

Do your homework

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FULL TEXT

You've written your resume and gotten a job interview. But your nerves set in as you wonder how you'll perform in that encounter, what the interviewer will ask you, and how you'll answer. Thinking about these things makes you nervous. Even panicky.

But you don't have to feel overwhelmed. There is a way out -- a way to make yourself feel that you're coming to the interview from a position of strength. The answer is to do your research. Prepare for that crucial meeting by deepening your knowledge of the company, its culture and the job. You'll look and sound smart. You'll be able to ask great questions. And you'll have the insights you need to make the right decision.

1. Research the company

Studying the company not only shows respect, but it will elevate your interview to another level of discussion. Jamie Dimon, CEO of JPMorgan Chase, spoke about this on the Stanford Graduate School of Business podcast, "View From The Top." When talking about job interviews, he said, "Some people walk into your office, and they say, 'Gee, I'd like to know about the strategy of your company.' They didn't bother to read the chairman's letter I wrote, which is about 30 or 40 pages long." In contrast, he notes, "Other people walk in, and they know everything [about the company]."

If you want a job with a certain company, study everything about that firm that's in the public domain: annual reports, executive speeches and presentations, media interviews and social media sites, including the firm's website. Wrap your mind around what its leaders are saying -- what their vision is and what the company's position in the marketplace is. It's also a good opportunity to see if that company's goals impress you.

Once you've completed this analysis, you will be able to tell the interviewer, "I'm impressed with the direction your company is taking," or "I was inspired by the chairman's speech to shareholders." And you'll be able to ask good probing questions.

2. Research the culture

Next, do your homework so you understand the organization's culture. Company culture has become more important than ever for job seekers.

How do you discover the cultural fabric of the company? Examine the company's back-to-work protocols. Do they encourage a return to the office, allow working from home, or are supportive of a hybrid approach? Having this knowledge will impress the interviewer and allow you to discuss your fit within these options.

Don't stop there. Look into other aspects of the company's culture. A recent article in the MIT Sloan Management Review examined the things employees look for in a corporation's culture. No. 1 was an environment in which "employees feel respected," No. 2 was "supportive leaders," and No. 3 was that "leaders live core values." These priorities have become increasingly important and can make all the difference to your happiness at work.

Talk to friends or acquaintances who have worked for the company. Search LinkedIn to read recent news releases and check out Glassdoor for employee reviews. Study the firm's website for cultural cues. If, for example, the website shows only senior executives, you can presume it's a top-down company. And if everybody on the leadership team looks the same, that should also be a warning sign.

Gather this intelligence and when you have your interview, express your understanding of the company's culture. If

you are impressed, say so. If there's a good fit, emphasize that. If you have questions, ask them -- and make sure you get the answers you need.

3. Research the job

Finally, doing due diligence about the job itself will be key in explaining why you're the ideal candidate for that position. Knowing the challenges you're likely to face will allow you to pitch yourself successfully.

Take a hard look at the job description and ask yourself, "How would I perform in this role during the first few months?" Chris Kowalewski, chief growth officer for Compass Group, a company that employs more than 500,000 people, said: "If someone comes through the door and says, 'I've done my research, here's what I know about Compass, here's what I know about the job, here's how I would approach the first 30, 60, 90 days,' they'd probably get the job."

When I asked Kowalewski what responses he was looking for, he replied: "There's not a single best answer. It's based on the research the candidate has done. Can they articulate a plan?"

If you're in sales, the first three months might involve building good relationships with clients, partners and teammates, and mastering the sales platform. If you're in IT, it might mean building similarly strong relationships and getting to know (and leading) others in the IT environment. The point is to fully understand the job and its challenges. Even if you're not asked about the first 30, 60 and 90 days, take the lead and provide those insights. Your due diligence in these areas will ensure that your interview is a deeper conversation and shows that you've done your homework. It will also show the interviewer you're a strong, confident candidate who is ready to contribute from day one.

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