Interview Techniques: Peter S Fiske Keck School of Medicine (USC) Postdoctoral Association

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Some notes I made...

Interview happens (during the interview) but also...

- Over lunch
- On the tour
- From the moment you arrive...
- ..until after you leave
- During negations

And once you have landed the job:

- With colleagues
- With supervisors
- With employees
- With people you hire

Stories you can share with your interviewers shape the perceptions they have of you

Negative perceptions of a PhD:

- Simple minded about money
- Impractical about time
- No sense of deadlines
- Socially passive
- Value ideas as absolutes
- Hermit vs leader
- Arrogant vs team player
- Rebel vs organizer
- ‘problem’ person vs ‘solution’ person

You can change this by sharing examples from your experience when you have dealt with deadlines, lead teams or have been an organizer. Examples don’t have to necessarily be from your work; you could use outside events such as having coached sports or organized a church event.

‘STAR’ Technique

In advance of the interview, take some time to think about these situations you may want to talk about and write it out in STAR format.

S/T ‘Situation/Task’ Describe situations you encountered and the background for the story
A ‘Action’ Describe what you did to address the situation or solve the problem

R ‘Result’ Describe the outcome as a result of your actions

Information Interviews

- Usually with a contact made through someone in your network
- Short - usually about 30 minutes
- Prepare questions in advance so you don’t waste time asking things you could have found on the company website
- Usually deal with the subjects:
  - Required background and training for the work
  - Their personal experiences
  - Advice
  - Future trends of the company

Advantages:
- You are in control
- You can ask questions which would not be appropriate in an interview
- You can see people in their actual work environment
- You can get feedback and advice
- You can get advice on the direction of the company/which areas they are hiring in
- You can see if the work environment is right for you
- You gain visibility
- You can practice for when it's important

DO:

Prepare and think of questions in advance, think about what you want to learn, act and dress professionally and send a thankyou note (email is perfectly acceptable).

DON’T:

Ask, even indirectly, for a job; speak with one person and assume you have the full picture (or even the correct one).

Formal Interview

Arrive 10-15 mins early; consider leaving the night before if it is a long trip; have a good firm handshake (practice with a friend), make eye contact (if you are uncomfortable doing this, set yourself the task of making a mental note of the interviewers eye color). Ask questions as well as answering them and be yourself.
Questions you should ask which can help in negations:

- Are there others competing for the position?
- How long has the search been going on?
- How unique is the position?
- When will they reach a decision?
- How long do you have to negotiate?

It is OK and even expected that you discuss these.

And if they do offer you a contact (academic or business)...GET IT IN WRITING

An example phrase in an email after your offer:

“thank you for your offer... let me just review & make sure I have the terms we agreed on correct...”

During negations

Consider not only the salary (try and avoid naming a figure or range you expect, even when asked).

Also consider...

- Health care
- Schedule of raises
- Bonus plan
- Commission plan
- Stock options
- Pension plan
- Profit sharing plan
- Employee education/tuition reimbursement
- Company stability
- Dependents tuition reimbursement
- Vacation
- Car
- Sick leave
- Maternity/paternity leave
- Flexitime/alternate work schedule
- Anticipated work hours
- Relocation allowance
- Potential for advancement

Conclusions:

Employers value (more than technical skills) –
• Personality
• Degree of fit
• Learning ability
• Leadership
• Communication skills
• Drive