

Resumes / Job interviews-Guide for applicants (George Robotham)

Background

The author has received tertiary training in Human Resource Management and training in the “Targeted Selection” method of employment interviewing. He has conducted a number of employment interviews and attended a number.

Major tip

Recruitment & selection uses “**Past behaviour predicts future behaviour**” The idea is to give plenty of examples of where in the past you have **successfully done the sort of things that you will be required to do in the new job**. Say what you did, how you did it and what were the results.

Competencies

Selection criteria for government jobs ask you to respond to typically 5 to 6 selection criteria with various competencies in different ways-Maximum of 2 pages in total, Half to one page per selection criteria, Maximum of 2 pages per selection criteria. Personally I think it is difficult to give sufficient information with the first approach and the third approach will be too much to write and read. If you are asked to use the first approach it is difficult to give many concrete examples so I would say “I will give you an example of how I did x at interview”. “I will bring an example of y along to the interview”

Some of the competencies asked for may include-

Academic or other required qualifications (Have certified copies with you)

Change management

Adheres to continuous improvement philosophy

Liaison with external bodies

Achieving excellence in ?

Leadership

Strategic thinking

Workplace Health & Safety

Knowledge and application of legislation

Advice to management

Auditing

Ability to work independently

Investigating

Negotiating

Project management

Training

Undertaking research

Customer service

Equity

Technical skills relevant to the job

Written communications skills

Oral communications skills

Computer skills

Interpersonal skills, very important, probably the most important of the lot

Flexibility

Responsible attitude

Seeks to review and improve processes

Establishes effective relationships

Willingness to commit

Managed staff

Built effective teams

Quality management

Depending what type of job you do there may be advantages in reading up on the internet and preparing a 1-2 page summary of the following-

Change management

Leadership

Strategic thinking

Workplace Health & Safety

Auditing

Negotiating

Project management

Training

Equity

Writing a resume

Insert your personal details and contact information.

Put in your career objective, do not be too specific or you will limit your chances of getting the job that does not fit the bill exactly.

Make the reader say “Wow” in the first third of the page.

If you think it is appropriate put in an overview of your employment highlighting your major strengths and major achievements.

Briefly list the jobs you have had, if there are gaps in employment use years instead of months and / or say what you did to improve your skills when you were not working.

List your qualifications / affiliations. Do not forget if you are President / Secretary / Treasurer / Coach of the local football club or a Scout leader that gives your potential employer a lot of useful information about you.

List your skills-These may be technical skills relevant to the sort of jobs you want to apply for, written communications skills, oral communications skills, computer skills, leadership skills, put a lot of work into describing your interpersonal skills as employers see this as very important. Think about the things you have done in previous jobs and put them down on paper as a guide.

List all the jobs you have had in the last 10 years describing in some detail what you did and very importantly what your achievements were. If you are just starting out in employment list your achievements from school, part-time work (Amazing how good a job at McDonalds looks if you work on it), volunteer work, other organisations you are associated with.

Carefully analyse the requirements of any position you apply for and tailor your resume to this.

Only a small percentage of jobs get advertised, you need to network widely to find the hidden jobs.

As a general rule I would keep the resume to 3 or 4 pages for people who have been in the workforce for a number of years, do not make the job of reading it too hard for the potential employer.

Very important-Get someone to proof read what you have written.

The interview

A lot of interviewers sit there dead-pan and uncommunicative, often this is because they are new to the process and very uptight about it, do not let this throw you off, just relax and be yourself.

An important tip for interviews is to project an image that you are highly interested in the job and that you are generally high energy in your approach.

The following questions are often asked in interviews in the private sector.

“What was it about the job ad that attracted you to apply?” Pretty hard to respond if you have thrown the ad away or do not have an electronic copy. Sometimes the person who wrote the job ad will be the person asking the question so a bit of stroking is appropriate. You can talk about things like a good match for your skills, opportunity to learn more about X, an industry you have experience in, an opportunity to apply solid skills learnt in another industry to a new industry, opportunity to bring

skills learnt in a high performing company to the new company, opportunity for a bit of travel if that is your thing, opportunity for lots of people interaction and so on.

“What do you know about our company?” If you have not looked up the company web-site if they have one or otherwise researched the company you are going to look like a bit of a dill at this point in time. Always refresh your memory of company details just before going to interview. Looking up the company web-site and noting the presence or absence of detail about your speciality may assist in your application and interview.

“Why have you applied for this position? / What interests you about this position?” You might be tempted to say you need a job to pay the bills but this may not necessarily be the best response. You should have got as much information about the job as you could. I would talk about having similar experience in a similar job in a similar industry or how experience in similar roles would add value to the position with them. You could also talk about the new things you are keen to learn. Some organisations are going through change processes and you could mention this is an exciting process for you or how you found working at Y with similar change processes very interesting and learnt a lot. Probably does not hurt to mention the job is close to home if appropriate. Saying how much you believe in the work the organisation does may be appropriate in some circumstances and will give a warm fuzzy feeling to the interviewers. (Most of the jobs with not for profit organisations do not pay highly but give tremendous job satisfaction)

This question looks like it is about you but they are still assessing how employing you will add value to their business.

“Where do you want to be in 5 years time?” Be careful with this one. You want to demonstrate you are keen to learn, am ambitious and want to progress in your chosen field but if you are over ambitious to the extent that your ambitions are not achievable with that employer and the employer knows you are not a really long-term prospect you may not get the job.

“Tell me about your ideal job” Much the same caution as the question above

“What makes for an ideal supervisor for you?” The most dangerous question of the lot! Impossible to predict as the personality of your potential supervisor can vary so much. I always say general things like sets high standards for themselves and me, is thorough, has good communications skills, has good interpersonal skills and a sense of humour is a bonus. Getting into the specifics too much may reveal a clash of personalities.

“Tell me about yourself”.

“Why are you the best person for this job?” / “Why should we give you this job?”

“What are your strengths?”

“What are your weaknesses?” Hint, mention a relatively minor weakness and say you have realised it is a weakness and say what you are doing to overcome the weakness.

“Describe your leadership style” Hint, good to talk about empowering people, involvement, communicating face to face etc.

“How would your friends describe you?” Conservative if not obvious another approach is required, think about what is a good answer from the employers perspective.

“How would your boss describe you?” Conservative if not obvious another approach required. Think about what is a good answer from the employers perspective.

“Describe what good communications means to you”

“What motivates you?”

“Why did you choose to start working in x field?”

“What is your most significant achievement in x field?”

“ Please give me an example of where you have gone the extra mile for a customer”

“ Please give me an example of how you prepare for a training session”

“Please give me an example of how you went about x”

“Can you describe your experience with regard to the development and review of X management system?”

“How did you contribute to accomplishing a team goal?”

“Describe how you found it difficult to build an effective working relationship with a customer / colleague?”

“Tell me what you have done to help a peer / team member to understand what knowledge / skills area to strengthen?”

“Provide an example of X documentation you have developed?”

“Tell us about a time when you faced conflicting priorities?”

“Describe the most difficult conflict you have been involved in or the toughest group you have had to work with?”

“Describe a time when you had to help a group of employees understand why a specific change process was necessary?”

Government jobs usually stick to questions based on the selection criteria. Generally I would go to the interview with 2 examples of how I had successfully implemented the things in each of the selection criteria.

Occasionally you will be asked intrusive, personal questions that infringe E.E.O. and anti-discrimination policies. I would just say I do not believe that is an appropriate question and attempt to give a general response that is appropriate. If you are really offended by the questions and think they prejudiced your prospects of employment ring the Qld. Anti-Discrimination Commission.

Towards the end of the interview ask the time frame for making a decision and appointment.

Ask when feedback from the interview will be available. Always ask for feedback, you will often not agree with it but it gives you an idea of how others perceive you.

The difficult area of money is often left to the last. The big organisations know if you pay peanuts you get monkeys. Really depends on how badly you need a job. Know the salary range for your job and place yourself so you do not undersell yourself but still have a reasonable chance of getting the job. The difficulty is that if you ask for too little employers may not take you seriously and if you ask for too much you will be too expensive.

Prior to an important job interview you should have a mock interview with friends.

It is a good idea to think about what some of the questions you are likely to be asked are and have a prepared answer in your head.

Be prepared for many interviews before you get a job nowadays, particularly if you are a mature or inexperienced applicant.

Towards the end of the interview you may be asked if you have any questions, have some prepared questions and do not take this lightly as it is an important part of the interview.

Some examples follow-

EMPLOYMENT QUESTIONS

1. What are the key responsibilities of the position? (Position description if not already received).
2. What are the main priorities for the position in the first 6 months?
3. What are the supervisor's expectations of the incumbent?
4. What are the main impediments to success the role?
5. What learning and development would occur for the incumbent?
6. What are the 3 main attributes you are seeking in X workers?
7. If you feel the climate is right you could ask why the previous person left.
8. You may wish to ask what unfinished projects there are from the person who left.
9. Can you tell me about a typical week for the person in this position?

Always a good idea to ring the contact person about the job beforehand, this may help you tailor your application to the requirements of the job.

Arrive in plenty of time to get yourself organised.

Leave home in time to allow for a flat tyre or the bus being late.

Always make an effort to appear clean & smart. Generally try to dress at a level slightly higher than the level you think the interviewers will be dressed at. Being a Queenslander and used to a casual lifestyle and dress I tend not to wear a tie. One recruitment consultant commented on this at interview and told me to ensure I wore a tie for the interview with the client. Coat & tie essential for interviews South of Tweed Heads. One interviewer commented adversely on my R.S.L. badge on my coat, stuff them! I wear a Wallabies tie, surprising how often this gets a positive response from interviewers.

You will find a number of recruitment consultants and other interviewers will have an exaggerated sense of their own importance and ability.

If you smoke lay off the fags at least 30 minutes before the interview and / or use a breath freshener. If it is a no smoking site they may wonder how you will survive all day without a smoke.

It is a really good idea not to turn up for interview drunk (saw it happen once) or otherwise smelling of grog. Some interviewers, particularly women, have an acute sense of smell.

Speak professionally, do not swear or use slang.

Listen carefully to the questions being asked and make sure your replies do not go off on tangents.

If possible try to bring along a number of good examples of your previous work.

After the interview sit down and try to identify what went well and what opportunities for improvement were presented. You may find it useful to write this down and review it prior to the next interview.

There are rare occasions when you turn up for interview and the interviewer has forgotten about the interview and is busy doing something else.

Always ask for confirmation of verbal arrangements with a letter or e-mail.

There will be times the interview does not “click” as far as communications and interpersonal issues go, there could be lots of reasons for this that have nothing to do with your abilities.

Ring the interviewer after the interview, thank them for the interview and re-confirm your interest in the position.

Some jobs may have a junior person the interviewers know trying to step up to a more senior role or someone who has been acting in the role temporarily, the reality is these people are particularly hard to beat. Employers sometimes like to go with the known persons. A number of organisations believe in promoting from within, great if you work for them, not so good if you are an external applicant. For a public service job ask if there is someone acting in the role when you ring the contact person for details. You know what you are up against then and are prepared to be dissatisfied.

Be certain your referees will give you a good reference, there ways of going about this that I will not put to paper. Always a good idea to ring your referee beforehand and let them know you are going for X job and what it involves. The best referees to use are your previous supervisors or managers. A lot of organisations do not take much notice of personal references. Employers know people will rarely put something bad on a written reference and will usually ring the referee.

Get specific instructions on how to find the place where the interview will be conducted, advice on parking may be appropriate.

Try to find out the names and positions of those who will interview you, helps you to pitch your responses at the right level.

If you are going for a job at a higher level, but especially a lower level than you have traditionally worked at have some good reasons why to trot out.

A security blanket for many employers is experience in their industry. If you do not have experience in their industry put a bit of work showing how experience in your industry is relevant to theirs. A small number of employers will realise that no experience in their industry will bring a new set of eyes and approach to their problems.

Some jobs will want to confirm your right to work in Australia and have a Police check conducted, bring along your drivers licence, preferably your pass-port if you have one, your Medicare card and your bank details.

A lot of the bigger companies ask for a pre-employment medical these days, they may have a particular organisation they will send them to.

A lot of organisations see workplace health & safety as very important these days. A few examples of how you have gone the extra mile in safety will not go astray.

Getting lots of knock-backs at job interviews can be very demoralising, you have to stay positive, learn from your experiences and try to do better next time.

There will be times when friends and relations of the interviewers get the job even though you are much better qualified, there is nothing you can do about that.

It is a fallacy that the best person for the job will always get the job, do not be too dissatisfied if you do not land that job, it is not necessarily a reflection on your ability. A senior Human Resources Manager in the Qld. Government once said to me “We have very sophisticated recruitment & selection procedures, I cannot figure out how we end up with so many idiots working for us”

Some employers make jobs out to be much better than they really are, be aware of this. Try to talk to some current or ex-employees. Check out the organisations web-site if they have one before going to interview.

The person who will make or break a job for you will be your supervisor. He or she will probably be an interviewer, make sure you are happy with their communications and interpersonal skills. One job I had, employees at my level always referred to the boss as “Pothole”, this was because he was always getting in the road.

A lot of employers realise that an interview, in isolation, may not give a good result and will ask you for a demonstration of your skills-A welder may have to do a weld test, a safety officer may have to do a safety inspection, a training officer may have to present a small training session, a word processing person may have to demonstrate their skills on a computer and so on. For a management position you may have to complete a psychological appraisal. Some psychological appraisals I have done I look like a super-star, some I look like a dill. Makes me wonder how valid and reliable they are. Try to find out what test instrument is going to be used and research it on the internet, sometimes you will find sample perfect answers! I know it is cheating but I suspect a lot of it is a bull-dust exercise.

Some employers will be disorganised at interview, you have to ask yourself if this is a reflection of how they generally do business. You should arrive at the interview all keen and prepared, do not be surprised if some employers are not keen or prepared. When you put in all the hard work you have to do to be prepared for an interview it will be a real downer if the employer is not equally prepared.

I had one interview when it was indicated I would have to do something I thought totally inappropriate for people in my occupation to do. For me saying I was not prepared to do that and walking away from the job was the right decision.

Went to one interview with a Qld. government dept, was given 20 minutes to review and prepare my answers to the questions to be asked at interview, about 10 questions. Got to question 4 in the interview and it became obvious that the questions they had were different from the questions they had given me. They offered to re-schedule the interview but I figured if they were this disorganised it was not the place for me.

Employers will be impressed by enthusiasm, you cannot possibly know everything they will want you to know but if you demonstrate a keenness to learn that is a lot of the battle.

With large organisations who have many questions the interviewers will be so busy writing down your answers that there is little communications happening. This is very off-putting but gives you a chance to demonstrate your interpersonal skills.

Sometimes when you get feedback you will wonder why interviewers came to a particular conclusion, often it is because they did not ask the right questions. Sometimes interviewers ask broad general questions expecting specific responses, the fact that you cannot read their minds is not your fault. Good employment interviewing requires detailed preparation by the interviewers.

Whilst it has never been true for me in interviews I have conducted, some people say the decision to hire or reject depends to a large extent on the impression you make in the first 5 minutes of the interview, so come along prepared for this.

Sometimes you will walk away from an interview thinking that went great and later you get a call that you missed out, sometimes you will walk away from an interview thinking that was lousy and later you get the job. Impossible to predict until you get the call, so do not be despondent after the interview.

Sometimes jobs disappear altogether for various reasons after interviews have been conducted.

Sometimes you will be asked questions that appear really dumb to you, the important thing is they are important in the potential employer's mind.

Rightly or wrongly membership and activity in a trade union will not always be seen in a positive light by some employers. Whilst it is against the law the reality is some employers will have gender, ethnicity, religious and age biases.

You should read up on resumes and interviews, lots of stuff on the internet, alternately get a few books out of the library. Seek.com.au has some good advice for job seekers,

You should be highly prepared for your interview, the other blokes you are competing with will be.

Do not rubbish former employers.

Relax and smile, try to project an image as a dedicated, high energy professional.

Like many things in life getting a job follows the 5 P rule (Prior Preparation Prevents Poor Performance)

Despite E.E.O. and anti-discrimination legislation there will be jobs that are hard to get if you are female and if you are male. Discrimination because of age, too young or too old is real. Whilst I am hopeful it is decreasing I still suspect some employers will discriminate against indigenous people.

If you are a young male it is best if your hair is short, dress conservatively and please get rid of earrings, studs and other metal on your head. If you have tattoos on your arms, wear a long sleeved shirt. Much the same advice applies to females but not the short hair bit. Not too much make-up, not too short a skirt, not too low-cut top. After one interview I helped with, a fellow interviewer said about an interviewee “He had enough metal in his head to make a Commodore” Needless to say this person did not get the job. Bright coloured streaks in your hair do not always go over well with older interviewers.

If you notice a particular job being advertised in a particular company regularly be wary. I once took on a job to be told by the workers I was the sixth person in that job in the last 2 years. The first time I went to lunch with some co-workers I was informed there was a book running on how long I would last. I did not last long.

While it is not advertised for E.E.O. and anti-discrimination reasons there may be hidden criteria for jobs in particular industries or companies. It pays to ask a few questions before you go to the effort of putting in an application.

You may feel you do not meet all the selection criteria for a job and hesitate to apply. Remember the documentation from the employer describes the perfect applicant, often they are going on a shopping expedition realising full well the perfect applicant does not exist. Besides while you may only have a small chance of landing the job if you apply, you will have no chance if you do not apply.

Depending on what type of job you are after there may be some value in talking to a few recruitment consultants about what they look for in resumes and interviews, my bet is they will tell you they have a strong focus on interpersonal skills.

The issue of how much to put in your resume is a vexed one. Generally the more senior and skilled the job the more detailed your resume should be. Be conscious if it is too long and consequently too much like hard work to read you will turn the reader off.

The big recruitment companies often use word recognition software to scan your resume and put the information in their standard format. You need to review the job advertisement and position description if you can get them and ensure your resume covers the skills listed if you have them.

Rightly or wrongly we live in a world where recognised qualifications or “pieces of paper” are becoming increasingly important. The time, effort and money you spend on obtaining qualifications may give you the edge over other job applicants.

For some jobs, usually the more senior ones, up to 3 interviews will be required, this is a real pain in the neck, particularly if you have to make up some innovative reasons to your boss about why you will be absent from work. For the initial, screening interview I usually try to convince the interviewer to give me a telephone interview instead of me dragging myself all the way over to the interviewer’s office. I have frequently gone to a face-to-face interview with recruitment consultants only to find I am not suited to the job, I have thus wasted a lot of time, effort, petrol and parking fees. Once I have convinced myself the job is worth following up on I will commit to face-to-face interviews.

If you are going for a professional position, membership, or even better, advanced standing in professional associations is looked on favourably by some employers.

Once you have the interview it is always a good idea to ring and thank them for the interview, confirms your interest in the job, allows clarification of things unsure about and gives you a chance to expand on things you forgot to say at the interview.

On some occasions the recruitment process may take months, you could easily get a call out of the blue requesting you come to interview for a position you have long forgotten about and written off. My advice is to hang onto the ads for 3 months.

Some employers, particularly those with Quality management systems are into continuous improvement philosophies, not a bad idea to weave some comment on this into your responses.

A good general rule in life and particularly with job interviews is to avoid discussion on sex, religion and politics. If you do not know your audience discussion on these topics can be disastrous. Sometimes people will say something controversial to see how you react.

It is good to project an image that you embrace change but you do not want to come across as a stirrer if you are not sure that driving change is what the employer wants in the position.

When I was a young bloke my Father said to me "If you are going to be a bulldust artist you have to have an exceptional memory and be very good at it, otherwise you will get found out." Lying is not a good idea and while I have never done this myself, some people say there is not much harm in taking something that was relatively small and making it appear much bigger. Make no bones about it, job interviews are about impression management.

When I am talking about interpersonal skills I tell interviewers I use reflective listening and appropriate self-disclosure. Look these up on the internet and practice them, can make a big difference to your life.

Employers value succinct written communications and generally, approaches to work that are not overly complex. Employers also value "real world" solutions not theory.

A commitment to personal training and development will impress some employers for some jobs. You need to be able to talk about what you have done to improve your skills and what further training you think is appropriate.

I know it sounds trite but saying you are looking for a job that gives you a chance to make a difference is appropriate for some jobs.

Sometimes you will be asked to demonstrate your time management skills, look this up on the internet.

Remember that you are often only as good as your previous employers say you were, do not burn your bridges no matter how dissatisfied you are with a previous employer. I had one employer I was very dissatisfied with and tempted to give them a blast when I left. Whilst it would have felt great at the time I resisted the temptation to do this. They ended up asking me back for a senior role that paid higher than my original position and I had the chance to address some of the issues that had previously annoyed me.

Some jobs will want you to push the boundaries, challenge the status quo, question accepted practice etc. If your enquiries do not reveal this is the case it is probably best to project an image of conservatism.

Being right is not always perceived as being as important as getting on with people. Often it is the relationships you build, not your technical expertise that determines success.

If asked about leadership I say I believe the number 1 job of a leader is to transmit and embed high value standards. I also say a leader has to be beyond reproach in everything he does and give Mathew Johns and Bill Clinton as examples of leaders who got it wrong.

For professional jobs there are a small number of firms who will give you detailed professional tasks, write a report on X, prepare a training program on Y, as part of the recruitment process. They will then use your hard work, without acknowledgement, for their financial gain. I generally believe giving applicants relevant tasks to perform as part of the recruitment process is the sign of an organised employer but just use a bit of caution.

For male interviewees beware of the female interviewers with the low cut dress, this could be a test!

Be wary of the interviewers who appear over-friendly or appear to be flirting with you, they are probably messing with you to see how you react.

It does not hurt to ring a week after the applications close or a week and a half after the job was advertised to enquire about where the process is at. This confirms that your application was received and puts your application and the fact you are definitely interested uppermost in the reviewers mind. Do not ring so often after that, that you are a nuisance.

Seek.com.au and Smart jobs.qld.gov.au (for Qld government jobs) are probably the best sources of jobs. Byron.com.au occasionally has jobs that do not make it onto Seek. Logo is a source of local government jobs.

If you are applying for a lot of jobs it pays to have an excel spreadsheet with the company name, position title, location, date advertised, date closes, date first interview, date second interview etc.

I have said this before but I will say it again as it is very important, demonstrate your interpersonal skills!

Remember that the interview is as much about you interviewing them, as them interviewing you. They have to be happy with a decision to employ you, equally you have to be happy with them as an employer.

As an interviewer you find it relatively easy to screen for experience and training, what is difficult and very important to screen for is "Fit" with the organisation as far as "Fit" is concerned I have never been able to figure out good advice other than to avoid being seen as extreme.(unless of course you know this is required in the job)

Best advice is to get a few books on this topic, there are books specifically on writing selection criteria for government jobs, look at the careers advice section on Seek and similar web-sites, talk to a few recruitment consultants about what they see as important and talk to a few Human Resource Managers about what they see as important. Not everybody will be prepared to help but some people

see being asked for their opinion as very flattering and will pull out all stops for you. The fact that you have put in this work to be prepared will boost your confidence when you go to interview.

“It ain’t over till the fat lady sings” Applied for a job about 2 months ago, a month ago got an unsuccessful e-mail, got a call today asking me to come to interview, storey I was given was that I was sent the unsuccessful e-mail by mistake! I would not be surprised if the person they appointed left or did not work out. Who cares!

Be careful of over-selling yourself. Went to an interview for a senior S.H.E.Q. managers job and highly prepared because I really thought it was out of my league. I am thinking my safety experience might just hold up but the weaknesses in my quality and environment experience will be revealed. Turns out they were very happy with my quality and environment experience and tell me they are concerned my safety experience is far in excess of what they are looking for. Got me stuffed! Do not know how to prepare for that other than to say I have a very simplified version of my resume that I use for the junior jobs.

Applied for a job advertised on the internet by a recruitment consultant, sounds reasonable, salary negotiable. Recruitment consultant rings me when he gets my resume to tell me there are 25 detailed selection criteria to respond to, I enquire about salary which ends up being pretty ordinary. I worked my way through the selection criteria that the recruitment consultant e-mails me and got back to the recruitment consultant with the message his client was expecting Super Man with a Fred Flintstone salary and I was pulling out of the process.

Got interviewed by a State Manager. Was obvious he had no idea of what qualities to look for in a good OHS person, he had a very immature knowledge about modern OHS practice and seemed to be having trouble seeing the relevance of similar experience in industries other than his own. Not a good way of convincing people the company is worthwhile joining so I withdrew my application.

HANG IN THERE-THAT GOOD JOB WILL COME