Top 5 Interview Tips

Even in a down economy there are jobs available and the key to landing a job is having not only a targeted and stellar resume, but also performing well in the interview. The resume only gets you an interview, it’s the interview that gets you the job! With so much importance placed on the interview, I’ve compiled a list of my top five interview tips.

1. **Be Prepared (Part 1: Anticipating Questions)**
   You can prepare for an interview by trying to anticipate the questions you’ll get and develop the content of your answers ahead of time. Look up a list of common interview questions and select a few you expect you’ll get (Like “tell me about yourself,” or “why should I hire you,” and also prepare for a few you hope you don’t get. See the Career Center’s page on interviewing here: http://www.careercenter.sjsu.edu/students/launch/interview/prepare_interview/prepare_interview.html

   Also be sure to prepare for Behavioral Interview Questions. Behavioral Questions are intended to ascertain how you respond or react (behave) in certain situations. They may ask you about past experience “Tell me about a time when you dealt with a difficult coworker,” or a hypothetical situation “What would you do if you were in the middle of a presentation and your computer suddenly failed.” These are usually aimed to see how you respond to negative or difficult situations. Prior to the interview reflect on how you’ve dealt with these situations and prepare your answers in a format that includes the Situation or Task, the Action you took & the Result (STAR). If you’re not familiar with the STAR strategy, you can learn about it here: http://web.mit.edu/career/www/guide/star.html

2. **Be Prepared (Part 2: Know the Organization)**
   Preparation being on the list twice should be a more-than-subtle hint of how important it is. Not only do you want to prepare by reviewing your own experiences and qualifications; but, you’ll also want to research and be knowledgeable about the organization. Know their mission, values, products and accomplishments, and work your knowledge into your answers if possible. Always prepare questions for the employer for the end of the interview. Your questions can (and should) also demonstrate your knowledge of the organization: “I understand your mission at company X is to increase market share by 2012, specifically how do you see the marketing department contributing to that goal?”

3. **Remove All Unnecessary Stress**
   Being interviewed is stressful enough without complicating things by running late, getting lost, or being unprepared. Remove all possible stress-contributing factors under your control. Arrive plenty early and use the extra time to continue your preparation before entering, plan your route ahead of time, maybe even do a test drive the day before to gauge traffic and possible delays. Removing these stress inducing issues will help you relax and be genuine.

4. **Form a Connection with Your Interviewer**
   Interviews can feel like an invasive, one-way dissection of you! In actuality an interview is a two-way interaction, with give and take between two people. It’s true, and it’s important to conceptualize it this way. The interviewer is a person, just like you. They may not be altogether relaxed interfacing with you. It’s your job to hold up your end of this two-way communication by being polite, making them feel comfortable, paying attention to their body language, and listening closely. It can also be appropriate to use humor to connect on a human level and the more the interview becomes like a conversation, usually the better.

5. **Nail the (Big) Little Things**
   And of course…don’t forget all the little things (that can become big if get them wrong): dress appropriately and professionally, don’t chew gum but have fresh breath, make good eye contact, give a firm handshake, engage in small talk when you meet, display attentive posture, bring extra copies of your resume, get the interviewers business card, ask intelligent and informed questions, ask about a follow-up process, thank them for their time, reiterate your interest in the position, and send a thank you note or email.

Lastly, remember that there is no such thing as a perfect interview. There will always be something you feel that you could have done better. Prepare as much as you can before the interview, but most importantly during the interview convey an attitude that is friendly, likeable, courteous, and attentive.