

Preparing for the Interview

The interview is your opportunity to shine and show the potential employer why you are the best fit not only for the job but for the organization. Below are some tips to help you prepare for the important day.

Preparation:

1. **Research the organization.** You should have already done some research on the company before you applied, but once an interview is granted, being an informed interviewee is critical. Be sure to read the organization's **mission and vision statements** and try to refer to them in the interview if possible. Also, for any healthcare system, it is important to know the size of the facility (number of beds, number of locations, etc), any specialties they are known for, or any important civic involvement or events that they do. Being able to refer to any of the organization's successes or overall operation shows the potential employer you have done your homework and are truly interested in the organization.
2. **Do a 'dry run' drive to the interview location.** Many of us rely on MapQuest or our GPS to get us where we need in the time we need to get there. These are great tools, but they do not give us an accurate picture of the true travel time. It is very important that a few days before the interview, you drive to the interview site, locate the parking area and find the entrance you need to use. You should also make this trip at the same time you would for your interview. Traffic will be much different at 7:30am then it will be at 3:00pm, so make sure you keep this in mind. To ensure you allow yourself enough time to get to the interview, do a practice run and you will be much more confident and relaxed on the day of the interview.
3. **Prepare for questions.** Practice how you will answer possible questions posed by the interviewer. In many cases, it isn't the technical knowledge questions that are difficult to answer, but the situational, interpersonal and team work questions that can be the most challenging. Being able to articulate why you are the best person for the job, how your skills match the needs of the organization and how you can contribute to the overall success of the organization are key. Some questions you are likely to get from the interviewer are:
 - a. Tell me about yourself
 - b. What do you know about our organization?
 - c. Why do you want this job?
 - d. What do you find most attractive about this position?
 - e. Why should we hire you?

4. **Have questions ready for the interviewer.** One of the biggest missteps one can make in an interview is to not have questions ready to ask of the interviewer. It is very difficult to try to think of questions on the spot, so having questions prepared in advance is critical. One word of caution, **NEVER ask about salary or benefits.** This will almost always be perceived as a huge negative by the prospective employer. Instead, make sure your questions are about the culture of the organization, expectations of the position, etc. Some questions you can ask are:
- a. What is a typical day like in this position?
 - b. What is the nurse/patient ratio in this facility?
 - c. What are you looking for in the ideal candidate
 - d. What do you enjoy most about working here?
 - e. Can you explain the scheduling process?
 - f. What were the results of your last survey?

It is also important to remember that you are interviewing the organization to make sure it will be a good fit for you. Don't forget to get information that will allow you to make the right decision for your future. One question that all candidates should ask is: **How did this position become available?** This question is important for a couple of reasons. If the interviewer answers that the other person left the organization, your next question should be, **How much turnover has occurred in this position over the past 2 or 3 years?** If you feel the interviewer is being evasive or you find out that there has been a high level of turnover in the position, you may want to do some more research on the organization before accepting an offer. If the interviewer answers the question by stating the previous person was promoted, then you know that there is the opportunity for advancement within the organization.

5. **The telephone interview.** Many organizations are using the telephone interview as their first step in the interview process. This is a cost and time saving step for the organization and allows them to expedite the interview process. The challenge for the interviewee is being appropriately prepared. Most organizations will call first to schedule a time to do the phone interview, but not all. It is important if you are in an active job search that you are always prepared. Here are some tips to help you prepare for the telephone interview.
- a. **Keep a copy of your resume by your phones at all times.** This includes next to your home phone and in your car if your cell phone is your primary contact number.
 - b. **Keep a note pad with your resume.** You will want to take notes during the interview, especially to document the name of the interviewer and any follow up information they will share during the call.

c. Make sure everyone in your household is on board with your job search.

Many people do not realize how many opportunities are lost because of poor or improper message taking, messages not being delivered, family members being rude to the caller, or ignoring the call all together.

Have a serious conversation with your family about how important it is to answer the phone properly and to respect your privacy when you are on the phone with a prospective employer.

The Interview:

- 1. Arrive at least 15 minutes early.** Some employers will have you fill out an application or short profile before they interview you. Give yourself some extra time to compose yourself and relax before the interview begins.
- 2. Have multiple copies of your resume and references with you.** Some organizations are using group or panel interviews to speed up the hiring process. If you are interviewing with a group, it is polite to ask if everyone has a copy of your resume and to let them know you have copies available if needed. Hold on to your references until asked for them.
- 3. Dress professionally.** First impressions are critical and a bad first impression is extremely difficult to overcome during the course of the interview. The employer will be looking at you as this is the best they will ever see you dressed. So make a great impression.
 - a. Clothes should be clean and pressed.
 - b. Jewelry and make up should be simple
 - c. No perfume or cologne
 - d. Facial piercings should be removed and tattoos covered
 - e. No gum chewing
 - f. Shoes should be clean and shined
- 4. Be polite to EVERYONE you meet.** Organizations value the opinion of their front line staff. Make sure you are polite to the receptionist and everyone you encounter. Your interview truly starts the moment you get out of your car in the parking lot. One bad encounter could negate even the greatest interview.
- 5. Relax.** This is much easier said than done, but keep in mind that you are sitting in that chair for a reason. You have sparked their interest enough to bring you in for an interview. You deserve to be there and be confident that you can prove to them that you are the right person for the job.

- 6. Answer questions completely but stay on target.** Many times nerves will force us to either share more information than necessary or cause us to clam up. If you are not clear on what the interviewer is asking, it is perfectly acceptable to ask the interviewer to repeat or rephrase the question, or an even better option is to paraphrase the question back to the interviewer to ensure you have a clear understanding. Try to avoid providing too much personal information. Keep family information to a minimum and try to remain focused on your skills and abilities at all times.
- 7. Be prepared to discuss past experience.** The best predictor of future success is past performance. A good interviewer will ask you situational questions and ask you to recall instances in your past work history to support your successes and challenges. One word of caution, **never talk negatively about a past employer, no matter how bad the situation was.** Even if you were fired from a past employer, you can turn it in to a positive. When discussing past challenges, you can express that even though the situation, position or business relationship didn't work out, you received some great training, experience, and/or insight from it.
- 8. Ask questions and close the interview.** As discussed above, this is the time to learn more about the organization or request any additional information you may need to help you make an informed decision. It is also the time to express your interest in the position, ask if they need any additional information from you and to also find out what the next steps of the interview process will be. Thank the interviewer for their time. This is also the time to let the interviewer know you have your references available if they have not yet been requested.
- 9. Follow up with a Thank You note.** This may seem like a small detail, but a thank you note is extremely important. You want to make sure your thank you note is sent within 24 hours of your interview, although the sooner you get the note to them the better. Emailing your note is appropriate, but taking the time to hand write a quick note of thanks will leave a great last impression. No matter what option you choose, **it is critical that you follow up with a thank you note.**