

# Getting the job you want

NB this is informal advice based on personal experience in recruiting and being recruited, and some excellent advice I received at the start of my career.

It concerns organisations in general, not any past employer in particular. If it contradicts any official advice for a job application, follow the official advice!

*This presentation is personal and does not reflect the view of any past employer.*

# Intro

- ▶ The ratio of applicants to jobs can be as high as 1500:1, maybe higher
- ▶ If you can get through the initial selection stages to the interview stage then you are probably in at something better than 12:1, more likely 6:1
- ▶ Getting shortlisted therefore appears more challenging than getting the job if you reach the interview
- ▶ The odds are better than it looks: there are always candidates who are unsuitable or not serious, and often many who do not prepare properly
- ▶ Choosing a job that fits you and simple preparation can radically improve your chances
  
- ▶ *The advice here applies mainly to larger organisations following systematic human resources policies. It might not help with e.g. a job with a start-up*

# 'Failure' can be a lucky escape

- ▶ If you do all the preparation and still don't get a job, do not despair:
  - ▶ It can mean you do not fit - so a lucky escape
  - ▶ Or there was never any chance in the first place
  - ▶ You had some practice to learn from, to do better next time

# Pre-selection processes

- ▶ Large organisations often recruit from lists of candidates that have succeeded in general competitions, advertised periodically (sometimes years apart)
- ▶ The volume of applicants to these competitions can be enormous
- ▶ Tests - often machine-readable and perhaps online - may be used to reduce the number of candidates in a low-cost way
- ▶ These tests can be about 'verbal and numerical reasoning', knowledge of the organisation, linguistic capability or even general knowledge. Speed is critical.
- ▶ You can and should prepare for these tests - you can become faster by practice. Sometimes past or sample papers are available. Otherwise, just use 'test your IQ' books. Also - know when to skip questions.

# Selection is a systematic process - at least for larger organisations

- Interviews are not spontaneous, personal occasions
- Selection is a predictable and therefore manageable process - *for the candidate also*
- Managers explicitly define the **job/person requirements** & assess people against them
- The key question for them: Who meets the requirements best?
- The key question for you: What can I contribute in this job?
- **Interviews are not about fast thinking and fast talking on the day**
- **They are about preparation, and going for a job that fits you**

# What can I contribute?

- Focus on what you can contribute and why, what you have done, what you know - all the way from the advert to the interview
- MAYBE
  - ▶ Personal goals (not money or promotion) - to achieve something, to help create something you value, to develop your skills and broaden your experience
- BUT NOT
  - ▶ I want or need the job / a promotion / the money
  - ▶ My performance in my present job means I deserve it
  - ▶ I am the most senior candidate
  - ▶ Hypothetical what I *will be/will do/would do* if I got the job
- If “Why do you want the job?” then, answer with what you can contribute, personal goals

# Preparation starts with the application

- There is usually a ‘person specification’ provided
- Items in the specification (and job description) are usually in order of importance so stress more your experience and capability relevant to the first few points
- For each requirement
  - ▶ Consider your work experience - what have you done that corresponds ?
  - ▶ Consider experience outside work (e.g. managing a family budget, or leadership role in a club or other free time activities)
  - ▶ Make lists for each requirement
  - ▶ Stress the relevant experience in your application (not just standard list of duties & chronological description of experience)
- Think creatively about how your experience connects to requirements but NEVER invent
- Do not worry if you have *some* weaknesses - give it a try

# First preparation cont.

- Do research on the organization
  - ▶ What plans does it have, what issues does it say it has?
  - ▶ Try to visit
  - ▶ Ask the manager if they, or someone else, can give you some background
  - ▶ Consider how you can contribute (Don't try to tell that on a visit!)
  - ▶ Does the job and organization sound interesting for you?
- Can you make a contribution and do you want to?
- If you can't answer those two questions positively, why are you applying?

# You have got an interview

- In organisations with equal opportunities policies, normally
  - ▶ The requirements are public and the questions must concern the requirements
  - ▶ Every candidate must be asked the same basic questions i.e. the basic questions will not be personal to the candidate
  - ▶ **Therefore, you can analyse the requirements and predict broadly the kind of basic question you will get**
- You cannot predict exactly but you can prepare for the most obvious
- What have you done...How have you...Something that went well/went badly...How have you contributed...How did you deal with...

# Preparing for questions

- Constructing a good answer spontaneously, under pressure, is not easy
- Take the obvious questions and prepare in advance your ideal answers
- Bullet points of your relevant experience, achievements and strengths
- Try turning your notes into a few coherent sentences.
- Practice - does it actually flow?
- A few coherent sentences on the broad topic will buy you time to think about the precise question
- Think through stories, concrete examples, to illustrate each requirement
- Try to connect with the organisation's plans and issues
- Have a clear summary argument as to why you fit the job requirements

# Follow-up questions

- To bring more out of the candidate or to clarify
- Less predictable, but gives you second chance to cover things you have missed, to emphasise a key point, to show you did your research on the organization, to show your motivation
- Don't be afraid to mention important points a second time
  
- *Good preparation signals motivation for the job*

# Before and during the interview

- ▶ Don't just sit and wait to be called in
- ▶ Stand up, walk around
- ▶ Talk to somebody (about anything!) if you can
- ▶ Take a bottle of water in case they don't provide it. Don't hesitate to take some water before answering a question
- ▶ Answer the questioner but speak to the whole panel
- ▶ If you realise you forgot something, ask to mention it at the end
- ▶ You should be asked if you have any questions:
  - ▶ Do not feel obliged to ask one
  - ▶ Don't ask a question about the basics of the organization
  - ▶ Don't ask details about conditions, pay etc....If they offer you the post, then you can ask before deciding

# Thank you!

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