

Preparation: Be prepared for any kind of interview

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In person, online, by Skype and even in the dreaded group

Well, 2013, it was a good run. As we reflect back on the past year and look ahead to the new one, remember that our resolutions don't have to just be about eating better and hitting the gym more. In fact, with many of you just returning from a holiday break, now is the perfect time to create a plan that will help you reach your career goals in 2014.

First, let's get you ready for the interview experience. There are so many things to keep in mind, so it's easy to miss something. That's why I've enlisted the help of some of my friends in the industry to share their own two cents. Through all of our conversations, there was one common theme: come

prepared.

"Spending time researching the company prior to an interview, attending career fair or even networking with a current employee over coffee can be invaluable," said Liz Soucise, a recruiting manager here at MediaCom. "I'm not talking about spending hours digging through every article from the past several years, but you need to devote some time to investigating the company, its clients and the people who will be interviewing you. Checking out the company website, reading profiles on LinkedIn and doing some online searches will generally get you what you need to be prepared."

Of course, it's not just about being able to react.

"Part of your preparation should include coming up with relevant questions to ask. It's okay to ask about generic things, like company culture, but be sure to mix in some more thoughtful ones - show the interviewer that you care enough to know something about the company for whom you say you want to work," said Soucise. "For example, you could inquire about a particular client campaign you've seen, or ask something like, 'I noticed you spent much of your career at a competitor; what made you move to this company?'"

Remember, though, that being prepared isn't just about dressing the part or saying the right thing. Technology has introduced a new wave of recruiting techniques, so today's candidates need to be ready for a number of different interview settings. Let's take a look at the main ones.

The in-person, face-to-face interview

The one-on-one interview is standard fare, but you may find yourself being interviewed by a panel, and things can get tricky once a third or even fourth

person joins the discussion. If there is more than one interviewer, be prepared to share your attention with each person. One person might be driving the conversation, but don't focus exclusively on him or her. Assume that every person in the room has a say in your fate, so equal attention is critical.

The phone or Skype interview

My advice for phone and Skype interviews is generally the same, and it's about eliminating any possible distractions. For example, if you have roommates, be sure to let them know you are interviewing. The last thing you want is to have a roommate or family member (or even a pet!) interrupt your meeting.

For Skype interviews, Regina Angeles, director of talent acquisition for Mindshare, encourages candidates to set the right tone at the start.

"Make sure you have a blank wall or neutral background behind you that won't put off the interviewer. Once, I interviewed a candidate who had his laptop set up in his bedroom, and I had a direct view of his unmade bed in the middle of the afternoon. It was very distracting!"

And of course, always test your connection in advance of the call.

The online interview

Employers are experimenting with new forms of online interviewing. Most are generally like Skype, but some are one-way interviews that the recruiting team can review at a later time.

According to Ty Abernethy, co-founder of Take the Interview, digital

interviewing is the most rapidly growing screening method for organizations hiring campus and junior-level talent.

"Chances are you have or will soon be asked into a digital interview, whether it's a live two-way video chat or a one-way pre-recorded session," said Abernethy. "The best way to prepare is to embrace the technology and get comfortable being on a webcam before the event. Queue up your webcam and practice answering interview questions the same way you might practice in front of the mirror. Focus on looking at the camera, and play with lighting and background to provide the most optimal environment. When it's time to interview, just smile, relax and have fun."

The coffee shop

Even if an interview is conducted at a coffee shop or a diner - or even a bar - the general rules of interviewing still apply. No booze, no messy foods and put your best table manners to work. Even though the environment may be casual, don't forget that you are being assessed for skills and fit at every moment. While conversation may flow more easily, don't drop your guard too far.

Finally, regardless of the interview setting, the bottom line boils down to this: be professional and be prepared. An average candidate can be elevated by appearing informed and engaged, while someone with a stronger background and resume may be damaged by coming in without having done the right amount of homework.

So do your research and be flexible. Even if you don't get the job, look at every interview as an opportunity to practice and get better: if you do that, you'll be sitting in the catbird seat when you find the exact opportunity that's

right for you.

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Ed Frankel is partner-director of U.S. talent acquisition for MediaCom, leading all recruiting efforts across MediaCom's offices in New York, Chicago, Ann Arbor and Los Angeles. Ed currently manages a team of recruiters to discover and deliver the top industry talent across all MediaCom positions. He also oversees all recruiting efforts, including the employee referral program, alumni networking, career fair involvement and campus outreach. Ed graduated from Rutgers University with a degree in political science.

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