Interviewing Basics

Preparation
- Preparation is the single most important component of a successful interview.
- If you don’t have one already, obtain a complete job description if possible (depending upon the level of the position).
- Find out where the interview will be, obtain good directions and confirm the time. Be sure you know where you are going.
- Ask for specific information as to who you will be meeting with. Ask for names and titles. If possible, get info about your interviewer from your network.
- Research the company. Use its website and other resources, and the annual report (if public). Search for current press releases.
- Research the company’s competition; learn about any challenges the company is facing.
- Identify the key competencies the interviewer will be looking for. Prepare stories or examples of situations where you have demonstrated each quality or skill. Use the S.T.A.R. method: Briefly describe the situation + state the task + explain the action(s) you took = end with the result.
- Make an appointment with the CSO to do a mock interview. We can offer personalized feedback to ensure you have a successful interview. Try to do this at least one week prior to the interview. Don’t wait until the last minute.
- Prepare your 2 minute pitch. You can use this to answer “Tell me about yourself”.
- Make sure you are prepared to handle salary questions; do your homework on what the position should pay.
- You should already have potential references lined up. If you don’t, reach out to those individuals that you would like to use as a reference and ask their permission. Prepare a professional “reference list” document including the name, contact information and the context of the relationship with each person. You may need to email this soon after the interview.

First Impressions
- It’s true that perceptions are formed within the first few minutes of meeting. First impressions are extremely important. Smile, be enthusiastic and pleasant. Have extra copies of your resume (on quality paper) on hand as well as a professional pad folio and pen. Look organized.
- Arrive 10 - 15 minutes early. Give yourself plenty of time to get organized and grounded.
- Turn off your cell phone before you meet the interviewer.
- Make eye contact, smile and give a firm handshake. Simple, but easy to forget.
- Determine what style of dress is appropriate. Usually it is safe to err on the conservative side. Business suits are usually acceptable for an interview; unless you determine that the organization is extremely informal (some high tech companies and others might be very informal – research it or ask your network). If the culture is extremely informal, it may be appropriate to wear something professional yet not as conservative as a suit. Slacks and a blazer might be more appropriate.
- Be polite and engaging to everyone you meet, even if you are frustrated about something. Negative (and positive) feedback will get back to your interviewer.
- Be prepared with a brief overview of your background and what you bring to the table. Practicing this beforehand will keep you grounded.
- Tip: Read the interviewer as best you can. Respond accordingly.

The Interview
- There are many different styles of interviews. Be sure you’re ready for any of them. They include: clarification, behavioral, panel, stress, case analysis, or conversational.
- Stay confident and positive. Focus your answers on what you can do, not what you can’t.
- Make sure you completely understand questions before you answer them.
- Be focused and keep answers concise. It is easy to unintentionally meander away from the point of the question. If you feel you have rambled, it is ok to ask “Does that answer your question?”
- Remember to use examples and stories. They make you more believable and more memorable.
- Chemistry and cultural fit are always assessed in an interview. Interviewers want to see you will be easy to work with. Be pleasant and use appropriate humor if your assessment is that the interviewer will respond well to it.
- Ask thoughtful questions throughout if appropriate, or at the end of the conversation.
- Do not raise the issue of salary or benefits until the interviewer brings it up.
- Ask for the job. If you feel this is the job for you, don’t be afraid to express your enthusiasm.
- Tip: Interviewers are sometimes not adept at interviewing. Be sure that you communicate your key strengths and experiences even if the interviewer forgets to ask. Take responsibility for making the interviewer feel comfortable.

Ending the Interview Effectively
- Follow up is crucial - Only 20% of interviewees send thank you notes. This is an easy way to stand out from the crowd. Make sure they are perfect in grammar, etc. and refer to an aspect of your conversation.
- If you feel the interviewer has doubts about your candidacy, address them in the thank you note (simply).
- Depending on the industry or company, notes can be hand written, emailed or sent via US mail. A hand-written note is rare, therefore often quite effective. Use an email thank-you to show timely follow-up.