confident and professional.