

Tips on How to work with your Consultant

Working with your recruitment consultant

Identifying the right new opportunity for you is not simply a case of playing 'snap' with cv's and job descriptions – many other factors come into play. Changing jobs has a significant impact on the direction of your career and recruitment consultants want to ensure that it is taking the direction in which you want to go. Your recruitment consultant is involved in helping people find jobs every day of the week and will have seen the career paths of many professionals before you, creating an exceptional pool of information at your disposal.

Where we start

Many professionals have issues with editing their cv to illustrate the key aspects of their career and experience. Your consultant will therefore work with you at the first meeting to produce an edited and effective cv. The process involves assessing your skills and personality, as well as identifying your career aspirations. Since your consultant's first objective is to get you an interview with the firms you wish to meet, it is in his or her interests to produce the most effective cv in any given market condition.

The primary consideration will be to forward your details to current vacancies in which you're interested. Your consultant will discuss with you the opportunities presented by each vacancy and provide you with an insight into the culture of the recruiting organisation. Should you be successful in securing an interview, your consultant will ensure you have all the available information about the organisation beforehand. This doesn't just include corporate literature but also our own insight into the organisation, gleaned from regular visits and briefings, as well as from candidates for previous jobs and often temporaries who've worked there.

Where you come in

It's imperative that you provide your consultant with feedback as soon as possible after an interview at a client. If your feedback is positive and you're interested in the position, your consultant will ensure that your enthusiasm is professionally relayed back. Many clients call their consultant within an hour of conducting a first interview – and can be disappointed to discover that the consultant has not yet received feedback from the candidate. Also, there may of course be questions arising from the interview, or even a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of statements at that meeting. It's your consultant's responsibility to resolve all these for you.

Following initial meetings or interviews, your consultant will contact you if there is any positive news from a client in respect of interviews or to seek more information. However, it's not practical to get back to every candidate when an individual cv application has been unsuccessful, but this information is usually imparted in the course of ongoing conversations. Your consultant and you should agree on a suitable framework for ongoing contact relevant to your circumstances.

Keeping the heat on

If the first marketing exercise has been unsuccessful, your consultant may, after a suitable period of time, suggest a remarketing exercise. The second line of attack is often to draw up a list of firms that you are interested in and that may be interested in you, but where there are no current advertised vacancies. These firms can be approached on a speculative basis; this approach can be made with full disclosure and a cv or on a no-names basis.

After the initial marketing exercise, your details are held on a sophisticated computerised search system, so that even if your consultant is unavailable when new jobs are registered, his or her

colleagues will be aware of your suitability for the new appointment and contact you.

In addition to interviewing, preparing cv's and marketing exercises, consultants spend a lot of their time liaising with their clients base to market our service.

Tips for succeeding at interviews

Get organised - be prepared

- Ensure you know whom it is you're meeting, where and how to get there.
- Take contact details, spare CV, pen and notepad.
- Take along information to impress the interviewer with your research and knowledge of their company.
- Before the interview, read company information, visit competitors' websites and read trade magazines for the latest industry developments.
- Know yourself! Study the job specification again and match it to your CV so that you can provide evidence that you meet the job requirement.
- Wear a smart but comfortable outfit - a good first impression is a must.

Your first impression

- When you walk through the front door, remember you're already making an impression on your prospective employers. If it's not right then, it's too late to redeem yourself – should you not be invited for a second interview.
- Anyone from the receptionist to the managing director may directly or indirectly influence the final selection of candidates, or even the job winner.
- Inside the interview room, you'll be introduced to the other interviewers if there are any - look at them when greeting them, smile and carefully remember their names so you can address them throughout the interview.
- If the sun's in your eyes, or the chair is wobbly, say something rather than squirm and fail to concentrate on the interview; competent people find solutions and never settle for second best!

Questions to you

- Relax - imagine you're having a conversation with a friend. Having been invited to the first interview – they are actually saying that you interest them and on paper meet their job specification.
- Listen - sometimes, people get so caught up in their feelings they forget to actually listen to the questions; slowing the pace will help you hear the questions and answer them correctly.
- Before you respond to more difficult questions, think about your answer and how you want to express them - this will help you speak more confidently.
- Why not practice talking slowly and evenly before you go - record your answers and listen to your pace and tone.
- Body language demonstrates how comfortable you are with your subject matter - if you're enthusiastic about what you're saying, smile and let your hands do the talking (but don't overdo it).
- Look at who you are talking to - but don't exclude other interviewers present.
- If you said something you didn't mean, and are worried it could damage your chances, simply rectify it by restating what you really wanted to express - don't hold back; it could be your only chance to get that point across.

- Be factual and honest about strengths and weaknesses - show that you recognise your weaknesses as characteristics you're striving to improve.

Questions to the interviewer

This is a chance to show your enthusiasm and interest! It's crucial to have several questions prepared in advance - these could include:

- What would be my core responsibilities?
- What training or induction is given?
- What are the other people in the department like?
- How would their roles impact on mine?
- What sort of one-off projects might I be given?
- What interaction would I have with other departments of the company, or with clients or suppliers?
- What scope is there for taking on extra work or being involved in any other aspects of the company?
- What plans do you have for expansion - how would these impact on my role?
- Where are the opportunities to progress within the company?

Conclusion

- There may be an explanation of how the process will continue - if not, then ask; also try to find out when you should hear back - but don't push - some recruiters will not want to commit themselves to timescales until they have had time to consider all the candidates.
- Make sure the appropriate people know where you can be reached – provide them with details of holidays (and how to contact you).
- Finally, thank your interviewer for his or her time, shake hands.
- Remember to say a personal goodbye to each person you talked with.
- Don't forget to acknowledge the receptionist as you leave, particularly if you have been looked after while waiting, such as having been given tea or coffee or if your coat and bag or briefcase have been taken care of.

Post-interview action

- Give your recruitment consultant a ring and let him or her know how it went.
- Your consultant is employed by the company to liaise with you, and can also handle any queries or objections raised, or persuade the employer to wait while you supply more information.
- Some interviewers may give you their direct line in case you have any further queries - take advantage of this if necessary but don't overdo it; allow a reasonable amount of time - a week is ideal.
- It's occasionally a good idea to write a letter confirming your interest and thanking the company for its consideration. A timely but subtle reminder like this could pay dividends!

Interview Questions and what they are looking for!

Q: Tell me about yourself. (The interviewer is really saying "I want to hear you talk").

A: This is a loosener but is a common question so your response can be standardised. Write a script and rehearse it so it sounds impromptu. Spend a maximum of four minutes to describe your qualifications, career history and your range of skills. Emphasise those skills that are relevant to the job on offer.

Q: What have been your achievements to date? (The interviewer is saying, "Are you an achiever?").

A: Again this is a common question so be prepared. Select an achievement that is experience related and fairly recent. Identify skills you used in the achievement and quantify the benefit.

Q: Are you happy with your career to date? (The interview is really asking about your self-esteem and self-confidence, your career aspirations and whether you are a happy, positive person).

A: The answer must be 'yes' but if you have hit a career plateau or you feel you are moving too slowly, then you must qualify the answer.

Q: Tell me the most difficult situation you have had to face and how you tackled it? (The interviewer is really trying to find out your definition of 'difficult' and whether you can show a logical approach to problem solving using your initiative).

A: This can be a trap! To avoid it, select a difficult work situation that was not caused by you and which can be quickly explained in a few sentences. Explain how you defined the problem, what the options were, why you selected the one you did and what the outcome was. Always end on a positive note.

Q: What do you like about your present job? (The interviewer is really trying to find out whether you will enjoy the things the job has to offer).

A: This is a straightforward question. All you have to make sure is that your 'likes' correspond to the skills etc. required for the job on offer. Be positive, describe your job as interesting and diverse but do not overdo it, after all, you are leaving!

Q: What do you dislike about your current role? (The interviewer is trying to find out whether the job on offer has responsibilities you will dislike or which will make you unsuitable).

A: Be careful with this one! Do not be too specific as you may draw attention to weaknesses, which will leave you open to further problems. One approach is to choose a characteristic of your present company such as its size - its slow decision making etc. Give your answer with the air of someone who takes problems and frustrations in your stride as part of the job!

Q: What are your strengths? (The interviewer wants a straightforward answer as to what you are good at and how it is going to add value).

A: This is one question that you are going to get so there is no excuse for being unprepared. Concentrate on discussing your main strengths. List three or four explanations of how they could benefit the employer. Strengths to consider include technical proficiency; ability to learn quickly; determination to succeed; positive attitude; your ability to relate to people and achieve a common goal. You may be asked to give examples of the above so be prepared.

Q: What are your greatest weaknesses? (The interviewer is asking about your self-perception and self-awareness).

A: This is another standard question for which you can be well prepared. Don't say you have none - this will ensure further problems. You have two options - use a professional weakness such as a lack of experience (not ability) on your part in one area that is not vital for the job. The second option is to describe a personal or professional weakness that could also be considered a strength and the steps that you have taken to combat it. An example would be, "I know my team

think I'm too demanding at times - I tend to drive them pretty hard but I'm getting much better at using the carrot and not the stick". Do not select a personal weakness such as "I'm not a morning person - I'm much better as the day goes on".

Q: What kind of decision do you find most difficult? (The interviewer is really saying, "I need someone who is strong and decisive but who has a human side").

A: Your answer must not display weakness. Try to focus on decisions that have to be made without sufficient information. This will show your positive side. For example, "I like to make decisions based on sufficient information and having alternatives. When you have to make quick decisions you have to rely on 'gut feeling' and experience."

Q: Why do you want to leave your current employer? (The interviewer is trying to understand and evaluate your motives for moving).

A: This should be straightforward. State how you are looking for more challenge, responsibility, experience and a change of environment. NEVER be negative in your reasons for leaving and it will rarely be appropriate to state salary as the primary motivator.

Other Relevant Interview Questions!

How does your job fit into your department and company? (Gives an idea of level of responsibility).

What do you enjoy about the industry?

How do you respond to working under pressure? (Meaning - can you?). Give examples.

What kinds of people do you like working with?

How have you coped when your work has been criticised? (Give an example including the outcome).

What is the worst situation you have faced outside work? (Give an example including the outcome).

How have you coped when you have felt anger at work? (Give an example and show how you were still able to perform a good job).

What kind of people do you find difficult to work with? (Take care! You won't know everything about the staff at the company at which you're being interviewed).

How have you coped when you have had to face a conflict of interest at work? (Testing interpersonal skills, team and leadership opportunities).

Tell me about the last time you disagreed with your boss.

Where have you been unable to get on with others? (Give an example).

What are your preferred working conditions, working alone or in a group and why?

How do you think you are going to fit in here especially as this organisation is very different to your current employer? (You may not be able to answer until you have established what he/she perceives as the differences).

What are you looking for in a company?

How do you measure your own performance?

What kind of pressures have you encountered at work?

Are you a self-starter? Give me examples to demonstrate this.

What is the biggest problem you have faced recently and how you resolved it?

What changes in the workplace have caused you difficulty and why?

How do you feel about working long hours and/or weekends?

What example can you give me of when you have been out of your depth?

What have you failed to achieve to date?

What can you bring to this organisation?

What area of your skills do you want to improve? (Try to relate this to the role on offer).

Which part of this role is least attractive to you?

Why do you think you would like this role?

Where would you like to be in five years?

How would your colleagues describe you?

What would your referees say about you?

Why should I give this position to you instead of the other people on the shortlist? (Strengths).

What reservations should I have about you as an employee? (Weaknesses).

What do you do in your spare time?

What five adjectives would you use that best describe you? (Both in and out of the workplace).