Interviewing Techniques

The ideal interview is a two-way street, allowing the employer to convey information to you, the interviewee, about the job and the organization, while you have the opportunity to discuss your qualifications and the information on your resume. The interview is the most important element in the job search process. It is a time to assess the “match” between you and the employer. The employer will be assessing your background, skills, personal style, and interest in the position/organization and supplying you with information about the job and the organization. You will be providing the interviewer with information on your skills, level of commitment, and your experiences, while at the same time eliciting enough information to ascertain whether or not the particular job/organization is right for you.

Being invited to an interview generally means that the potential employer already thinks you are qualified to do the job (so pat yourself on the back!). This probably means that your cover letter and resume were effective. The interview, therefore, will not only determine your qualifications for the job, but it will also be a chance for the interviewer to find out what you’re like and to assess how well you would fit into the organization. It is quite common and natural to be nervous before an interview. Typically once you get into the interview room and settle down you will realize that you are just having a conversation with a colleague in the field. You’ve gotten to this stage on your own merits. Just keep up the good work!

The basic rule of thumb of interviews is that you need to articulate convincingly why you should be hired and why you are interested in the position. The following qualities will enhance your ability to come across professionally and effectively in an interview.

Communication skills. The ability to write and articulate ideas and information and to interact with others.

Confidence. An awareness of your strengths and weaknesses (areas needing improvement). Willingness to set and attain realistic goals.

Personality. A sense of humor, cheerfulness and flexibility in new situations. Enthusiasm to accept challenges is particularly important.

Accomplishments. Academic as well as personal achievements.

Knowledge. An understanding of the organization and the career field.

GENERAL POINTERS:

Be prepared. Know as much about the position/hospital/organization as you can. Ask for a copy of the annual report/informational brochure/job description prior to the interview. Ask colleagues, friends, and faculty about the organization. The more you know, the more focused your answers will be.

Know yourself. Think honestly about your strengths and weaknesses, your work style, skills, and goals. Be prepared to give honest answers. Review your resume critically and try to identify the areas that an employer might view as limitations without apologizing for deficiencies.

Be prompt and professional. Arrive early. If you don't know where the organization is located, call for directions ahead of time. Anticipate traffic, parking problems and general unforeseen difficulties. If you know you are going to be late be sure to call and let someone know. To be more comfortable, you should arrive approximately 10 minutes early. Allow yourself the time to read your resume one more time, catch your breath, hang up your coat and get into the right mind set for the interview.
Dress appropriately. First impressions count! Nursing is a profession, so dress accordingly.
For women: a tailored skirt or pants suit in dark colors. For men: a tailored suit in dark colors and a conservative tie (basic colors and patterns are best). Have a portfolio to carry your resumes and other documents in; light on perfume/cologne; carry breath mints.

Be honest. Let an employer get to know you. You want to be sure that you and the employer know what to expect if you are hired.

Be positive. Never say anything negative about past experiences, employers, or courses and professors. Employers, like anyone, tend to generalize: if you didn't like "x", you are a negative person and won't like me either. Figure out what was positive about an experience and talk about that. Be "up" about yourself. If you wouldn't hire yourself, neither will the interviewer. Be enthusiastic. If you are genuinely interested in the job, let the interviewer know that. No need to sound desperate, just interested. This interest makes the interviewer feel as though his/her organization is well respected and enticing, which is flattering.

Demonstrate interest. This can be achieved by doing research on the organization prior to the interview. It can also come across by asking questions during the interview about the job, the organization and the people it serves. When asking questions, be sure that the answers will give you information that you don't already have (or should have) and that the questions are genuinely of interest to you. Be responsive to what has gone on in the interview. If you have listened well, you should be able to come up with thoughtful questions, which impress the interviewer.

Be ready for anything! Interviews in health-care settings, in addition to the traditional one-on-one format, may involve several interviewers at a time, meeting with different staff successively, or even observing the setting for some length of time. Questions about how you would handle particular scenarios are quite common. Expect these kinds of situations.

Follow-up. Always write a thank-you note within 48 hours of an interview. Hand-delivering thank you notes is a nice touch that is rare in our fast-paced, high tech world. See the section on follow-up correspondence for details and samples.