Five Professionals Give Interview Tips

Applying for a job may seem like a gamble. You put in an application or send in a resume to be entered into a large pool of candidates. And if you’re lucky, you’re selected for an interview. Often a company will interview several people for each job opening. This means that there are at least two other people vying for your position. Savvy job seekers can get ahead of the competition by thinking like an employer.

What is an employer looking for?

“Organizations are looking for people who solve problems, not create them” said Ann Skinner, director of the Upper Savannah Workforce Development Board. “They ask questions to learn about your skills. They also look for clues to figure out if a candidate will be reliable.”

Kristin Mansell, a recruiter for Sykes, says that the first thing she notices about a candidate is their body posture.

“If they’re slumped in the chairs, if they’re on their phones, arms crossed, or if they’re alert and excited, if they introduce themselves, or if I’m greeted with a smile.” Mansell said.

Mansell said she notices their appearance, if they took the time to prepare a resume or if they brought proof of their high school diploma or GED. All of these things help employers determine how serious a candidate is about the position, she added.

Lee Matthews of Sage Automotive Interiors suggests that a candidate be punctual.

“Always be on time once you get hired,” Matthews said. “This is the most basic agreement you make with an employer. You agree to provide your time and they agree to provide you with a wage. People that are late for an interview, regardless of the excuse, will always have an excuse for not making it to work on time.

“Have a strong, positive attitude.” Matthews added. “You can teach someone to do just about anything if they have the right attitude and are willing to learn.”

Melissa Tolden of Horace Mann said, “The trait that stands out with me is how well a candidate can articulate their goals and problem resolving skills. Keep a positive attitude, instead of saying ‘I don't like to do the same task all the time. Say I love to multi task. Have a take-away, learn something from each interview.”

Phil Madden, Sykes Director, said that not only a person’s reasons for applying are important but also their ability.

“Do they have relative Knowledge or experience about the job they are interviewing for?” Madden asked. “Are they qualified? Are they overly confident? Are they more interested in salary versus the job description and needs of the position?”

To be able to answer these questions and more Madden suggests, “Research, research, research. Know the company you are interviewing with and use all resources to gain knowledge. Find out where the company is headquartered, who the CEO is, what the company’s mission statement is, and how many people they employ. Find a mentor or coach who can do “mock” interviews prior to the live interview. And lastly, believe in yourself!”

Job seekers are sometimes nervous because they are eager. Skinner said the best way to deal with jitters is to prepare. “It is like preparing for a test, you practice.” She encourages potential workers to try their hand at common interview questions. You might feel goofy at first, but after a while, you get used to talking about your skills.”

“The most common interview question is the simplest, ‘tell me about yourself.’” The answer should be short and focused on why you are a good fit for the job. For example saying, ‘I am an accountant with two years’ experience in tax preparation,’ is more effective than saying, ‘I grew up in Columbia and I moved to Greenwood six years ago.’ She explained, that the question isn’t posed to elicit a biography but to give you a chance to show how you can help the company.

Skinner said that lists of interview questions can be found on the internet, and SC Works Centers have additional resources such as workshops, books and professional staff who can conduct mock interviews. To learn more about SC Works go to [www.upperscworks.com](http://www.upperscworks.com) or go like Upper Savannah Workforce System on Facebook. There are seven SC Works centers in the Upper Savannah region. The telephone number for Greenwood is 864.229.8872.