

TALK YOUR WAY INTO A JOB

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The interview may be the doorway to a career, but how you handle the interview is the real key to opening or closing an opportunity. And, every interview is different—different job, different company, different interviewer, etc. So, it's necessary to prepare for each one. After that, how well you do will depend on your own ability to “situationally respond.”

“Flexibility and self-confidence are critical to a successful interview,” said John M. Qualy, CLU, managing partner at The Qualy Group in St. Louis, Missouri. “Interviewers want and need to see if a candidate can think on his or her feet and that he or she can relate to their business.”

No single strategy works in every situation. For instance, a company may decide to assess communication skills, sociability and work motivation when interviewing for sales positions. However, how these attributes are interpreted is largely based on the interviewer.

You can build interview self-assurance through experience, thorough preparation and being confident about what you have to offer to an employer. The following tips also can help you make a strong presentation:

- Think of yourself as the best candidate for a position and let that guide your conversation.
- Think of yourself as successful in previous jobs and activities. Demonstrate this by highlighting patterns of achievement in past projects, assignments and activities.
- Think of yourself as a businessperson. Talk in business terms, like increased revenues, cost-effectiveness and work objectives rather than theories and models. It's important to communicate that you're conscious of the bottom line and can help improve productivity.
- Practice interviewing with someone who can objectively critique your performance and help improve your interviewing techniques.

Interviewing

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- Learn as much as possible about the company's market, product and competition and try to interject this information in the interview. If possible, try to learn something about the interviewer before you meet.
- Think of your accomplishments in business terms, even if they occurred outside a work setting. This will help make your entire background more relevant to a company.
- Bear in mind that measurement is always part of the process. So, use tangible terms to describe accomplishments, such as time or dollars saved, process improvements, outputs or results.
- Keep tabs on your impressions of the organization's culture and style to help you respond more appropriately. For example, are conversations informal? Is there a lot of attention to hierarchy? Are collaborative or competitive terms used more often?
- Ask questions. Be prepared to ask intelligent questions about the company, its customers, and what it's like to work there. Potential employers will be impressed if you demonstrate your interest in their company – not just the job.

“The best advice is to be prepared for the interview,” John Qualy said. “The more prepared you are, the more confident you'll be and better you'll do.”

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