

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **Preparing for it and getting through it with flying colours**

Preparing for an interview is half the battle. If you follow the ground rules as I lay them out, you will find that you press all the right buttons with the interviewer. The rest is up to the chemical interaction between you which is never easy to predict and sometimes, with the best will in the world, just doesn't work.

The main headings in the rules of preparing for an interview are:

- 1) Learn everything you can about the employer that wishes to interview you;
- 2) Make sure you have all the information you can possibly obtain about the job;
- 3) Make sure that you understand all the information about the job that you have been given;
- 4) If you don't understand anything about the job, either ask any introducer for clarification (eg an agency that has introduced you to the employer), or prepare a question to ask at the interview (see below);
- 5) Check that you know where you are going for the interview;
- 6) Prepare a list of questions for the interview;
- 7) Make sure that you have answers to the awkward questions that the employer may ask you;
- 8) Make sure that you are dressed appropriately for the interview;
- 9) Make sure you leave yourself plenty of time to get to the interview

Now, the list doesn't look very long, does it? However, it covers enough information to keep you sitting in a tutorial for a good two hours with me talking non-stop. Does that sound as if it would be boring? It won't be, believe me. One of the things that I have spent more hours examining than most people I know is on the topic of interviews: how to conduct them; how to handle being interviewed; dos and don'ts of interviews and so on.

The truth is that most people haven't the foggiest idea of what to do at an interview. In all honesty, most employers haven't the slightest idea of how to interview and, as a result, the candidate who prepares best for an interview can often guide the inexperienced employer so effectively that he or she is simply bowled over by the sheer professionalism of the candidate they are (supposedly) interviewing that they offer them the job there and then. But, that doesn't happen all that often and we shouldn't get carried away with ourselves.

Let's start with Point One. Learn everything you can about the employer that wishes to interview you. Now, I'm not going to give you an exhaustive list of sources to use for this, simply because there isn't one. If you are looking at, say, a company that is involved in the healthcare industry, for instance, you need to check all the resources that relate to a company in that line. In the USA, hospitals are privately-run, by and large. In the UK, they are part of the NHS in general though certain companies like BUPA have, or have had, their own private hospitals. This means that you will need to explore the company that runs an American hospital group and find out what size they are, what their ethos is, what their speciality/specialties may be, how many hospitals they run, what number of beds they have and so on and so forth. In the UK, it is a simpler matter as the NHS is

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monolithic, but there are still individual trusts running several hospitals, there are still league tables of hospitals showing which are and which are not meeting their targets, who is top of the tree and who is languishing at the bottom. You need to compile all the information you can find by checking all the sources possible, from groups that represent private healthcare companies, to professional organisations that may be able to give you a qualified opinion of how a particular hospital is regarded in the professional community to newspapers who may have a business news department that can comment on how successful a particular hospital group is/how many times they have been sued successfully by patients/whether they are expanding or contracting and any other information they may have that could be relevant. Speaking to a stockbroker can be helpful too, if you use one. Usually, these people know their subject inside out and are only too happy to give their professional opinion.

As to the NHS in the UK, the information that is in the public domain nowadays is huge. Any hospital in the country will have reams of information available to you through their own health board. In both the UK and US cases, it is worth noting that our old friend, Google can often come up with everything you ever wanted to know about anything/anywhere/anybody.

If the employer is a private company, use the relevant sources mentioned above, if you can. Stockbrokers, where relevant, Google always and several others. For example, Dun & Bradstreet can give you plenty of useful information about companies from the financial point-of-view, even very small, private companies. Then there is Standard and Poor's. They say of themselves that 'Standard & Poors is the world's foremost provider of independent credit ratings, indices, risk evaluation, investment research, data, and valuations.'

What more need I say? Well, simply that the more sources you consult, the better. Try Kompass, Applegate or any one of the infinite number of sources your nearest business library can suggest. Librarians are helpful people and a visit to your nearest one can reap rewards. As an employer may wish to quiz you about not only your knowledge of them, but also about whom you would regard as being their major competitors, it helps to dig a little to see who comes nearest to them in size and quality of performance. Do, however, compare like with like. I remember as a young graduate being interviewed by Rank Xerox for a job as a photocopier salesman. When I was asked whom I thought to be their major competitors, I mentioned another leading photocopier company from Europe. The look of disgust that I could possibly regard *that* company as being on the same planet as Rank Xerox still lives with me. I know that I sank several levels in the interviewer's estimation at that point and I had to fight hard to get his approval subsequently. However, dear reader, I did. Luckily for me, however, I didn't end up in the crazy world of photocopier sales as something else came along instead.

Read the job description they have sent you. If they haven't, ask them for one, or look at the advertisement, if they have placed one in the newspaper/online etc. After all, if you're going to be interviewed for a job, it does help to know what the job is. Indeed, not only to know what it's about, but to understand it in full. If you don't understand anything, note

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down any queries that occur to you. These notes may relate to scales of operations, regularity of reporting, lines of reporting and so on. Whatever it is, it doesn't matter. *NOTE IT!* Remember that any agency that puts you forward for a job is there to help you get that job. So, if you have any queries about a job, ask the agency. If they don't know the answer, they will ask the employer before you go in order to remove any doubts for you. That's what they're there for!

If you find that the job specification contains terminology you don't understand, make a note. If you want to know what it means, try asking Google. I favour keying in a query such as what "GAAP" means. Google comes up with the answer in less time than it takes to type this sentence. It means 'generally accepted accounting principles'.

I know it sounds so basic, but make sure you know where you are going for the interview. If it's nearby, go there one evening after work, or one morning before work. Check out the traffic situation. Is it likely to be nose-to-tail at rush hour, or whenever you are going for your interview? If it's likely to be really busy, make sure to take that into account when you set off for the interview. There is absolutely nothing worse than arriving late for an interview, or arriving in time, but dripping with sweat. No one likes shaking a hot, sweaty hand!

If you're driving, make sure to take adequate money for a meter. Make sure that you know how much the meter charges and what coins it accepts! Make sure that you can park there at the time you have an interview. Some main roads get cleared come rush hour to facilitate faster traffic flow. If your car is in the way, it'll be shipped off to the pound and it will cost you an arm and a leg to get it back out again. Advance planning avoids this!

Make sure you know *exactly* where the interview is being held. Check that address out. Even go there in advance. Speak nicely to the reception staff. Ask them for any company literature as you have an interview there and you want to learn as much about the company as you can. They will be happy to help you. It also gives you a chance to reconnoiter the reception area (more about that later). If the interview is in a large building in a city complex, you may need to establish which floor it is on and which elevator to take to get there.

If the interview is in another city, you need to plan as well as you can to get there. Get maps off the internet (Google Maps are great as you can pan in and out to see the big picture and the street map too – and, no, I don't work for Google!). The best thing to do is to ring up the company's reception and ask them to give you directions. It's one of the things they're there for, after all. Ask them to tell you how to get there from whichever point you are coming from. Ask about parking, taxis, floor number and so on. Find out how busy it will be at the time you are coming and how much time you should allow to get there without getting flustered. Keep a note of their telephone number and take it with you.

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Next, we come to one of the crucial parts of interview preparation. That is the preparation of a list of questions to take with you to the interview. What? You don't think you'd want to do that? That would be a big mistake. I have been training people at all levels for interviews for more years than I care to remember and it didn't matter if they were taking their first step into employment from high school or experienced, senior accountants, engineers or doctors. They were always advised to prepare such a list. It doesn't need to be long. About ten to twelve questions should do it. You need to keep the interviewer answering your questions for between ten and fifteen minutes maximum (unless you get a clear feeling that your questions are welcome and are leading into interesting lines of discussion). You don't want to subject them to a third degree. Equally, you want to ask searching questions. It is very likely that fresh questions will occur to you during the interview. You should store these at the front of your memory (if you have a dreadful memory for things like this, see the short list of mnemonics at the end of this section to help with memorisation) or you can take the easy way out and ask if you can take notes during the interview.

When the interviewer asks you if you have any questions to ask them, you should explain that you have been preparing for the interview and you have a list of questions. You hope they don't mind if you refer to the list? I have yet to hear of any employer who has objected to this. After all, you are showing them that you have taken the time and the trouble to prepare in advance for the meeting. Indeed, you have done them a courtesy. They will be most interested to hear what you have to ask them. At this point, you can ask a question that may have arisen in your mind during the course of the interview. It will look very perspicacious of you to have thought of such an apposite question in advance.

We will get to the interview itself soon. However, before we do that, you need to do more work. Sorry! Getting a job can be just that, but it's worth it in the end, if you get the job you're after, isn't it? First of all, however, you need to decide what shortcoming your résumé reveals. It is reckoned these days that probably at least half of the résumés any employer looks at are full of lies. Well, I wouldn't want to say that you should always be completely open about all your faults. Sins of omission are less easy to pick up than blatant lies. Let me urge caution, therefore. Bear in mind that lying about the dates you worked somewhere will catch up with you if the employer decides to take out a reference on your employment with that company. It is better to be honest, if you can, than to be caught out telling a whopper. After all, you can think of good reasons for why you did what you did, can't you? If not, start thinking now! Why did you leave that company so abruptly? Did you have a 'personality clash' with your boss? If other people did too, then you should say so. Alternatively, you might be best to make out that the gap in employment was to exploit a unique chance to travel in Europe. If it was long enough ago, it probably won't matter, so don't lose sleep over it. Most people have one or two employers where there was not a complete love affair between them. However, you need to remember; if you sound off about a past employer and how lousy an employer they were and the poor standards they applied etc, you need to remember something of crucial importance. The experience you have gained is, in part at least, with these people who were so useless. Right? So, what does that make your experience? The same.

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You must remember a very important thing. In an interview, one quality shines over all others. It doesn't replace essential things like relevant experience, suitable qualifications and so on. However, it colours the employer's perception of you, the candidate. That quality is being positive. If I had to put it in neon lights, I couldn't emphasise it any more. I don't mean that you say yes to everything. That's just stupid. It comes down to the way you walk; the way you talk; the way you look and engage with them. You know what I mean. You've met these positive people, haven't you? They're the ones who leave you feeling buoyed up and cheerful. They're the ones who can come into a room and fill it with their light and energy. They're the ones people like to be around because they give off positive fields of energy. To help yourself get a job, you need to be that person. But, HOW?

Energy is something that most of us have in one form or another. Oh, I don't mean the energy to climb a hill or run a mile. I mean the energy to enthuse someone about something. Maybe you once had a teacher at school who could do that? I did. They were the ones who lived their subject because they loved it. You probably have a subject that you could talk about all day. I don't mean negative things like hating paying taxes. We can all talk about that, but it's not positive. What you need to think of is what makes you rhapsodise? That's a good word, because a rhapsody is what I'm thinking of here. It may be an exaggeration, but the qualities of a rhapsody are akin to those expressed by someone who has the qualities I am referring to. An evangelist has them. An oenophile has them (that's a wine-lover, in case you didn't know). They are inspired. To help yourself get a job, you need to be that person. But, HOW?

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It is the act of being positive that will mark you out from the crowd in an interview, especially one in which a number of people are interviewed together. How, though, do you deal with the downside of your résumé? Most of us have something in our personal history which isn't A-grade. Perhaps an exam we flunked, or a job we left after only a few weeks. How do you handle that in an interview? Well, it's better that you put the most positive gloss on things. Why did you get a bad grade in that exam? Maybe you were ill on the day. Why did you leave that job so soon? Well, another, much better job came along and you were 'headhunted' out by the next company you worked for. You did badly in your degree at university? It was due to bad use of time in your exams – *and you sure learned your lesson there!*

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Anyone who is a success will tell you that the road to success is littered with the experience of failure. Point me to a millionaire and, nine times out of ten, you will find that they have been through the school of hard knocks. Often, you will find that they have been bankrupted, not once, but twice or three times! The important thing is that they learned from their failures. That is the lesson to take to heart. People tend to learn from personal experience. You can give the best advice in the world, but, by golly, the majority just keep on, full steam ahead until they hit the rocks. Well, here's a word of advice. Be smart and follow what I am suggesting and you can take a short-cut to success by following these guide-lines. Remember that the right approach is all it takes to make your way in this world and the interview is the gateway to the new world you want to join, so don't be put off just because you aren't a 'straight A' student.

What should you wear to an interview? That depends upon the type of job you're being interviewed for. If you are being interviewed for a job working in a professional firm (eg accountants, solicitors, architects etc), it would be out of place not to be dressed formally. A guide to what 'formal' dress is may be best described as what you would wear to court if you were appearing as either a witness or a defendant before a court of law. In other words, as a man, you would be best to wear a plain, dark, business suit, a pale (white or cream) shirt, a sober tie, black or dark blue socks and black shoes. I should add that a pin-stripe suit would be acceptable if it can be described as conservative. Ties should be non-controversial, so one that my brother-in-law wore with an interesting pattern which closer examination showed was a design worked around a florid rendition of the word, 'bullshit', would not be advisable. Equally, naked ladies or the tie little Johnny gave you for your birthday probably won't do either. Although you may like that crisp, clean after-shave that you bought at Christmas last year, the interviewer, stuck in a twelve foot by nine interview room may find it unbearable. Don't wear any! Just make sure that you don't arrive late and sit there sweating profusely. Use a traditional soap that doesn't smell of any of the very powerful 'fragrances' that are so beloved of a certain class of manufacturer. Equally, if you wear any jewellery (except a wedding band), don't. No earrings. No nose studs or piercings of any kind.

If you are female, the same basic rule applies for the choice of interview dress. Image that you are a witness in a court case. Do not imagine that you should turn up dressed for a wedding, for example. That would be too 'over the top'. Too dressy and too exaggerated. Simplicity is the key word here. The same rules apply, by the way for women as to men regarding perfume. Wear none. I am of the view that make-up should be minimal or made to look minimal.

Jewellery can be indulged in slightly more, but it should be understated. No glittery diamond rings or sparkling necklaces. Maybe a plain gold necklace, or stud ear rings. High heels or up to you. Remember that not all men are over six foot tall. If you are lifted to that height by your heels, it might be best (just so as not to put the poor lamb's nose out of joint) to wear low(ish) heels. As to the skirt/trouser choice, that isn't too much of a problem these days. Either will do, but a scout around a traditional kind of business (like a law firm) during a working day when the staff are all leaving after a hard day's work,

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may tell you whether the firm approve of trouser suits or not. If this is a point that really matters to you, I suggest that you get the job first and then kick up a fuss once you have your feet under the desk. Making a point about the war of the sexes isn't what this discussion is about. It is about getting you the job. Putting people's noses out of joint doesn't tend to succeed in my experience.

As I indicated earlier on, it is essential that you arrive in plenty of time for the interview. If you are driving, this will give you time to refresh your memory about the company, if you have notes. You should bear in mind the time of day scheduled for the interview. Is it close to the rush hour? If you are taking public transport, is it running on time? Better to be too early rather than too late. If at all possible, try to give yourself a good twenty minutes leeway so that, if you are on time, you can settle yourself down, relax, catch your breath and arrive comfortably early (five minutes is fine). If you arrive by car, you can sit in the car for a few minutes, straighten your tie in the mirror or check your lipstick (remember, it should be minimal!). You may wish to review your list of questions and consider the answers you will give to any awkward matters that you aren't entirely comfortable with. It is these points that you must handle with most confidence and assurance. A moment's hesitation, an anxious biting of the lip and you may reveal something that a well-trained interviewer will want to worry away at, or he may simply make a note to check out that aspect of your background.

Long before arriving for the interview, think of some of the questions that interviewers love. There are so many, it is difficult to know exactly which ones to list. However, here are a few to cut your teeth on.

What are your strengths?

What are your weaknesses?

What is your greatest achievement?

What is your greatest failure?

What have you learned from your greatest failure?

How would you describe yourself?

How would your colleagues at work describe you?

What things interest you?

What sports do you actively participate in?

Why?

What are your ambitions?

Why?

Why do you want to work for this company?

Why do you want this job?

Why do you think you are suitable for this job?

Why do you want to leave your present company?

If you had a free hand, what would you like to do for a job?

If you don't get a job with this company, where do you think you would like to work?

There are so many questions that an interviewer can ask you that you should consider what they will be on the basis of your résumé. What areas of your

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experience/qualifications etc make you sensitive or defensive? Those areas are the ones that you need to address. Ask yourself the most intrusive questions about the topic that embarrasses you. How can you answer the questions without lying? Sometimes, you may feel that you have no option, but remember that you may make matters worse if the interviewers want to check up on your references. Sometimes, it may be best just to 'edit' your résumé a tad rather than land yourself in hot water, but if you do do so, don't forget what the edited version of your résumé says!

A point worth remembering is that some companies use 'spoiling tactics'. These are deliberately designed to put you off and upset you. For example, when you arrive at the interview, there are two people there to interview you. One may not be introduced to you. He or she simply seems to be in the room, doing other bits and pieces, but, every so often, he or she will offer a sharp or snide comment about you, such as, "Do you always turn up to interviews dressed like that?"

Or, "Speak up, can't you? We can't lip-read!"

Or, "We don't have time for time-wasters!"

If he or she really wants to upset you, they may deliberately antagonise you by being simply and utterly obnoxious, "You must be the most stupid individual I have ever seen at interview."

Or, "Is that revolting smell aftershave, or didn't you shower this morning?"

In case you think this is just exaggeration, I should stress that this is a technique of which I have personal experience. Why should anyone wish to use such a confrontational approach in an interview? It's to gauge your responses to appalling behaviour when the job you are being interviewed for involves dealing with exactly that sort of scenario. If you are being interviewed for a leading organisation that deal with temperamental customers (perhaps a leading top-of-the-market store that counts some of our less well-mannered pop stars and Hollywood actors among their clientele), the last thing they want is someone to knock six bells out of the latest tough guy of the silver screen because he doesn't like the actor's choice expressions. Trying to rile you is perfectly reasonable in such an interview situation. You need to keep a lid on your feelings and be extra polite. **REMEMBER** – in an interview, things happen for a reason!

So, remember that you are under constant scrutiny from the moment you enter the building until the moment you leave.

As you are the one who is asked to take the floor and ask them questions yourself, they have relinquished control of the interview at this point. You are now in charge. This is the opportunity for you to make your mark on the meeting, if you haven't already done so. If you haven't - why haven't you?

The first thing to do is to say, "I prepared a list of questions when I was researching for the interview. I hope you don't mind if I refer to it?"

I have yet to hear of any interviewer who wasn't highly impressed by anyone who is so dedicated and who agreed whole-heartedly to let them refer to their list. The range of

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questions you can prepare will cover topics over and above the day-to-day routine of the job to 'pad out' the information the company has already given you. Although you may think the purpose of asking questions at the end of the interview is for you to find out as much as you can about the job, it actually is more the case that you use it as part of your presentation in front of the interviewer(s). Of course, if there are questions to which you really do want answers, then this is the time to ask them. Otherwise, I suggest that you make sure that you have made the points you should have made earlier on. If you haven't, you can use the chance to initiate questions by using it to make an introductory statement to lead in to the question. For example, if you want to emphasise your man-management experience and you feel that it is both an important aspect of the job and one in which your own expertise hasn't been sufficiently highlighted, then it is a good thing to make the interviewer know that you have the sort of experience they require by starting off:

"I have over six years' experience of man-management in the catering business as you can see from my résumé. Now, the job spec says that you need a minimum of four years' experience. I am not over-qualified in that requirement, am I?"

The sort of things to consider asking questions about would include the responsibilities the job carries - ie the man-management; cash-responsibilities; property security; the structure of the company (is the management structure 'flat', with only two or three layers of staff, or is it hierarchical with many strata?); will the job entail dealing with clients/customers off-site; is a driver's license required etc. In the UK, a matter of great common concern these days is the state pension. As the baby boomer generation near retirement, there is a general realisation that the state pension scheme is not up to the task of paying a living income to everyone. The over-riding concern in that country, therefore, is to ascertain that the job carries a decent company pension scheme plan and the questions to ask would include the percentage that you would be expected to pay into that plan from your salary and when you would qualify to start paying into it. It is a matter of concern in many other countries too, so if you aren't in the UK, it doesn't stop you asking about it!

You should keep them answering your questions for ten to fifteen minutes. Unless you get a clear feeling that they want to talk more, that is the best sort of limit to set yourself. At the end of that time, as you are still in the driving seat, it is up to you to bring things to a conclusion. You may wish to put things in a manner like this:

"Right! I think that covers all the points I want to ask you about. It sounds like a fantastic opportunity and I'm really keen to be seriously considered for it! Thank you very much for taking the time to see me today. It was a real pleasure to meet you and hear all about the job."

You may wish to embroider the words a little. Alternatively, you may feel that it is a trifle too flowery for you. Nonetheless, it is important to let the interviewer(s) know that you are keen on the job. Remember - there is absolutely NO POINT in going for an interview without going with every intention of getting the job offered. You can always say, 'thank you, but no thank you' when they offer you the job. If you go in with the

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attitude of 'come on, sell me the job', you might just as well not bother going, because you won't get the offer. Interviews are there for one simple reason: to sort the wheat from the chaff. If you show yourself to be reticent or just plain bolshie, the employer will want to get rid of you as soon as they can. You want to have them begging you to join them. The better your handling of the interview, the more likely it is that they will be 'buying' because you follow the instructions I have outlined above.

Let us consider the actual interview itself, now that we have looked at the preparations you should make for it. You should now know as much about the company as you can find out; you will have a list of questions to ask in your pocket; you should be prepared for the worst questions they can ask you and you should have answers to (almost) anything they can lob at you; you will be appropriately dressed, with minimal perfume, make-up and jewellery; you will be in plenty of time and you will be able to go over your prepared information before the interview to refresh your memory.

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This is it. You arrive at the company's offices and find Reception. You may have already been there to ask for company brochures, in which case you may well be greeted with recognition. Regardless, smile pleasantly at the receptionist and say who you are clearly. "Good morning. I'm Matthew Taylor. I have an appointment to see Mr Whitney at ten o'clock."

Having provided the necessary information about who you are, who you are to meet and when, you will be asked to take a seat. At this point, as you should be a little early, it is a good idea to ask where the rest room is. Regardless of your gender, it is a good idea to look your best. You may not need to go, but it helps to know that your hair is neat, your tie is straight or your make-up isn't smudged. If it's a hot day, it's a good idea to wash your hands and face to get a cool, freshly-scrubbed look about you. If you're tired, it will perk you up. Whatever, you do, however, try to avoid offering either a cold hand or a hot, sweaty one to the interviewer to shake. It is rather off-putting otherwise.

Now, Reception areas have an unfortunate feature which is common to many of them in my experience. They tend to have furniture which is overly soft. You've noticed too, have you? I don't know. Maybe there's an Institute of Reception Furniture Manufacturers somewhere that specialise in making it. Whatever the cause, it means that you will often find that you disappear into the chair or sofa and have to struggle to get up to greet the interviewer who comes to meet you. This may not seem to be a big deal, but I should emphasise that it is much more important than you may think. Why? It's quite straightforward. Many experts in the field of human relations have their own opinions about the time it takes to form a lasting impression of someone from first meeting. In general, it is estimated that you form an impression of someone within three minutes of the first encounter and it can take some shifting if it isn't that enthusiastic. For that reason, you need to avoid fighting battles with the furniture when you should be bonding with the interviewer. To that end, you should check out the sofa or chair that you sit on to see if it wants to embrace you lovingly or just allow you to sit on it. If it wants to absorb you on a semi-permanent basis, struggle out of it and sit yourself on the edge of the chair

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with your feet gathered underneath you so that you can stand up without reference to the furniture. In case this looks uncomfortable, you should make use of whatever literature is on display on the nearest coffee table and pretend to read it. The act of reaching over to pick up this literature will make you perch on the edge of the chair anyway, so it won't look too odd when the interviewer comes in to greet you. At the same time as he or she arrives beside you and asks,

"Matthew Taylor? I'm Tom Whitney."

You should stand up with a broad smile, shake his hand firmly (no limp handshakes, please!) with a good grip and meet his gaze. This is a definitive moment. The direct eye-contact is very important, it establishes you as an open, friendly individual with nothing to hide. You know yourself how you react to people who avoid meeting your gaze, don't you? It makes them look shifty and untrustworthy. That is the last impression you want to give. You should reply,

"Mr Whitney. I'm pleased to meet you."

He will now wish to conduct you to the interview room. This may take some time, depending upon the size of the company. In the larger companies, you may have to go up several floors and walk along a number of corridors to get to your destination. During that time, of course, you are under scrutiny. The interview, to put things plainly, has started and you need to make sure that you are making all the right noises from the start.

As you progress to the interview room, I strongly suggest that you have a store of half-a-dozen subjects about which you can chat inconsequentially. They should definitely not be matters that are partisan in any way, so avoid the usual topics such as politics, religion and, probably, sport. However, the parking situation, the weather, the pleasant pictures hanging on the walls in their company HQ, the décor of the offices, the latest company report which may have recently come out and which you have studied in depth are all matters you could quite happily talk about. What you are doing, of course, is killing time before you get down to more important matters. However, the way you handle yourself will be noted. If you are being interviewed for a job which requires you to meet customers of the company, they will be seeing what reaction you are prompting in them while you pass the time of day with them. Will this person be a good ambassador for this company, they will be asking themselves? Would I be impressed by him or her if I came here to do business?

When you reach the interview room, you will be offered a seat, usually facing the window, while the interviewer will sit with the window behind him or her. In this way, your face can clearly be seen and any emotions that flit across your features will be seen by them. Their faces will be in the shade by contrast. You may be asked if you would like tea, coffee or a glass of water. There is no trick in this. If you want it, take it. If you don't, don't. However, I suggest that you finish it if you do accept the offer.

When the interview starts in its recognised form, it will follow the routine of question and answer. Remember, however, that many employers who interview and who do not use professional HR consultants have only a very vague idea of the structure of an interview. Remember also that in larger organisations, there may be more than one interview. There may also be the joys of psychometric tests (see below).

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **Preparing for it and getting through it with flying colours**

Before starting, you need to consider the way in which you are sitting and behaving. This may seem unnecessary, but the way you act physically can be a giveaway to the way you feel. You should definitely avoid any sort of protective posture and you should take care to ensure that you make good, open, direct eye contact with the interviewer. A good way to sit is directly facing the interviewer. It looks comfortably relaxed to cross one knee over the other and rest your hands on the upper knee.

Make sure that your gaze is neither oppressively direct (in other words, that you don't simply stare fixedly at the interviewer) nor evasive. I find that it is natural to look at someone when they initiate a question, then to lower your gaze as they continue or elaborate on the question. You will find that a normal degree of eye contact will be anything up to half the time you are speaking to them, or they are speaking to you. That eye contact, however, will be around the area of the face, including nose, mouth, forehead etc. You will find your gaze wanders over the interviewer in this way quite naturally. However, in order to avoid looking as if you want to escape from the interview room, you should make sure that you keep your attention focused in the area extending from the interviewer to the résumé on the desk from which he or she obtain information about you. When thinking about the answer to any question that is put to you, you will find that looking at your résumé is quite natural. It is a focus of the interviewer's attention. Equally, you can look at your hands as they rest on your knees as a reasonable focus for your attention. Looking down as you are thinking is a perfectly standard thing to do. However, do avoid looking up towards the corner of the room, or towards the door. Each direction makes you look as if you are contemplating flight. It is best not to give that (misleading) impression!

Showing interest in the information the interviewer is telling you is no bad thing. You may have noticed how actors are trained to show the same interest in shows like 'Friends'. As the group sit around in a set-piece situation, one of them starts to tell the gossip about another character. Observe how the other actors lean, almost imperceptibly towards the conveyor of the tittle-tattle. It is as basic as nodding when someone tells you something. It is confirmation that, *'yes, I am listening and paying heed!'*

Now, when the interview ends, it is because you have finished asking your questions. However, as you gathered earlier, the interview actually begins when you arrive in the building. It also ends when you leave the building. In other words, you still have to be conducted back to Reception by the interviewer or one of his/her 'little helpers'. This entails a further dose of the relaxed, informal chat I mentioned to you at the outset. After an interview, there is often a certain euphoria at having survived in one piece and, for that very reason, this is the time of **MAXIMUM DANGER!**

Remember this! There are more interviews that are lost by accident than by cunning questioning by interviewers. Believe it or not, many candidates actually think that what they say 'off-record' doesn't register with interviews once the interview is 'over'. It does.

I remember an example of a deliberate ploy played by a Sales Manager once upon a time.

## **THE INTERVIEW**

### **Preparing for it and getting through it with flying colours**

After a second interview, he told the candidate, "Bill, I like you. You're just the kind of guy I need in my sales team. You've got the job!"

Hooray! Bill was, of course, delighted. It was exactly the sort of job he wanted. Now, the Sales Manager generously invited Bill to the team's Friday Night. Every Friday night, the guys in the Sales Team got together for a bit of bonding and drinking. No holds barred. Of course, come Monday morning, rank re-established itself and the Sales Manager would be the Boss Man again. Well, our intrepid Sales Consultant (designate) went on the Friday Night Bash. It was great. Lots of booze. The Guys asked him what made him tick and what his aims were and which way was up as far as he was concerned. Wanting, of course, to make a good impression, our Sales Consultants (designate) answered his new colleagues as frankly as he and a gallon of beer would allow. Boy! Did he have a sore head the next morning. He felt wiped out. Not as wiped out as he was on Monday morning when he got a letter from the sales Manager telling him that he was sorry, but he had been unsuccessful at the interview and he didn't have the job. Ouch!

So, to get back to our point, NEVER, NEVER, NEVER let your guard down. You are still in an interview, so watch what you say and stick to the plan. Use the remaining topics of non-controversial conversation I mentioned to you earlier. Be polite. Do not be controversial. Ask what the delicious coffee they served you was and where it came from. *'That beautiful picture in Reception. It seems vaguely familiar. Who was it by? Oh! Leonardo da Vinci. Ah, yes. The Mona Lisa. Of course, silly me! Yes, it did seem familiar'*. Don't worry. It's conversation. Obviously, you don't want to appear stupid, but you do want to be chatty, positive and interested and, when the time comes to say goodbye, remember a good, firm handshake, good eye contact and a smile. Say, *'thank you for taking the time to see me'*, even if you said it before. Good manners go a long way, especially nowadays.

When you walk out of Reception and onto the street, then the interview is over, but don't start hopping around and cheering. Walk normally until you are out of sight and then (and only then) you can turn into a jelly. Yes. The interview is over. If you have played your cards right and you knew your stuff technically, you should be the best-prepared interviewee they have seen, unless anyone else they were seeing read this too!