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Take the terror, agony out of interviewing

Interviewing for your first professional job probably ranks up there with playing Russian Roulette or walking a tightrope in terms of fearful experiences. Any inside information about the interviewing process, therefore, can do wonders for alleviating the potential terror quotient.

The Career Planning and Placement Service has a variety of helpful ways to learn about interviewing, including a weekly workshop that deals specifically with the details about the process.

According to Larry Smith, director of CPPS, the job candidate should research the particular industry as well as the specific company for the interview to be a success.

"You have to know what the job is really about before you get to the interview," Smith said. "Good candidates show that they've done their homework about the job, including what work is involved and information on the company."

Susie Ralls, a college recruiter for the Coopers and Lybrand accounting firm, said the initial impression is of crucial importance for a successful interview.

"The way they shake hands is really important; a strong handshake makes a good impression," she said. I also look for an 'executive presence' and if they can relax during the interview."

Once the interview gets going, the recruiter will start to determine the candidate's strengths and weaknesses by how he or she answers a variety of questions, ranging from "How do you determine success?" to "Why should we hire you?"

If a candidate feels somewhat stumped for a good answer to what their weaknesses are, Smith said that's because they are supposed to be challenged by such a question.

"That question is one that's intended to provide information about how you handle difficult questions," he said. "Contrived answers usually



Michael Peterson, a marketing major, discusses his career options with recruiters from Jeld-Wen, Inc. for a position as a product management trainee.

sound contrived.

"We've all got weaknesses, and good candidates have the ability to talk about personal weaknesses and how they are dealing with them; their 'fix-up' plan," Smith added.

As far as relaying personal strengths, Ralls said she usually words the question so the candidate will convey what attributes they have that are related to the position they are applying for.

"I like to see if they really understand what they're getting into," she said. "If they say they are good at skipping rope, I'm not impressed. But if they say they like meeting people and are interested in how companies work, these are the kinds of answers we look for."

a 3.0 GPA, he or she is not such a good candidate," Ralls said. "But if the candidate has a 3.0 and works 20 hours a week and is president of a fraternity, a 3.0 is very good."

Part-time job experience is a big plus for a potential employee, but Ralls said she also looks at what they have done with the job since they have had it.

"Say they had a job a pizza shop. We look at how they got it and if they have moved up at all," she said. "So a part-time job can have a lot of significance, even if it's unrelated to our field."

At the end of the interview, time is usually allotted for the candidate to ask questions concerning the job. According to both Smith and Ralls, it's important that the candidate doesn't simply ask rote questions just to be asking something.

"The key is in the genuineness of their questions," Smith said. "Things like salary, benefits and vacation inquiries aren't good questions to ask. You can ask all that after the job offer."

"Helpful questions are ones that ask about evaluation criteria that will be used and ones asking about the opportunity for career advancement," he said.

"You can always tell if they're asking rote questions and they couldn't care less about the answers," Ralls said. "We want them to be really thoughtful about the questions, to show they've given some thought and interest to the questions beforehand."

Ralls said a candidate will be rejected from consideration "if he or she has no ability to relate to the interviewer at all, or has no awareness of what they are getting into."

"But many students don't necessarily do anything glaringly wrong," she added. "Many times it's a matter of picking the best candidate out of a lot of good people."

Darla Jackson

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