





Facing the panel

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INTERVIEW SERIES: PART 1

In today's executive job market, acing one interview is just the first step to being hired. Corporates normally screen potential employees over a series of six interviews. Follow our advice on how to prepare for the panel interview, the final step in the recruitment process

Sitting opposite a row of executives while vying for a top job probably isn't your idea of a good time. Yet if you're preparing for a panel interview, chances are you're a top contender. "You've probably had an interview with the Human Resources Executive and with your prospective boss," says Sandra Burmeister, CEO of the Landelahni Recruitment Group. "Now a broader range of executives are keen to make a final assessment of what makes you tick and whether you're right for the position."

While they may be nerve-wracking, numerous interviews actually offer a unique opportunity to gauge how the company operates. "You can benefit from a panel interview too, since you'll have an opportunity to gain an insight into the company's culture and personality," says Burmeister. As you progress from interview to interview, use your increasing knowledge of the company and its bosses to stand out from other candidates. >

BUSINESS EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE

5 PANEL INTERVIEW TIPS

Follow Burmeister's advice on how to prepare

1. Be ultra-prepared: Do your research. Find out what you can about the company in advance: its business, its philosophy and its customers. It's not enough to simply visit the company's website; search the business pages of online newspapers as well.

Also check the company's profile on social networking sites like Facebook

KNOW YOUR WORTH

Nia Maritz, MD of DBS Human Capital, shares tips on communicating your worth when applying for an executive position

- Really understanding the position for which you're being interviewed and recognising both your limitations and capabilities is the best way to prepare for the interview process. Knowing what makes you good at what you do helps you focus on where you can add the most value.
- Understanding your true passion and how it integrates with your skills and work experience can help you get interview-ready and open up a perfect career opportunity.
- Knowing how you make decisions when under pressure and how you behave is your natural aptitude. Natural aptitude planning will help you understand what your intellectual worth is to any organisation and bring it across during an interview process.

and LinkedIn.

If possible, find out who'll be on the panel and what their responsibilities are. This will help you address each person by name and give you some insight into the questions they're likely to ask. Practise the panel interview with a few friends who are in similar jobs and, if possible, video the session to review your body language, comments and communication style.

Even if the recruitment agency or company says it's unnecessary, prepare enough copies of your CV and, for marketing positions and related jobs, your portfolio. It's a good way to impress the interviewers with your professionalism.

2. Make a strong start: Looking the part is critical for success in a panel interview. Dress professionally and err on the side of understatement, unless you're interviewing for a position with an ad agency!

Take a few deep breaths and enter the interview room with enthusiasm. An open expression and an engaging demeanour are important. The panel will form its first impression of you within seconds – and that impression tends to stick. Show with your positive energy that you're ready to tackle challenges and make a fast start on the job.

3. Make eye contact: If possible, greet each panel member with a firm handshake, while smiling and making eye contact. Continue making eye contact with each member of the panel from time to time – don't look at a spot on the wall or over their heads. Answer questions by directly addressing the people asking them. Speak clearly and answer questions fully. Elaborate, rather than giving "yes" or "no" answers.


4. Have facts at your fingertips:

Have all aspects of your CV and portfolio at your fingertips, so you can quickly refer to details, no matter what questions are asked. Think through areas that may not be clear from your CV. You may be asked to give examples of how you behaved in certain situations, or how you handled projects or crises.

A panel interview often indicates that the company culture is one of teamwork. Recall examples of your success as a team member or leader in your previous jobs. Prepare answers to questions about your strengths and weaknesses. Be honest, but not self-denigrating, about your weaknesses, always adding that you're willing to learn and improve. Provide examples of experiences where you achieved a positive result, even in the face of a challenge. The point is to show the value you bring to the company, not what you expect from them in terms of remuneration.

Be ready with two or three questions you have about the company and the position. This will help convince the interviewers that you're really interested in the position.

If you don't know how to respond to a question, take a moment to compose your thoughts so that you don't rush into an inappropriate answer or sound flustered, and never be negative about current or former colleagues.

5. End positively: A crisp end to the interview is important. Don't let the interview peter out. If possible, shake each panel member by their hand and thank them for their time. 

INTERVIEW SERIES: PART 2

In the November 2011 issue of DESTINY, we discuss how to handle psychometric and peer interviews.