

Job Interviews: Ten Do's, Don't's

By Emily Gutierrez



Club Member and expert Emily Gutierrez sheds light on the job interview process.

Over the past few years, I have interviewed many candidates for entry-level positions and jobs that have the potential for supervision, and I have noted an alarming trend. In short, most of the interviews were dismal and dismaying, as well as hopeful and heartening. I was very disappointed by the poor showings of people who are already in the Civil Service system; conversely, I was quite impressed by those coming in from outside of the system. The candidates who showed up for the interviews completely unprepared were quite noticeable, as were those who prepared. Most people are blissfully unaware of the consequences of a lack of preparation. Therefore, I have condensed the results of my observations, as well as the observations of my co-interviewers, and submit the following recommendations so that candidates can make sure the loss of a potentially great job does not happen to you.

- 1. Don't show up for the interview late.** Do give yourself ample time to arrive early (no more than 15 minutes early).
- 2. Don't dress for the interview like you're going to a nightclub or doing some gardening.** Do try to dress like you care about the job for which you are interviewing.
- 3. Don't wear loud prints and colors or splashy ties;** do tone it down. Plan your outfit in advance; get a second opinion, and even a third.
- 4. Don't wear strong perfume or cologne;** in fact, don't wear any scent. Do make sure you do not smell of anything stronger than soap. Many people have allergies to cosmetics scents. Being trapped in a small room with someone who reeks can cause an interviewer to subconsciously score you on the low end or rush you through the interview, just to escape the odor.
- 5. Don't overdo the makeup, hair, jewelry and accessories;** remember, less is more. Do remove all but the simplest jewelry; limit yourself to one ring. Hair should be clean, neat, combed, and conservatively styled. Stay away from hair color that doesn't appear in natural hair; no spiky pink Mohawks, please.
- 6. Don't let your piercing(s) or tattoo(s) speak for you.** I understand that body art and piercing is a matter of self-expression; however, as an interviewer and potential employer, I am not interested in how you feel about whatever your issue is. These are unnecessary distractions for the interviewer and can leave a potential employer with discomfort, which translates very easily to a lower score. Do make an effort to disguise and/or cover your artwork.
- 7. Don't answer interview questions off the top of your head.** Do some preparation. I recommend having a friend ask you three typical interview questions and record your responses. More importantly, listen carefully to your responses and have your friend critique them; take notes. Afterward, answer and record the same three questions again and repeat the process until you are satisfied.
- 8. Don't let your résumé go past a single page.** Do pare it down and keep it relevant to the job. Research résumé preparation and construct it carefully. Keep in mind that your résumé will speak for you before you arrive.
- 9. Don't list your employment experience chronologically;** oftentimes, this information can be redundant. Do condense your experience and use bullet points to point up experience relevant to the position.
- 10. Don't come to an interview without doing some advance work.** Do research the department/division/section where your interview is; talk to someone who works there; ask questions. Go online and read about the Department; find out what the mission statement is, and keep it in mind. If you have an opportunity to segue the Department's mission statement into your response, do so but only do so once.

There are many more helpful hints that come to mind but, just like a good interview candidate, I decided to limit myself. Striking a balance between giving a thorough answer and telling a long (and tedious) story is a tricky business. Recording and listening to your responses with a critical ear can be a real "aha!" moment. You catch yourself rambling and imparting useless information and you can't seem to find your way out of the situation; that's when panic can set in. When this happens, take a deep breath and relax. The interviewers know that any interview comes with a certain level of nervousness and take that into account when scoring.

The content of your responses is the most important aspect of your interview. The information you impart should be brief and to the point. Introducing an answer with a seemingly pointless and irrelevant explanation can cause a lot of frustration for the interview board. I have often had to "reel in" the candidates and bring them back to the question at hand. I once heard someone speak of a poor interviewee as follows: "If you ask him what time it is, he tells you how to build a watch." Don't be a watch-builder.

Please keep in mind that a job interview is not an opportunity for you to show off your stand-up comic abilities. Although an interview is serious business, any time you can lighten things up using self-deprecating humor can help you and the board relax and the interview will go smoothly. Again, this is tricky business and I would try it out on a friend before I brought comedy into an interview.

Interviewers will often ask a candidate to relate an experience to illustrate their answer. It is not necessary to give the interview a history of your world. Use your most recent experiences to illustrate your answer; keep it brief and keep it interesting (more tricky business).

If you follow these basic rules, and any other do's and don't's you can think of, your success may not be guaranteed, but you will stand a much better chance of getting that really great job you've been searching for, and your employer will be getting someone that demonstrates that their professionalism is of paramount importance.

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Alive! can't guarantee space for all. —Ed.

Newsbrief

RECORD-BREAKING BOAT TOURS:

As reported by the Harbor Jan. 30, during 2007, 11,471 fifth-grade students from 125 schools participated in the Port's School Boat Tour Program – a 24 percent increase in school participation and an 11 percent increase in student participation over 2006, a new record for the 11-year-old program, which was created in cooperation with the Los Angeles Unified School District. The tours are provided free of charge by the Port as well as a subsidy for bus transportation.

In addition to the school program, the Port hosted boat tours for more than 16,700 visitors from business and community groups during 2007, including an estimated 9,800 visitors during the World Trade Week free boat tours last May. This year, the Port's World Trade Week free boat tours will be offered May 17 -18.

In 2007, 139 classes took boat tours over a 41-week period. Schools from the San Fernando Valley -- including Woodland Hills, Reseda, Northridge and Sylmar -- accounted for nearly 10 percent of the total number of tours. The Port's Speakers Bureau conducted more than 40 elementary school classroom visits to prepare students for their boat tour experience, a 62 percent increase over 2006. Students participated in the program as a complement to their LAUSD local history curriculum.

"Our students were thoroughly interested in the entire tour! The tour really tied into our study of California and geography. Great links to economics as well. The tour combined many facts as well as a boating experience my students had not had before. This was a terrific experience!" said J. Keppel, a teacher at Cold Water Canyon Elementary School.

With a narrated 55-minute boat tour departing from Ports O' Call Village in San Pedro, the Port's School Boat Tour Program provides a unique, up-close opportunity for youths to see the daily operations of the nation's leading con-

tainer port. For younger students, the Port arranged rides on its Waterfront Red Car Line to provide a transportation adventure of days gone by when the red cars ruled the Southern California transportation system.

The School Boat Tour Program has grown in popularity as teachers have discovered that the tours add real value to their classroom curriculum. Teachers have also found that the tours bring to life the concept and scale of global trade as students see shipping containers being loaded and unloaded from massive cargo ships by giant cranes. Students also experience the diversity of operations within the Port, as well as a myriad of places of interest.

Greater Los Angeles metropolitan area schools, learning institutions, groups or organizations that are interested in Port of Los Angeles boat tours can receive more details by calling the Community Relations team at (310) 732-3508. For more information on the Port, please visit the website at www.portoflosangles.org.



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Washington Nationals	Sun: 7/27	(Autograph Night)
Arizona Diamondbacks	Sun: 8/3	(Dodger Build-A-Bear Night)
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