

How to Ace The Executive Interview

By the time you reach the point in your career where you're interviewing for an executive level role, you may feel highly confident in your knowledge and experience. Chances are good that you have been on both sides of the interview coin and have interviewed quite a few candidates yourself. If pressed for time, you might be



tempted to focus on challenging questions you anticipate, appropriate responses, and examples of successes stories you'll share. All of this is important; however, there is more to be done. As a firm specializing in executive-level placements, we've seen our share of candidate missteps from highly qualified individuals going through this process. Below are some tips based on our recent experience.

#1: *Re-visit and Re-assess All Online Profiles*

It's important to remember that an executive interview starts long before the first question. In today's era of social media, your interviewer will probably "see" you long before they meet you or hear you speak, and if what they see collides with their vision of professionalism, that's definitely not the start you are hoping for. Review any personal profiles on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, etc. and ask yourself, "Does this represent me the way I would want my future employer/Board of Directors to see me?" While that spontaneous vacation picture your cousin posted of you last year or that snarky quote you re-tweeted

seemed funny and harmless at the time, potential employers take social media profiles seriously and may form an inaccurate picture of who you really are based on a moment of "fun." Also, make sure your LinkedIn profile is current and aligns with your resume and relevant experience. You should have some great endorsements on there, and if you've conducted any presentations recently or had any materials published, be sure to include those.

#2: *Conduct Relevant Research*

Everybody should know that it's important to research an organization as thoroughly as possible prior to the interview, but it is surprising how many individuals ask questions that could have been easily answered simply by looking at the organization's website. Researching all available avenues affords you the opportunity to ask relevant and informed questions about the organization that may directly impact your role. Check for recent press releases regarding new business developments, mergers, acquisitions, etc.



Many organizations include their annual reports from the last few years on the website, which can not only offer viable financial information, but give you a fuller sense of the culture.

#3: *Master Your Preparation*

This is the time to make sure you know your CV like the back of your hand, and begin

thinking about what types of questions to anticipate. If you don't know whether the interviewer(s) will have your resume in front of them, have several prepared on professional paper that you can take with you.



Remember, the interview is designed to assess whether you, the candidate, can do the job at hand, whether you'll spring into action once on the job, and whether you fit with the organization's culture, mission/vision, and existing management team. You also should conduct a self-inventory and measure it against what you've gleaned from your research on the organization's culture and philosophy. We've seen many people who were drawn in by a title, an organization's reputation, or simply the opportunity to advance who really hadn't assessed whether or not they were a cultural fit for the organization, and vice versa. If you're vying for a CEO role and one becomes available, it's easy to want to "go for it," but the wrong fit can be worse than not making a change at all.

#4: *Show Up On Time (but not too early)*

This is simple: Never, ever be late. Allow more than enough time to arrive on time, but don't walk through the door more than 15 minutes early. You might think it shows initiative and enthusiasm, but the reality is, your interviewers are typically very busy professionals who have set aside an allotted time to meet with you. By arriving too early, they may feel a sense of urgency to adjust their timing to meet your schedule, and that can be more annoying than it is admirable. If you're more than 15 minutes early, review your notes or take some time in your car visualizing yourself as the solution the organization needs while you wait to enter the building.

#5: *Dress the Part*

When interviewing for an executive level role, it's important that you dress the part. Wear your best attire, including shoes. You want to walk into an interview conveying that you have the professionalism it takes for the job. Even if you've done research that reveals a casual work attire is the "norm," don't assume that's how you should look. You don't work there yet. While appearance shouldn't be the basis of the final decision, it often plays a role, and it's better to be overdressed than underdressed. Dressing too casually implies a lack of respect for the organization and the importance of its search process. One exception: if the interviewer tells you in advance that their dress code is casual and specifically instructs you to do so, then by all means, honor the request.

#6: *Master Your Communication Style*

When you walk into the room, introduce yourself. You may be tempted to wait for the interviewer to take the lead, but extend your hand first—it demonstrates confidence and self-assurance. Throughout the interview, pay attention to your overall body language and tone of voice: what do they communicate? Are you sitting forward and engaging? Are you making eye contact with everyone in the room as you're answering questions? Making a real connection during the interview process is important.



#7: *Ask Questions*

Remember that an interview is truly a two-way street. You should be evaluating the potential of the hiring organization's opportunity as much as the interviewers are

evaluating you. Come prepared with questions of your own that will help you assess that in addition to alignment in terms of desired skills and qualifications, your values and goals are compatible with the organization's. But don't make your questions all about your needs. Just as with any communication situation, your questions should reveal your interest in their needs as much as your own.

#8: *Send a Thank-You Note*

It is surprising how many experienced leaders overlook this small, but very significant, gesture. It only takes a matter of minutes and is a basic courtesy. The interviewers have invested a great deal of time and energy in selecting you as a candidate, and deserve appreciation for this

investment. Make this your first post-interview activity, and include the following: appreciation for the opportunity to meet, something specific about the conversation, a statement regarding your level of enthusiasm for the role, and conclude with a direct link between your qualifications and the organization's need in their new leader.

None of the steps outlined above require a great deal of time or effort. They are simple ways to help you create a great impression in the interview. You have spent your career building for this moment—don't let the "small" things derail your continued success.



About the Author

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