



CONTRACT ACCOUNTANTS

INTERVIEW GUIDELINES





CONTRACT ACCOUNTANTS

The short time you spend at a job interview could have
a dramatic effect on your career prospects.

It is therefore important that you perform well. No matter how attractive
your career record is to date, the employment interview remains an important step
towards achieving your ambitions.

These hints, combined with the guidance provided by our consultants, will equip
you with valuable information on how to conduct yourself during interviews
with prospective employers.



Your attitude is determined 10% on what happens to you and 90% on how you choose to react. Whether you think you will succeed or whether you think you won't succeed – you're right! What you think actually becomes your reality.

Envision yourself already working IN a job that would make you happy. Write down the following:

- What type of job are you doing?
- What are the functions of your job?
- What salary are you earning?
- What is your environment?
- What type of boss do you have?
- What are your advancement possibilities?

If you have not been getting the results you want, you need to change the way you are handling your job search. Continuing to do the same things in your job search – will provide the same results. Great leaders, great sports figures and successful people all make changes. They all hire coaches to get them to their next level of performance or success.

Do you realize that Michael Jordan missed more shots than he made? When you think of Michael you think of the greatest basketball player of all times, you don't think of his missed shots. Successful people try more so they fail more, but they learn from their failures and keep going. There is a very important lesson to learn from them.

Keep in mind that there is no job security. The only job security you have is to keep your skills and marketability current. Take additional courses, learn technology, earn your degree, do whatever you need to do to increase your value to a future employer. The only job security existing today is for an individual to keep themselves marketable. This involves maintaining computer literacy, utilising technology to increase effectiveness and becoming an expert within their chosen profession.

Think of the analogy of this process to your job search. The job seeker must determine which positions will benefit their careers and then "audition" for the part to prove to the decision makers why they are the best person for the job.

If you are not "planning for success, you are planning for failure." If you take the time to plan your job search, you have dramatically increased your chance at landing your dream job. The same holds true for a job search - if you don't know where you're going, you are never going to get there! The best person to manage your career is you!

Once a person has committed to making a job change, the first step is to set specific goals. This applies to the individuals currently in the job market as well as individuals who are employed, but open to new opportunities. Most individuals want to find a job that will provide them with personal satisfaction, competitive compensation, benefits and the opportunity for growth. It is important to be realistic about current qualifications as well as the specific type of work you want to do.

Answering some honest questions may help you to understand exactly what it is you should be looking for:

Personal Appraisal

Honestly describe the kind of person you are (e.g., a leader or follower, etc.)

1. Write down how your friends would describe you.
2. What do you want to accomplish with your life?
3. What role does your job play in your life?
4. What are your accomplishments to date?
5. What role does money play in your values?
6. What are your main interests?
7. What do you enjoy most?
8. What displeases you most?

Job Appraisal

1. Start with your most recent employer and then work back toward your graduation. Describe in detail each job including your title, company, responsibilities, salary, accomplishments, successes, failures and your reason for leaving.
2. How would you change your job history?
3. In your career to date, what responsibilities have you enjoyed most? Why?
4. What kind of job do you think would be a perfect match for your talents and interests?
5. What responsibilities do you want to avoid?
6. How prepared are you for that type of responsibility?
7. If you want to advance in your career, are you prepared to pay the price? Longer hours? More pressure?
8. What have your superiors thought about you as an employee?
9. Can your work make you happier? Should it?
10. If you have been fired from any job, what was the reason?
11. What have you done to improve your weaknesses?



It's important to evaluate any objective you're considering in light of your answers to those questions.

There is an 80/20 Rule. 80% of what you achieve is the result of 20% of your efforts. If your goals are to improve the quality of your life and the level of job you accept, figure out your best talents. What is the 20% of your actions that provides you with the 80% of your results? Your goal should be to spend the majority of your time using those top talents. These are also the talents you want to market to a future employer. Change is occurring at lightning speed in the job market due to the three drivers of change: people, technology and information. The day of working 40 years at the same company and retiring with a gold watch is non-existent. Today's market is all about the power of now. Conventional practice is gone. It's time to rethink priorities and to shift emphasis. The attitudes and values of the workforce have shifted and competition is tougher than ever before.

Some realities:

- The average individual changes jobs every 4 years.
- There is no job security within a company, job security comes from you keeping your skills and knowledge current.
- Embrace technology – it is here to stay.
- The new workplace is hiring individuals who embrace change! Work on becoming flexible, adaptable and a change “maker”

When you send your information to a recruiter you should:

- Summarise your marketable characteristics in your cover letter.
- Clearly state your target market (geographic, area, industry, and position) and your salary range.
- State your key selling points, your summary and most importantly your accomplishments! Recruiters will sell your accomplishments to their clients, not your job description.
- Attach a list of professional references. Don't list an HR person as one of your references. They are restricted legally on what they can say, and will often only verify dates of employment and if you are eligible for rehire. You need to go to the person who was your direct boss and ask them to be one of your listed references. If you left that position on good terms, most people want to help you with your job search. Many recruiters will use your references to book interviews for you or to remove any concerns a client may have about you or your experience.
- Be honest. Recruiters will check your professional references. If you have something in your past, for example, getting let go on “bad terms”. Your recruiter will find out. If you have not been honest, your recruiter won't trust you and your working relationship is often ended at that point. If you are honest with them, they will try to help you handle it in the most positive way. A recruiter's reputation is at stake with every single candidate they choose to represent.
- Don't call your recruiter on a regular basis unless they ask you too. Follow up is great in most situations. Send them a short email message every two weeks. Do not take it personally if a recruiter does not get back to you. Be confident that they are doing everything possible to find you a job.
- The ideal situation is to seek out a recruiter that is professional, represents reputable corporations, has tenure with their firm, is honest with you and most importantly, someone you can trust with your career. You want to find a recruiter that you can build a relationship with and feel confident that they have your best interest at heart.
- Make sure that your recruiter has all of your contact information. With today's technology, you should be reachable immediately following your interview. Actually, recruiters expect you to be accessible at

all times, in case they get a last minute interview for you.

- Make yourself readily available for interviews. If a recruiter books an interview with one of their clients, MAKE IT HAPPEN! Clients are busy and do not like to work around your schedule. Never cancel an interview. If you cancel, that is the client's first impression of you. Make sure you have good communication with your recruiter to prevent negative situations.

Having your resume in the hands of a recruiter is the best passive way to be open to outstanding opportunities and the reasons to work with an agency include:

- Recruiters have access to many positions that are not advertised.
- Recruiters can provide tremendous insight into the companies they represent, especially preparing you for your interviews.
- When top corporations need "The Best" person for a specific position, they turn to recruiters for their expertise and network!
- The process is extremely confidential.
- Small to medium companies, in general, are growing rapidly. It is typically those companies that utilise agencies.



- Recruiters are always educated and aware of market trends. They can talk with you about current trends and predicted future trends as well.
- If your recruiter knows what your long term goals are, they can help you find positions that will enable you to attain your goals.

When you get a recruiter on the phone, offer to send them your CV and cover letter. Recruiters like to see your experience before they actually interview you. Usually, a recruiter has a good idea whether or not they can represent you. A good recruiter will be honest with you either way. Neither of you wants to waste any time.

If your CV is a job description, you need to rewrite it! Your CV is a sales presentation that ends up functioning as your "ticket to an interview". CV's, if not written properly, can end up screening you out. Your CV needs to be concise - understand many agencies and large companies scan CV's for certain keywords. You need to include key words in your covering letter that will make the reader of your CV want to read further. Don't include anything important about your qualifications or experience in your covering letter that is not in your CV.

In the body of the CV, indicate any unusual responsibilities you've been given or examples of how you've saved the company time or money, or helped it grow. Include any special recognition of your abilities and keep your CV honest. Never exaggerate, embellish or deceive. Tell the truth about your education, accomplishments and work history as many companies run background checks which will confirm the information you have provided. If there are discrepancies, you will be eliminated from consideration. The following are common mistakes that could cause your CV to be screened out versus help you schedule an interview:

1. If your CV is a job description that could be used by anyone who worked in the position.
2. Accomplishments are not listed for each job.
3. CV contains errors: spelling, grammatical, dates, etc.
4. Major skills are not listed.
5. First job is listed first versus the most recent position.

Research

When you are selecting your industry targets, make sure you research the following on the industry or position you are targeting:

- Trends and future prospects in a specific industry
- Areas of growth or decline in that industry
- The challenges the industry faces that could utilise your skills
- The culture of the industry
- The top, medium and lower ranked companies in the industry
- It is not always the most qualified person who gets the job offer. It is the person who had the best interviewing skills, the person who conducts the best "interview".

CV Tips

Research the company

You need to research your targeted company prior to an interview. There is a wealth of information on the Internet and you should review their entire website. Make sure you read any recent news releases or articles published about them. You may also want to research information on their main competitors. There are a number of research publications providing this and additional information. Among the most helpful are:

- The company's internet site
- The business Who's Who
- Top 300 companies
- The Stock Exchange Research Handbook

Research the opportunity

It is critically important that you know the requirements of every job you target. You want to tie in your experience and skills to the specific requirements of your prospective employer. You must understand the requirements of the job so you can prepare how you will present yourself in your interview. In a job

interview you sell the skills, experience and attitude you bring to the table that coincides with their opportunity. Thus, the interviewer actually starts to “see you in the role.”

Research the individual

It is very helpful to learn as much as you can about the person who will be conducting your interview. They could be listed on the company website, or you might try to Google their name to see what information you surface. Remember, the individual who is hired, is a reflection on this person's ability to identify the perfect match for their opportunity. The interviewer wants to hire the candidate who will make him/her look good.

Dress appropriately

Employers assume that the best they will ever see you dressed is during your interview. Even if they tell you to dress casually, it is best not to arrive in jeans. When you take the time to dress appropriately, it sends a message to the employer that you care enough to present yourself professionally.

Appropriate actions

Confidence:

You cannot enter an interview with a defeatist attitude. You need to sell your abilities. The best way to display confidence is to focus on your accomplishments. You should follow up each accomplishment with the impact it had on your employer. You need to let the interviewer know you are confident in your abilities to do the job they are offering.

Positive Attitude:

During your interview, you need to maintain a positive attitude both in the things you say and in your appearance. You need to smile and even if you hear something that you don't agree with, don't look disgruntled. You can always ask questions later in your interview to clarify all facts.

Eye Contact:

Keeping eye contact throughout your entire interview is vitally important. Most individuals look up or to the side when they are thinking which is fine. However, the minute you start to answer a question, look right into the eyes of the interviewer. Looking away or down often gives the impression of dishonesty or disinterest.

Body Language

Experienced interviewers will watch how you react to questions during your interview. Your body language can project information that you are not verbalising. Following is a list of Body Language to avoid:

- Avoid fidgeting – it shows a lack of self confidence
- Avoid “over the top” hand gestures – they are distracting
- Avoid biting your lips – it gives the impression you are making things up
- Avoid crossing your arms – it appears you are defensive
- Avoid shrugging your shoulders – it appears you don't know the answer
- Avoid nods and head shaking – use words to answer questions
- Avoid yawning – it appears you are bored

Your first impression

You never get a second chance to make a first impression. There are several things you can do to put your best foot forward.

- Know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's full name, and its correct pronunciation and his/her title. Always be early for your interview, as you never know when you might get lost or stuck in traffic. Nothing leaves a bad impression as being late does
- You can never be too polite to anyone you come in contact with before, during and after your interview.
- Treat the receptionist with respect and never act as if you are impatient or bored, it sends a negative message. Some interviewers will keep you waiting to see how you handle yourself. Others will ask the receptionist how you treated them.
- Greet your interviewer with a firm (but not hand breaking) handshake and a smile.
- Dress appropriately – appearance is a large part of a first impression.
- Arrive prepared and organised.
- While waiting do not eat or drink anything
- Turn your cell phone OFF – no exceptions

Ace the interview:

Remember the interview is not just a fact finding mission - you are "auditioning" for the position they have available. The greatest mistake is trying to determine if you are interested in the job during the interview. You have no offer, there is nothing to determine until you do get an offer. The purpose of the interview is to put everything on the table you can offer this company, so they do make you an offer. It is at that time you determine if you are interested.

Don't:

- Be overly aggressive or egotistical
- Bring up questions about salary
- Act defensively when questioned about anything
- Act disinterested in the opportunity
- Allow your thoughts to "drift"
- Answer questions with only Yes or No
- Lie about anything
- Ask for refreshments
- Discuss your weaknesses
- Speak badly about past employers
- Try to determine your level of interest during the interview

Do:

- Arrive 10 minutes early
- Refer to the interviewer by their name
- Smile and use a firm handshake
- Be alert and act interested
- Maintain eye contact



- Make comments in a positive manner
- Speak clearly
- Accept refreshments offered
- Promote your strengths
- Give positive reasons for leaving prior jobs



Audition for the Job

Often the first interview is a screening process. You want to get in front of the individual who will actually be your boss – which is usually later in the interviewing process. During the interview you need to find out what is most important to this person, so they will pass you on to the next person in the process. You should have a “two minute commercial” that will prepare you to answer the dreaded question “Tell me about yourself.” You need to write down more than one keeping in mind the following:

- Who you are addressing
- What is important to this person
- Who your competitors are
- What do you offer that others do not

You are not trying to tell your “life” story. You are stressing the benefits you can offer this person while including a call to action.

Once you have established an interest in what you are saying, you then need to talk about accomplishments you have achieved and the benefits to your employer.

Your two minute commercial should answer these questions:

- Tell me about yourself?
- What are you doing these days?
- Where do you work?
- What kind of job are you looking for?

Common interview questions:

Tell me about yourself?

What is your greatest strength?

What is your greatest weakness?

What are you looking for in your next company/position?

What is the most difficult situation you've ever had to deal with, and how did you handle it?

Who had the most influence on your life? Why?

Why are you interested in this position?

Why are you interested in working for our company?

What are your most outstanding accomplishments?

Why should I hire you over someone else with similar experience?

How did your education prepare you for this position?

Describe a typical day's routine for me?

Job related questions:

Tell me about your current/past positions?

What did you like most? Why?

What did you like least? Why?

How would your co-workers describe you?

How would your supervisors describe you?

How would you describe yourself?

Can you handle pressure and deadlines?

Why did you choose your particular career?

Why should we hire you?

Describe your most rewarding experience?

What were the highest priorities of your last job?

Give me an example of a time when a supervisor complimented you?

Give me an example of a time when a supervisor criticized you?

How do you get things done by deadlines?

Tell me about your toughest problem at work. How did you solve it?

How would you evaluate the company you were with last?

Tell me what you know about us?

Describe the perfect job for you?

Interpersonal questions:

Describe your method of influencing people?

Do you prefer to work alone or as part of a team?

Tell me about your relationships with supervisors?

Tell me about your relationships with co-workers?

Tell me about the person you admire most. Why?

Describe the supervisor you had that impressed you the most?

How would you describe yourself at work?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

What factors in your past career, education or other activities do you feel will contribute to your success?

Expectation questions:

What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?

What made you decide to make a career change?

What are your career goals? Do you have a contingency plan?

How do you know you'll be successful?

And the most important question:

Why should I hire you over someone else?

Prepare your questions in advance

When the interviewer is asking you questions, they are in control of the interview. When you ask questions – you are in control. You should accomplish two things during your questions:

1. Uncover the priorities of this particular interviewer.
2. Sell yourself and stress skills that may not have surfaced so far in the interviewing process.
 - Can you tell me what skills are most important to you, for this position? (Obviously, you show them how you have those skills.
 - What will the top priority be for the person you hire?
 - How do I compare with the candidates you have interviewed so far?
 - If you could add one skill to your current department, what would that be?
 - Do I have the experience and skills you're looking for in this position?

You need to listen carefully to each response. If they say the word BUT, whatever follows that word could be a reason for them to screen you. You need to overcome any and all concerns if you are to be considered for this job.

Objections

Objections are "buying signs", they are a "request for more information". Interviewing is a sales process. The greatest challenge you will face in your job search is rejection. Interviewing is "sales" and rejection is part of the process. It is important you do not take rejection personally. Learn from each experience and fine tune your job search skills.

There are four kinds of objections:

1. Personal (your personality, attitude)
2. Postponement (delay tactic)
3. Price (salary / benefit issues)
4. Service (your skills / experience)

If you know what kind of objection you are given, you can easily overcome the objection. When you get an objection, this person wants you to overcome their objection and give them a reason to hire you.

Examples of objections:

Number 1 "I need someone with a higher energy level"

This is a personal objection – you are coming across too laid back.

Suggested answers:

- I may not come across as a person with high energy, but I've always been able to out-perform my co-workers because of my focus and hard work ethic.
- That is why I was so valuable to my past employers. My performance reviews and references all refer to my high energy level.

Number 2 "I will get back to you when we have interviewed all candidates"

This is a postponement objection – to delay a decision.

Suggested answers:

- Can you tell me how I rank among the candidates you have interviewed?
- Do I have the skills and experience you feel would qualify me for this position?
- What is the ideal start date for this position?

Number 3

"I'm not sure we can meet your salary requirements"

This is a price objection – they can't meet your salary demands.

- I listed my salary as negotiable. What is the salary range for this position?
- I'm extremely interested in working for your company and my salary requirements are flexible.
- Do I have the skills and experience you need?

Number 4

"I'm looking for someone with more experience"

This is a service objection – they are questioning your skills.

- I have been able to obtain 5 years of experience in my 3 years because of the additional responsibilities placed on me very early in my career.
- I am very interested in working for your company, and I'm extremely confident in my abilities to perform the tasks of your opportunity.



What employers want

When an employer decides to conduct an interview with you, there are certain things that are important to them. Employers are evaluating you during an interview on the following areas:

Enthusiasm

Employers want to know that you are willing and eager to be a part of their company. Your in-depth knowledge of their company is a great way to show your enthusiasm.

Ability to speak clearly

You need to speak clearly, enunciate each word and refrain from using any slang terms during your interview. Verbal communication skills impact almost every hiring decision.

Teamwork skills

Most opportunities look for an individual who can interact with other people. Give specific examples during your interview of your ability to work effectively as a member of a team.

Leadership skills

Leadership does not only refer to supervisory or management positions. Hiring authorities look for leaders in most positions. What sets you above your co-workers? What skills can they build on for your future growth with their company?

Problem solving

Employers need to know that you can handle yourself when a problem arises. They want to hire individuals who instantly become part of the solution versus someone who dwells on the problem.

Work related experience

If you have related experience, you need to give specific examples so the employer realises there will not be much of a learning curve

Company knowledge

Employers like to hear that you have done your research regarding their company. It proves that your interest in working for their company is sincere.

Flexibility

Employers want to know that you are able to “go with the flow.” It proves that they will be able to depend on you later, no matter what changes they implement.

Ambition and motivation

Ambitious people are generally motivated enough to make great improvements in the company.

People skills

Your ability to get along with others is key to any employer.

Professional appearance

You are a representative of the company you work for and employers don't want to be embarrassed.

Multi task

Most employers will expect you to work on several projects simultaneously. You must be successful at switching tasks quickly as well.

Computer proficiency

Most companies utilise technology to help them run more efficiently. You need to be comfortable working on a computer and in many jobs, you will be required to continually upgrade those skills. Technology and the Internet are not going away.

Reliability

Employers want dependable and reliable people to work for them. Your ability to arrive on time is a good place to start when trying to prove that you possess this quality.



Closing the interview

What you do at the end of the interview, is just as important as what you do at the beginning. If you are interested in the position, express your interest. If he / she offers the position to you, and you want it, accept on the spot. If you need some time to think it over, be courteous and tactful in asking for that time. Set a definite date when you can provide an answer.

DON'T be too discouraged if no definite offer is made or specific salary discussed. The interviewer will probably want to communicate with his / her office first or interview more applicants before making a decision.

If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected, don't let your discouragement show. Once in a while an interviewer who is genuinely interested in your possibilities may seem to discourage you in order to test your reaction.

Sample closing questions you could ask:
What is your ideal start date to hire someone for this position?

Would you describe your interviewing process?

When are you planning to set up second interviews?

When should I follow up with you?

After the interview

Call the consultant at Contract Accountants who referred you to the position immediately after the interview and explain what happened. He / she will want to talk with you before the interviewer calls him / her back. If you are interested in progressing further it will assist if your feelings towards the position are known, together with your perception of what the clients reaction is likely to be.

The job offer

You need to view your job offer as a package including salary, start date, benefits (cost and deductibles), leave, and other perks offered. The job offer is your reward for a job well done during your interviewing process! It is extremely important to realise that an offer is more than just a salary and a start date.

- When you accept an offer, you need to completely understand the following:
- Starting salary – your official base salary and when it will be reviewed
- Your hours – normal working hours, overtime policy
- Benefit package – Medical aid, pension/ provident fund (how much the company contributes and how much you contribute as an employee), cellphone allowance, car allowance if applicable.
- Annual leave – how many days, if there is a time of year the company advises employees to take leave and when/ if number of leave days is reviewed.
- Additional perks – parking, free lunches or employee canteen, casual dress code, flexible working hours.

Why counter-offers are lose-lose propositions

Before accepting a counter-offer from your employer, consider whether you'll be the winner or the loser in this employment manoeuvre. Although no statistics are available, many employees who give notice are receiving counter-offers from their current companies to encourage them to stay. These proposals can include one or more of the following:

- A pay increase.
- A promotion and/or added responsibility.
- A promise of a future raise, promotion or other incentive.
- The creation of a new, more appealing reporting structure or organisation.

An employer may accompany its offer with an added motivator, such as a special call or visit from the vice president or CEO and other flattering gestures. Or it may try to manipulate a departing employee by heaping on a sense of false guilt.

What will the boss say to keep you in the nest? Some of these comments are common.

"I'm really shocked. I thought you were as happy with us as we are with you. Let's discuss it before you make your final decision."

"I've been meaning to tell you about the great plans we have for you, but it's been confidential until now." The V.P. has you in mind for some exciting and expanding responsibilities."

"Your raise was scheduled to go into effect next quarter, but we'll make it effective immediately."

"You're going to work for who?"

Let's face it. When someone quits, it's a direct reflection on the boss. Unless you're really incompetent or a destructive thorn in his side, the boss might look bad by "allowing" you to go. His gut reaction is to do what has to be done to keep you from leaving until he's ready. That's human nature. Unfortunately, it's also human nature to want to stay unless your work life is abject misery. Career change, like all ventures in the unknown, is tough. That's why bosses know they can usually keep you around by pressing the right buttons.

The Prevailing View:

Before you succumb to a tempting counter-offer, consider these universal truths:

- Any situation in which an employee is forced to get an outside offer before the present employer will suggest a raise, promotion or better working conditions, is suspect.
- No matter what the company says when making a counter-offer, you will always be considered a fidelity risk. Having once demonstrated your lack of loyalty (for whatever reason), you will lose your status as a "team player" and your place in the inner circle.
- Counter-offers are usually nothing more than stall devices to give your employer time to replace you.
- Your reasons for wanting to leave still exist. Conditions are just made a bit more tolerable in the short term because of the raise, promotion or promises made to keep you.
- Counter-offers are only made in response to a threat to quit every time you deserve better working conditions.
- Decent and well-managed companies don't make counter-offers ... EVER! Their policies are fair and equitable. They will not be subjected to "counter-offer coercion" or what they perceive as blackmail.

References and excerpts taken from
"Don't Interview... Audition"
by Barb Bruno



www.ca.co.za
recruitment@ca.co.za



CONTRACT ACCOUNTANTS

Unlocking exceptional talent...

