

Preparing for the Interview

Noted below are some basic pointers in interview preparation.

Evaluate your own reasons for exploring the opportunity.

This was covered in the first section. Doing so will help you ascertain your own motivations and discern if a new role fulfils the aspirations you seek.

Review and recap on your own career history and moves.

A typical interview would require the interviewer to go through your career history to evaluate your experiences, strengths and weaknesses. It only makes sense for you to be clear on your own history, sales targets, headcounts, achievements, etc, even if it was “so many years ago”.

Most managers would also want to know your decisions for previously moving companies, in order to understand your commitment and thinking process, and to assure themselves that you have the staying power to see through any difficult situations.

Review your achievements and contributions to the company.

Whilst many of us are uncomfortable with blowing our own horn, this is important information for an interviewer to assess your fit to their role.

An easy approach to manage this is to factually and concisely state the facts as you share each stage of your career during the interviews. For example:

- **State the Background Challenges** in each company - eg poor sales results
- **Your Evaluation** - eg identified conflicting channel network and poorly trained sales team
- **Your Initiative** - eg segmented market, realigned channel partners, identified new partners, set KPIs and agreed mutual terms; provided structured training to sales team; and
- **Impact on the Problem** - eg achieved better channel support, penetrated new segments, more competent sales team, increased pipelines and revenues by % within 9 months.

Review your weaknesses honestly.

If there were poor decisions or a period of failure in your career, make sure you are mentally prepared to tackle the queries.

Remember that although a failure may be in part due to challenges outside your control, eg, a poor economy, a bad management, weak operations support etc, this is not the forum for blaming.

Be matter of fact if the challenge was out of your control but

Take responsibility if the mistake was yours

Highlight what Initiatives you took to mitigate or manage these challenges where possible, and share how you have benefited from lessons learnt.

Keep in mind that in most senior positions, no role is smooth sailing and the interviewer is very likely seeking candidates who have the maturity and determination to take initiative and accountability in managing challenging situations which may well exist in the new company.

Prepare your Key Messages.

Based on the challenge and responsibilities of the new role, prioritise 4-5 Key Initiatives or Achievements that you would wish to highlight, normally at the tail-end of your interview. The purpose is to enable the interviewers to understand how you can add value to their organization, and differentiate yourself from the other candidates.

These Key Messages could well be used for questions such as “What are your thoughts on your ability to take on this challenge?”, “Do you think you’d be a good candidate for this mandate? The Key Messages would essentially be what you’d want the interviewers to remember about you, above anything else.

Consider your experience and track record versus the job specifications.

Bear in mind, it is likely you are exploring this new opportunity as it offers a bigger portfolio or additional challenges compared to the current one. As such, there may be gaps in your experience which you will need to overcome.

Identify these gaps, consider how you intend to tackle them, and whether you will realistically be able to manage these stretched objectives.

These will be the same questions on the minds of the interviewers.

Do your Research into the Company.

A good background knowledge of the potential employer is a key component of a well managed interview. Basic information like the products, markets, presence, P&L and the competitive space in which it operates is readily available in today's information age and provides you with the starting point to ask relevant and intelligent questions.

If your network of contact also provides you with grapevine information, take note of these details but be sure not to make hasty assumptions. If important enough, the veracity of these may be clarified at the appropriate point during the interview.

Identify a few Key Questions

Note down critical questions that will be important in helping you decide if the new role and company is relevant to your experience and exciting as a new prospect. Some examples:

- How did this vacancy come about. Replacement, newly created, succession planning?
- What are the key priorities, territorial scope, business focus of the company and this position?
- Where does the role fit within the company structure? Who is the direct manager and reports? Who are the key people that the role will have to interface with?
- What is the corporate culture and management philosophy?
- What are the challenges that the role is likely to face, internally and externally.
- What are the expectations and performance measurements of the role.
- What is the company's strategy in dealing with current consolidation in market, advent of new technology, new competitors, cost pressures etc.