

Top 10 Successful Interview Strategies

By Deb Hamacher

Many famous achievers have said in one variation or another that “luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.” Those are wise words for any high performer, including healthcare professionals. Opportunities abound, but you have to be ready for them by properly preparing yourself. Conducting a successful interview requires work and practice. Here are some fundamental interviewing suggestions to keep you primed for your next career opportunity.



It is sometimes surprising, and a bit vexing, that one of the most critical aspects of landing an important career opportunity is often one of the most overlooked. Mastering the interview process requires preparation, practice and an understanding of what employers expect from the experience. Even the most veteran professionals get anxious about interviewing; however, the following tips will better prepare you for the process and ensure you position yourself as the ideal candidate.

1. Be prepared for opportunity

Most career opportunities come when you least expect it. So it's important that you are always prepared.

Keep your resume updated. Confirm your contact information. Be sure you've detailed a complete and current history of your healthcare experiences, including facility names and locations; position titles, dates and responsibilities; career accomplishments; education and any other professional credentials and/or affiliations. It's also a good idea to have both printed and digital copies of your resumes on hand so you can mail, fax or email your resume as needed. And above all, be honest. Never lie or stretch the truth. One embellishment – if discovered – could turn an otherwise great interview into a curt dismissal.

Have your professional references in order.

More and more employers are checking multiple references these days. It's smart to already have them ready so you can provide them to the organization when asked. Make sure you have the current titles and contact information. And always confirm that they know you're using them as a reference.

Google yourself. Perform a quick internet search to make sure there is no questionable information online. Most organizations now conduct an internet search on potential candidates, so it is important for you to know if there is anything out there that could negate your chances of being a solid candidate. If you find something, take steps to have it removed and be prepared to address it should the topic come up during the interview.

2. Practice makes perfect

Practice is the key to a successful interview. The more you prepare, the better you'll do. Practice makes the interview process feel more natural and far less stressful. Here are a few exercises that will hone your interviewing skills:

Practice your delivery style. Have you ever watched yourself on video? How you perceive yourself typically differs from how others perceive you. Your facial expressions, voice tonality and body

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movements can send mixed messages. Practice answering interview questions in the mirror. Make sure your delivery is concise, clear and animated enough to keep the interviewer's attention.

Practice your answers. Keep them succinct – 30- to 60-seconds. Pause after speaking to give the interviewer time to respond. If you think 60-seconds is too short, time yourself answering an interview question in front of a mirror. You'll be surprised at how much information you can convey in less than a minute!

Anticipate the questions you'll be asked. Knowing the answer in advance can be a great stress-reducer in an interview. You can't predict everything, but you can make some educated assumptions of what questions the interviewer will ask. Prepare to speak to your experiences. If you've switched careers several times, be ready with an explanation. Know how to describe your previous positions and accomplishments. Review past interviews and recall the types of questions you faced. Practice your answers to those questions.

Set personal career goals. If possible, try to establish some personal career goals within the context of the organization and your desired position. Practice articulating them. Employers will be impressed that you've put thought behind it, and they'll admire the ambition.

Practice with someone. Role-playing is extremely effective. Get a trusted co-worker, a friend or your significant other to assume the role of the interviewer. Have them ask you questions and practice your answers. Ask them for constructive feedback on your answers, delivery style and mannerisms.

3. Stay knowledgeable on industry trends

As a healthcare professional, you'll be expected to speak on the latest industry news and trends. Understand the challenges and issues that face the industry, the organization with which you're interviewing and your specific area of expertise. There are a variety of excellent newsfeeds, online newsletters and blogs dedicated to tracking the healthcare industry. Follow a few of them to help stay current.

Also, familiarize yourself with the organization. Visit their website for information on their services, executive team and news. Review their annual report. You can also visit websites – such as Medicare's hospital compare page or Healthgrades – to review an organization's quality scores and ratings.

Finally, if possible identify at least two to three challenges or opportunities affecting the organization and/or its community. This shows that you've taken an active interest in the organization and are following its developments.

4. Don't talk... converse

Remember, good interviews are really conversations. Avoid dominating them. Try to listen more than speaking. Interviews are supposed to be dialogues, so give your interviewer the chance to respond. Listen closely and be attentive to what the interviewer is saying. Make eye contact and ask questions. Engage them and ask about their experiences. Their answers will give you valuable insight into the organization and your potential future co-workers.

When answering questions, avoid using potentially negative words like "but," and instead use words such as "yet" or "however." These words enable you to flip a negative topic into a more optimistic response.

5. Keep it relevant

In stressful interviewing situations, it is easy to get off topic. Remember to keep the conversation relevant and steer your responses back to the job opportunity. Speak to your career experiences and accomplishments, especially those that relate to the goals and challenges of the position for which you're interviewing. Ask questions about the organization's goals and the strategies they have for achieving them.

6. Credential yourself

Every call, every email, every touch point with a potential employer is an opportunity to credential yourself. Use every conversation, whether verbal or written, as an opportunity to highlight your experience, knowledge, leadership skills and personal traits. Every interaction is an opportunity to demonstrate your qualifications, your communication



The List: Top 10 Successful Interview Strategies

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4. Don't talk... converse
5. Keep it relevant
6. Credential yourself
7. Have questions of your own
8. Respond immediately
9. Remember names
10. Follow up

skills and your enthusiasm for working with the organization's goals and the strategies they have for achieving them.

7. Have questions of your own

If you've done your homework – if you've studied the organization and contemplated the position for which you are interviewing – you are bound to have

some questions. Ask them at the appropriate time. It shows curiosity and demonstrates your interest in the position. Be sure to keep your questions focused on the organization to which you're applying and the responsibilities you'll be assuming. Don't ask questions about topics that are more appropriately asked after you move forward in the vetting process – like time off or vacation policies.

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Even if an interview goes well, how you handle the follow-up is critical.

8. Respond immediately

When an organization or recruiter calls and leaves a message, return the call immediately. If they email, reply immediately. If you are unable to respond right away, reach back out to them on the same day. Opportunities are fleeting, and chances are you're not the only candidate they're considering. It's important to communicate a sense of urgency – to demonstrate both your eagerness for the opportunity and your responsiveness.

Timeliness is critical. Respond immediately, or at least within 24-48 hours.

If you don't receive a response, send a short message to the person to whom you were initially introduced. Simply reiterate your interest and your excitement about the organization and the people with whom you connected. Mention them by name.

9. Remember names

To the utmost of your ability, find out the names of everyone with whom you'll be interacting during the interview process, whether it's a phone call or face-to-face meeting. Write down their names and know their titles and roles. Address them by name if you have the opportunity to engage with them. If there's more than one person participating in the interview, attempt to engage each one individually. It not only shows respect, but it demonstrates your interest in both the organization and the people with whom you'll be working.

When working with placement specialists, like B.E. Smith, follow-up with your placement team. In these situations, an email is usually more appropriate, versus a handwritten note, but use your judgment. Understand how the people with whom you're working prefer to communicate. For example, it is perfectly acceptable for interim candidates to send an email to their placement team asking for an update.

10. Follow up

Surprisingly, this is one of the most mismanaged aspects of the interviewing process. Even if an interview goes well, how you handle the follow-up is critical. Traditionally, a handwritten note still goes a long way. It shows that you cared enough to take the time to sit down and handwrite a thank you. In today's digital age, it's becoming an increasing rarity, which only makes it more special to receive. That said, an email follow-up is a must, especially if you are interviewing with someone born after the Baby Boomer generation. Email use is ubiquitous today and how the majority of people prefer to correspond.

Finally, be yourself. Personality counts heavily in an interview. In fact, many employers make a decision within the first few minutes of an interview, and then spend the rest of the interview justifying their decision. They're looking for indications that the individual can fit into the culture – someone who is honest, motivated and dependable. Those are traits that can only be expressed through your personality. A resume might indicate knowledge or experience, but it can't demonstrate character. Be positive, confident (yet humble) and energetic. Most importantly, learn from your interviewing experiences. Continue to prepare, refine and hone your interview skills, and you'll find that you'll be better prepared to take advantage of the opportunities that will come your way.

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