

How to Ace the Job Interview

Interviews are a critical step in the hiring process

Jun 21, 2017

In the civilian workplace, jobs are attained through a very different application, screening and evaluation process than in the military. A critical part of the hiring process is the job interview – a meeting where you are evaluated on how you present yourself, interact with others, answer and ask questions, and set yourself apart from others. The interview determines whether you move further in the hiring process, or you're shown the door.

Types of Interviews

Recruiters and hiring managers interview candidates by telephone, Skype, or in person. You might be interviewed individually or as part of a group. And, in many cases, employers ask behavioral interview questions to evaluate your problem solving or decision making skills. Let's look at some of these formats:

Phone Interviews

Being interviewed on the telephone might appear easier because you don't have to dress up, find parking and worry about sweating from stress. But don't take the phone interview lightly. Follow these tips and treat it as formal as an in-person meeting.

- Remove all distractions (phones ringing, dogs barking, coffee shop noises) and take the call from a quiet place.
- Place your notes and key talking points in front of you where you can easily refer to your resume and the highlights of your background.
- Smile! Even though the interviewer can't see you, they will sense a warmer tone in your voice if you smile when responding to their questions.

Video or Skype Interviews

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Just as with an in-person interview, first impressions matter on a video interview. The interviewer can see and hear you, and your image must align with their expectations. If you would wear a business suit to the meeting, wear one for the video interview. Pay attention to your body language, too. Look at the interviewer when speaking – even if you are looking at your computer monitor. There is a real person watching! It is permissible to have notes in front of you on a video interview, but do not read them. Similarly, be sure your surroundings are professional and clean. Avoid doing a Skype interview in a crowded place, where someone might jump into view. Treat this as an in-person meeting.

Group Interviews

In some cases, employers feel it's beneficial to have human resources professionals and others interview a candidate at the same time. These interviews often include the direct manager, colleagues and others from the team. Each of these interviewers will evaluate the applicant on skills, experience, cultural fit and personality alignment with what is needed for the job. Treat each person interviewing you with respect and attention during the meeting. They all have input on your desirability to the employer.

Behavioral Interviews

Since much of your experience likely happened in the context of your military service, be prepared to answer questions around your behavior handling stress and conflict. Behavioral interviews are common for civilian companies, especially when evaluating veterans. AARP notes: "The behavioral interview is designed to find out your past reactions to situations in your previous employment positions. The purpose of asking open-ended behavioral questions is that your past performance is the best predictor of future performance. An example of a behavioral question is, "Tell me about a time when you had to confront a team member about poor performance. How did you handle that?" As you prepare for an interview, think about how you might respond to common behavioral interview questions.

How to Ace the Interview

Whether the interview is on the phone, by video, in person or with a group, follow these steps to ensure you are prepared:

1. Preparing for the Interview

Before you meet with the potential employer, become knowledgeable about the company,

industry, company culture, and hiring manager.

- **Be clear on what you can offer them.** What is your personal brand, and how do you align with the values of the company? How has your military career prepared you for the experience you are pursuing?
- **Research the company.** Look through their website and on Google. In Google, put the company name in the search bar and look through all the options - web, images and news to see what else you can find about them.
- **Research the interviewer(s).** Look at their LinkedIn profile – what common interests or experiences do you share? What someone puts on LinkedIn is public information and they expect you will see it.
- **Know your resume well.** Be prepared to describe your background, including dates, responsibilities, and positions you've held. If the company is not familiar with military candidates, make sure you "civilianize" your experience to show how it relates to the position you are pursuing.
- **Decide how you will dress.** Image is important in an interview, and you should understand how to present yourself to show you will fit in, but dress one notch above that.

2. During the Interview

In the interview your job is to answer questions, build rapport and ask questions. You should be able to explain how your values align with the company's mission; inquire about research you uncovered and demonstrate how your values and experiences can benefit them.

During the interview, be prepared to:

- **Engage in small talk.** Some interviewers like to chat before the interview starts to calm the candidate down. Use this time to build rapport and set the tone for the interview. Think about what you will and won't talk about before you arrive at the interview, so you don't misunderstand the casualness and say something inappropriate.
- **Talk about your what AND why.** The interviewer not only needs to understand your background and how it's relevant for the open position, but they also need to feel something about you. We call this their "emotional needs," and it drives hiring decisions. If the hiring manager feels you are too pushy, standoffish, or rigid, they might not feel you are a good fit. Make your case for WHY you are the right candidate.

- **Focus on your value-add.** Be ready to relate your military experience to show how you are trained and skilled for the position. You need to bridge between what you have done in the past and what you can do in the future. The interviewer won't have time to make this connection.
- **Ask focused questions.** Interviewers expect you to ask questions. You should have at least five questions prepared around the company's vision and business goals, culture and work environment, veteran hiring initiatives, on boarding process, and employee successes.

3. Follow Up

After the interview, if there are things you need to follow up on (e.g. a list of references), send that email as soon as possible. Thank the interviewer for the meeting, and confirm your interest in the position. Always include a bullet point list of highlights from the interview that reinforce you are the right candidate for the job. Send a handwritten thank you note to everyone you interviewed with and be specific about how you are a great fit for the company.

Interviews are a critical step in the hiring process. Be prepared to show up consistently and authentically and you will ace the interview.

Developed through the VFW's collaboration with Lida Citroën of the international brand strategy firm LIDA360, this article is part of the VFW's expanding education and transitioning services, resources and [webinars](#) designed to provide service members and veterans transitioning to the civilian workforce with an opportunity to learn about personal branding and strategies for navigating the job search process. To learn more about Lida's commitment to the veteran community, [check out her recent TEDX talk](#).

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