

D3 Personal Interview Tips

All candidates have to earn a living somehow, and most of the time, that process starts with an employment interview.

D3 has assembled the following comprehensive list of Interview Tips filled with the real essentials that you should know when interviewing with a prospective employer.

Sell Yourself.

- If you do not do it, then you can be sure that no one else will. Most of us understand this, but that does not mean that we are all comfortable with it. There is no need to bloat your accomplishments or make false claims, but there is every need to paint the best picture of yourself. If you are feeling apprehensive about this idea, then remember: it is not bragging if you did it.

Interview The Employer.

- Your goal should be to find a job that you actually care about and a firm/company that you want to be a part of. If you focus on jobs like that, then the interview will be much better. You will be genuinely engaged. You will ask more questions of the prospective employer because you are interested and not because “that’s what you’re supposed to do in an interview.”

Exceptional Preparation.

- Preparation is the number one thing that will set you apart from other candidates. Want to be more impressive? Prepare more. If you are obsessed with preparing for every aspect of the interview, then you will be ready to nail it.

Research The Prospective Company/Firm.

- You want to know about the place you are going to work not just so that you can sound intelligent in the interview, but so that you can figure out if it is a place that you actually want to work at. Even if this is not a “career” for you, it is likely that you will be in the job for a year or two. A year might not seem that long, but talk to anyone who disliked their job for a full year, and they will tell you that one year is a long time. See what you can discover about the firm/company. You will want to know what you are getting into.

Get To Know Someone On The Inside Of The Company/Firm.

- Employees can give you an idea of what “a day in the life” is like and can help you determine if this is a place you would like to work at. Plus, if you mention your meetings with employees during the interview then you will make an impression as someone who is serious about the job. If you do not know where to start, then head over to LinkedIn, Google or the firm’s web portal and do some searches for people at the firm/company you are interviewing with.

Be Familiar With The Culture And That You Are A Good Fit For It.

- Interviewers are looking for qualified candidates and people who fit in well with their community and culture. They want to be able to trust you, so show them that you display values that are consistent with their group. Note: if you really are not a good fit and do not match up well with the people you talk to, then you might want to reconsider going there. There is no sense in spending tons of time with people you do not enjoy being around.

Describe The Ideal Candidate.

- Once you know a bit more about the firm/company, spend some time writing out a full description of the ideal candidate. Try to be totally objective about it. What would the firm/company want? See things from their perspective. If you were the Office Manager, what would the perfect candidate look like?

Reframe Experiences.

- Once you understand what the firm/company is looking for and what the ideal candidate would look like, you can reframe your experiences to meet those expectations. For example, if the job description requires a “proven ability to motivate others,” then it is basically asking for “effective leadership skills” ... but one of those phrases might match up better with your background than another. Spend some time thinking about alternative phrases and how you can reframe your skill set to match the desired qualifications.

Create An “I can handle it” List.

- If you can convince the Office Administrator that you can handle the job, then you will have a much better chance of getting the job. Print out the list of required skills and experience that comes with the job. Next to each item, write down an experience you have had that is relevant. It does not need to be a perfect match, just an experience that proves that you can handle the task.

Develop A List Of “Sound Bites.”

- Sound bites are short phrases or sentences that you want to make sure you say throughout the interview. These are phrases that highlight everything that is great about you as a candidate. The exact way you tell a story might change, but you will always want to include the sound bite.

Online Reputation.

- Everyone going through the job process is going to have their name searched. You do not need to be an internet superstar, but it is a good idea to have an online presence that puts recruiters at ease. You either need to be comfortable with having the hiring manager reading your tweets and browsing your Facebook pictures or you need to adjust your privacy settings so that those areas are hidden.

Search The Interviewer Online.

- You can flip the script and search for your interviewers as well. Of course, you are not looking for dirt, you are looking for evidence that you might fit in well at the company, for areas of common interest, and for possible questions you could ask the HR representative.

Practice Interviews.

- It is not fun, and it might even be more awkward than the real interview, but doing practice interviews with friends, family, or others is a critical piece of the puzzle. You need feedback not just on your responses, but also on body language, tone, and approach. You will never know how your answers need to change unless you deliver them a few times to a captive audience.

Use The STAR Method To Guide Your Answers.

- This simple formula ensures that you accurately describe your experiences and highlight the results they provided. The STAR method includes,
 - S: The Situation – describe it
 - T: The Task or problem – what dilemma or problem did you face?
 - A: The Action – what action did you take?
 - R: The Result – what was the result of your action?

Devise Bullet Points For Each Question, Not A Full Script.

- You will want to write out your answers to hard questions beforehand because the written word forces you to clarify your thoughts. However, you only need to know the main point or primary story that you want to tell for each answer. You do not need to memorize everything word for word.

Hiring Managers Usually Ask Questions Related To Five (5) Categories.

- Your background, so that they can understand your experiences, education, and overall qualifications.
- Your knowledge of the job, so that they can test your understanding of the position, their company, and the industry.
- Your personality, so that they can understand your work style and social style and decide if that fits in with their company.
- Your skills, so that they can get an idea of your abilities and test your knowledge and competency for the job.
- Your future goals, so that they can get an idea of your career aspirations and determine how motivated you will be in the position.

If you are fully prepared for these five (5) types of questions, then you will be ready for most interviews.

Common Interview Questions To Be Prepared To Answer During An Interview

“Tell me a little bit about yourself.”

Use this question as an opportunity to tell a short story about yourself that describes the values you have and why you think they are important for the job.

“Why are you interested in our firm/company?”

This is where you show that you did your research. Tell them what you know about the firm/company, about the challenges they face and the opportunities they have, and how you fit in well with that overall picture.

“Give us an example of a challenge you faced and how you overcame it.”

Once again, a good story here is crucial. One solid story about overcoming a challenge will stick with a recruiter, partner and Office Manager long after the interview has concluded.

“What are your strengths?”

Only mention strengths that you can back up with clear proof. Prove your strengths with numbers and percentages, not generalized statements.

“What are your weaknesses?”

This is a classic question that everyone abhors. If you say that you “work too hard” then no one takes the answer seriously, but if you say a real weakness then you look like a bad candidate. So what do you do? D3 suggests picking a technical skill that is real, but mostly unrelated to your job. For example, you could say “Finance isn’t really my thing. I understand the big picture of profit and revenue, but small details and the mechanics of how it works, that’s just not how my mind works. So I would say that’s a weakness, but it’s also a reason I’m applying for this job in marketing. I know that it leverages my strengths and steers clear of some of the weaknesses.”

“Did you and your former boss ever disagree?”

Never speak poorly about a former employer in an interview. It does not matter what the circumstances were or how bad it was, keep things positive or neutral. Nobody wants to hire someone that might talk bad about them down the road.

“Why did you leave your last job?”

Be honest, but also use it as an opportunity to show why this job is a better fit.

“Are you a team player?”

Yes, you are, and make sure you have a good story and some proof to back it up. If you can provide the results that your team efforts provided, then that is great too.

“What books or magazines do you like to read?”

This question is meant to find out how much you keep up with the industry, market, and so on. Feel free to throw in some of your own personal tastes, but the hiring manager wants to hear that you read things that are relevant to the job you are applying for.

“Why should we hire you?”

Do not make vague statements here. Show them that you have done your research by highlighting what problems they are facing. Then, provide specific examples of how you are the right person to help solve those problems. Give them proof of your value and your answer will come across as clear, concise, and confident.

You Won't Be Able To Prepare For Every Possible Question.

- Do not worry about having all of the answers before your interview. It is more important to develop stories that highlight your key virtues and adapt those stories to the questions that are asked of you during an interview.

Treat Everyone With Respect.

- Smile when you arrive to the lobby and treat the receptionist, secretary, or administrative assistant with respect. It is not uncommon for recruiters, partners, Office Managers to ask these people about their first impression, so you want to start off well.

Remember Names.

- Make sure you know the name of everyone you meet and use their names throughout the interview. If you cannot pronounce their name or do not know how, then ask again right away. Asking how to say someone's name is not awkward if you do it immediately. If you ask 30 minutes later, then it reflects poorly on you.

Shaking Hands.

- This is a minor detail, but apparently many people worry about how to shake hands properly, so this tip is worth mentioning. Keep your handshake short and professional. Grasp hands, pump twice (up down, up down) and release. Practice with a friend one time and you will get it. Do not make it harder than it has to be.

Answer The Question That Is Asked.

- Do not stray off topic and babble about unrelated areas. Show that you are focused on the task at hand and engaged in the conversation. Better to have a short answer that is on point, than an in-depth one that is off topic.

Use Time Frames/Numbers.

- Do not forget to mention the results that you have achieved and how long it took you to achieve them. Results are compelling, broad and general statements are not.

Do Not Be Afraid To Say That You Don't Know Something.

- It is far better to truthfully state your skills and experiences than to be dishonest, secure the position, and be asked to do something you do not know how to do, and then have to fess up. Keep things truthful and accurate and you will put yourself in a position to succeed.

Start With A Short Answer And Then Go Into More Depth.

- If you begin your answers by rambling off on a long story, then it often takes a while for you to get to your point. This confuses the interviewer and can make them wonder if you are addressing the right question. If you start with a quick statement that shows you understand the question and have a solid answer, then you can continue with a full story and go into more depth.

Employers Value People Who Are Capable Of Taking An Opportunity And Running With It.

- The situations and circumstances change, but a person who can take advantage of whatever opportunity is presented to them will always be valuable. Regardless of the level you will play in the organization, do your best to showcase that you have the ability to handle whatever comes your way.

There Are No Rules About The Types Of Questions You Should Be Asked.

- Some people complain about getting a difficult and challenging question. You should be ready for hard questions. If you get a question that you do not understand fully or are not sure where to go with it, then ask them a question back. Get more clarity from the interviewer and see if you can get a better understanding of what they are looking for. Have the interviewer restate the question in different words. If you have a back and forth conversation, then you will usually talk your way through the tough questions. Sitting in silence, guessing awkwardly, and then complaining about the question later on doesn't help anyone.

When All Else Fails, Smile As Often As Is Appropriate.

- It is hard to dislike someone who is happy.

A Career - Not A Job.

- Most people just want a job. They want to be employed and get paid. Show the recruiter that you are looking for a career. You want to become a part of the culture, of the company, of a team. You want to be there through good and bad and support the people around you.

Ask "What intrigues you about me enough that you called me in for a second interview?"

- It is obvious that they like you because they invited you back for a second interview, so you might as well find out what they like. They will give you some key areas that they are impressed with, which will make it easier for you to briefly highlight those strengths as well as focus on the other areas that will seal the deal.

Start The Interview By Making It Easy On The HR Representative.

- Ask them, "What can I do to make today as easy as possible? How can I make your life easier today?" This sets a nice tone for the interview, gives you an indication of the recruiter's personality, and will give you some good information to start with.

Find Out What Is Important To Them.

- It might seem like the interview is all about you, your career, and whether or not you are a good fit for the job, but it is actually about the employer. You need to discover what is important to the firm/company and how you can help them reach their goals. At some point during the interview, be sure to ask: "What's really important to the firm/company within the first 90 days of me joining?" The answer to that question will give you specific problem areas that you can talk about solving for the firm/company.

If A Question Comes To Mind During The Interview, Then Ask It.

- Most Office Managers would prefer to have an interactive conversation during the interview. For example, if you give an answer that describes how you are excellent at working in teams, then it would be the perfect time to ask about the opportunities you would have to work on a team in the new position.

You Should Have At Least Three (3) Excellent Questions Ready For The End Of The Interview.

- If you have fewer then it will not look like you did your homework. Do not ask about vacation benefits or something else that can be easily researched. Ask something that is integral to how you will perform in the position.

Here Are Some Examples Of Good Questions You Can Ask During An Interview:

- What is the organization's/firm's plan for the next five years, and how does this department fit in?
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? By whom?
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization/firm in the near future? The biggest threat?
- Now that we have had the chance to talk a bit more, do you have any doubts or concerns about whether or not I would be a good fit for this role?
- Can you explain a typical project that I would be working on? What would "a day in the life" of this position look like?
- How do my answers compare to other candidates that you have seen?
- Give me an example of someone you hired for a position like this that you are delighted you hired.
- Twelve months from now, I want you to tell me that hiring me was the best decision you have made the whole year. What needs to happen for us to have that conversation?
- Give me an example of an employee that exceeded expectations.
- What is company's/firm's strengths and weaknesses compared to its competition?
- What are the significant trends in the industry (legal, accounting/finance, IT, etc.)?
- How do you develop your employees and make them better once they begin their employment?
- How are decisions made here? How much is team-based and how much is on the individual?
- What performance expectations do you have for a good employee in this position? What would success look like?
- Tell me about some of the department's successes in the last few years.

Say Thank You - Ask for The Job.

- If you think you are a good fit, then say so. If this job is your dream job, then tell them that.

Additional D3 Information

For additional information and insight concerning personal interviews, please consult with a D3 representative. As industry leaders in legal staffing, we pride ourselves on offering our expert commentary and analysis of a wide range of subjects affecting a candidates' employment search. www.d3legalsearch.com