

Project Management

Getting the Job

arras PEOPLE

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INTRODUCTION / GOALS OF THE INTERVIEWER

Welcome to Part 3 of the Arras 3 step plan for landing your next role.

Find it — Job search process
 Apply for it — Application process, CV and Cover Letter
 Get it — *Interview process*

We at Arras People know that to have made it this far in the process, you will have shown the ability to effectively find roles you are suited for and successfully passed on through the application process through developing your CV, cover letter and/or filling out a job application.

Now comes the opportunity to put yourself in a position to secure the role first-hand — the interview process. Although this final step can be tricky, there are many ways to impress your future employer in a face-to-face environment that encourages your true self to shine through. Now is the time for the elements you labelled in your CV to shine through by way of you.

Arras People will put the best information and advice available into your hands for this last hurdle.

GOALS OF THE INTERVIEWER

Great: you've made it to the interview stage. Well done! Now all you have to do is live up to just what the interviewer is looking for.

But do you know exactly what that is?

In preparation for the types of questions you will face and manners of interviewing you will partake in, it stands to reason that looking at the interview stage through the prism of the person on the hiring side of the desk will get lost in the preparation. But that shouldn't happen, because their targets might sound more familiar than you realise.

Here's a few things you can expect interviewers to look for:

- The first impression you make, i.e. your appearance — Do I like this person? How will they respond? Will I enjoy this interview?
- Can this person do the job — Job/industry knowledge? Identifiable skill levels/qualifications?
- Do they want the job — This is where they start to figure out your motivations, such as why you left the last job, what your career goals/interests are, what drives you professionally?
- Can this person fit in — Do they understand the system in place? If not, can they adjust accordingly and effectively? What style do they work best under?

There are several techniques and manners in which job interviews are conducted. Here, we

GOALS OF THE INTERVIEWER cont. / INTERVIEW METHODS

describe what these interview types are, and offer tips on how to handle them effectively and successfully.

INTERVIEW METHODS

TELEPHONE

It's a part of everyday life and an important tool for project management professionals. Quite often, the interviewer can resort to this type of interview as a preliminary way of determining a candidate's viability for the position.

There are proper ways to handle telephone interviews, as they are usually a preliminary way for employers to determine what kind of candidate they have on their hands:

Before: Research the company. Review specifics of the job specification. Have your CV to help cite key experience/examples from your career. Determine why you want the job and why you fit their criteria. Have questions to hand to ask them. Make yourself available at the pre-arranged time. Eliminate any and all distractions during the allotted interview space. Smile as you speak to create a positive energy that will shine through the phone line. Ensure you have a professional sounding message on your answering machine.

During: Remember the interviewer's name; Listen

carefully to what they say. Be honest, but don't embellish. Think positive = Sound positive. If you're feeling the pressure during the call, stand up — it helps to feel more empowered.

After: Review questions asked and determine how you could have improved your responses. If you don't get the role, request feedback: This may help with your interview technique next time. Give feedback to your recruitment agency about the interview, and be specific — a recruiter is meant to be a conduit between the job candidate and the employer, and they must take care to smooth over any issues that arise.

PANEL INTERVIEW

The panel interview can usually take place at the earlier stages of a project management interview process, but the amount of people you'll see in a room isn't set in stone. One can expect anywhere from 2-5 people, though there would be three key people concerned with their particular part in the open role to look for:

- HR Manager — HR related questions
- Line Manager — More specific to the role questions
- Person You'd Replace/Work Along Side — How they do the job, and how you compare to that

The Head of Programme and Stakeholder(s) could

INTERVIEW METHODS cont.

also take part in interviews, and their questions / concerns will revolve around their area of concentration. According to <http://www.job-employment-guide.com/panel-interview.html>,

"The panel interview is a way for the organisation to judge the communication level, interaction with a group and to assess the skill level of the candidate. You will be asked questions from all the panel members, sometimes the same question by different panel members. It is difficult to build the kind of connection with the interview panel as you can in a one on one interview."

As is the case with any interview, preparation, eye contact and an acute focus in your response to questions will carry the day in these sessions.

AD HOC

The ad hoc interview, usually with a line manager, often lacks the structure or visible method that other interview styles present. But these interviews can lull people into a false sense of security, especially if they don't do their homework before the ad hoc interview request.

Know your CV and the organisation. Prepare your answers for certain questions — among many others — such as...

- Why would you like to work for this or-

ganisation?

- Why did you choose this particular role?
- What interests you about our products and services?
- What is your major weakness? What are you doing about it?

Weaknesses tend to be of particular focus in ad hoc interviews, and our research suggests that preparation for answering such questions revolves around sandwiching your self-criticism with positive statements.

The opening words should lead into the critique, while the closing statements should wrap it up in an optimistic manner that suggests the problem is being tended to.

Example: **Q:** *What are your weaknesses?*

R: *I am an energetic leader with a strong capacity for displaying my enthusiasm for a task. However, I have struggled to follow up on paperwork on some occasions, so I have taken it upon myself to set up tools that remind me of what needs to be done."*

For the most part, answers to common ad hoc interview questions can be culled from review of your CV and an assessment of your ideal next career move. Other questions simply require good anticipation and practice, such as salary demands.

INTERVIEW METHODS cont.

BEHAVIOURAL / COMPETENCY

Competency-based interviews can be described as 'The ability or motivation to apply skills or knowledge.' In essence, these interviews are based on the premise that past behaviour at a job level predicts future behaviour at a similar job level.

To understand how they measure your specific competency, take leadership. Sample questions could include: *'Describe a time when you have set goals for an individual or for your team.'* Following up, the interviewer would ask: *'How did you handle the situation?'* and, *'What was the outcome?'*

If you could show examples wherein you: conducted effective team meetings, gave feedback, conducted appraisals, and/or recognised good performance, you would have touched upon positive factors the employers were looking for.

However, if you appeared to be insensitive, showed inconsistency in style, ignored practices and proven methods or given off the vibe of an autocratic governor, you wouldn't test well on that question.

Be ready to answer questions along the lines of "Please give me an example of..." or "Please describe...". As earlier questions would indicate, the interviewers want specific examples and occasions (complete with vivid description) you can point to that bear out whether you can handle the future

work scenario or not. Expect probing questions and clarification statements — the intensity will be more than likely be high. But if you stick to strong openings in your response ("Well, what I would do...", "Well, what I did was..."), you've established the foundation for a good response.

A great document is available from Arras People (http://www.arraspeople.co.uk/DWP/Core_Competency_Info_for_Candidates.doc) to give you more information on the competency-based interview.

PREFERENCE

This is usually based on a particular part of the interview, where interviewers (especially recruitment agency consultants) quiz job candidates about what they want out of their careers.

This style delves into your past, present & future as a way of determining that future: Who had the greatest impact on your life? Talk about your past mentors. Which industry preferences do you have? Why are you exploring other options?

As with many types of interview questions, preference-based interview inquiries usually demand that you have prepared for such questions beforehand.

INTERVIEW METHODS cont.

ASSESSMENT TESTS / CENTRE

Many medium to large-sized companies have turned to assessment testing as an objective way to learn more about job candidates in job-related settings, and the trend will likely continue. According to Management Level Psychometric & Assessment Tests, (<http://www.amazon.co.uk/gp/product/1845280288?ie=UTF8&tag=arraspeople-21&linkCode=as2&camp=1634&creative=6738&creativeASIN=1845280288.html>) author Andrea Shavick reasons that this holds true for those applying for 'a junior management, senior management or even director level position'. Therefore, project management positions can expect to include assessment tests as part of their selection criteria.

Psychometric Tests

These structured tests measure several aptitudes, including verbal reasoning, numerical reasoning, abstract reasoning and personality questionnaires. Psychometric tests can be administered at assessment centres, online, at an employment agency, or even at the office of your potential employer. If you have ever taken standardised tests of some sort, this falls along those lines. Your best bet for preparation is to take as many practice tests beforehand as you can.

Here are some websites that offer free tests:

<http://www.personality100.com/page/partner.xml?partnerid=a42b28f2cf1&linkid=2>

<http://www.psychometric-success.com/downloads/download-practice-tests.htm>

Shavick's aforementioned book features a variety of practice tests issued from SHL Group PLC, a world leader in test publishing. As with such tests, it's always important to catch the minor details: thoroughly read the questions, mark the answers in the correct format, pace yourself according to time restrictions, check and re-check your answers before you hand it in.

Presentations

Not uncommon in project management interviewing is the practice of making a presentation, often serving as an example of a pitch at a job meeting you might be called upon (if and when hired) to make.

According to www.presentationhelper.co.uk, the best manner in which a job interviewer can make a memorable impression is through the use of a visual presentation devoid of bullet points. Moreover, the presentation at a job interview, gives you a chance to stand out from the crowd. Rehearsal and preparation are key, and the use of some main guidelines for strong speaking will show a professional stature and manner that can be hard to ignore.

INTERVIEW METHODS cont. / INTERVIEW PREPARATION

- The Rule of Three — Introduction or aims, points you want to make (subdivide to three if necessary), and Summary.
- The Tell 'em Rule — Tell them what you plan to them, proceed to tell them exactly, then reinforce what you've told them.
- For more information on job interview presentations, check out Business Balls' analysis (http://www.businessballs.com/inter-views.htm#iving_interviews_presentations) entry.

Some other advice on presentations:

- Use your recruitment consultant to practice the presentation with, and gain constructive criticism.
- Second biggest reason why presentations fail? Not staying within allocated time.
- First? Failing to answer the question posed.
- Check what format is required. Will it need to be PowerPoint? Projector?

INTERVIEW PREPARATION

Regardless of what kind of interview style or method you face, general rules of thumb apply. While some are straight-forward in a professional setting, it's good to have them all at your fingertips if need-be as a checklist. Here is a list of the things you should know heading into the inter-

view:

Pre-Interview

- Know the exact place and time of the interview, the interviewer's full name and its correct pronunciation, and his/her title. Furthermore, know HOW to get there on time, preferably early.
- Have a copy of your CV, a pen and a pad.
- Take a look through your CV again beforehand. Make sure you pull out 3 or 4 success stories you know you want to talk about. For each story, apply the STAR Technique — **S**ituation or **T**ask; **A**ction you take; **R**esults.
 - Applying the STAR Technique to each success will give you a clear story and one you know you will be able to use during the interview, regardless of the question. It can also calm some of those pre-interview nerves because you feel more in control.
 - Look again at the job specification — the first few bullet points on the spec are normally the most important aspects to the role. Take each point in turn and think STAR again. Pinpoint in your CV & career an example that could be used to highlight your understanding, experience, skills, competency and training against a bullet point in the spec.
- Find out specific facts about the company: where its offices, plants or stores are located,

INTERVIEW PREPARATION cont.

what its products and services are, what its growth has been, and what its growth potential is for the future. Never rely on the company's website for this information. Look for industry news, press releases that mention/feature the organisation.

- Refresh your memory on the facts and figures of your present employer and former employers. They'll want to know a lot about the company you work for.
- Prepare questions you will ask during the interview. You are interviewing them, too! Things like finding out what happens during a typical day; training & development opportunities; career progression opportunities; and common trends and issues related to projects can all serve as a basis for some great questions.
- Be ready for probing questions into your background. Some interviewers like to put pressure on candidates, so be ready with solid responses.
- Dress conservatively and preferably in darker colours. Brush your teeth thoroughly as smiling throughout the interview is a very important characteristic interviewers notice. Wash and dry your hands.

During Interview

- If presented with a job application, fill it out neatly and completely.
- If you have a CV, be sure the person you give it to is the person who will actually do the

hiring.

- Greet the interviewer by his/her surname if you are sure of the pronunciation. If not, ask him/her to repeat his/her name.
- Shake hands firmly.
- Wait until you are offered a chair before sitting. Sit upright in your chair. Look alert and interested at all times. Strive to show you are a good listener and a good talker.
- Look at who speak to you in the eye.
- Try to get the interviewer to describe the position and the duties to you early in the interview so that you can relate your background and skills to the position.
- Avoid yes/no answers. Have a solid, definitive and truthful explanation at the ready.
- Make sure your good points get across to the interviewer in a factual, sincere manner. Keep in mind: only you can sell yourself.
- Prepare for general interview questions:
 - *What kind of job are you looking for?*
 - *What are your strengths?*
 - *What are you really good at?*
 - *What are your weaknesses?*
 - *What are you doing about addressing them?*
 - *What do you know about our company?*
 - *Why did you choose your particular career?*
 - *What are your qualifications?*
- **Smile.**
- Answer questions truthfully, frankly and as

INTERVIEW PREPARATION cont. / END GAME ESSENTIALS

- much to the point as possible.
- Avoid derogatory remarks about your present or former employers or companies at all costs.
- Don't let the interviewer get you off task. If they bring up weather, politics, football, etc., keep responses short and honest.
- Know your market value, but don't ask for salary/holidays/benefits information at the first interview UNLESS they bring it up first.
- Conduct yourself as if you are determined to get the job you are discussing. You'll look, act and feel confident if you do so, and you won't have closed a door you could end up wishing was still open a week later.
- At the end of the interview, ask the interviewer(s) if you have answered all of their questions sufficiently or if they have more for you — **smile** while doing so.

Post-Interview

- If you want the job, ask for it. Ask for another interview if necessary. If he/she offers the position to you, and you want it, you can accept on the spot (verbal only!). If you need some time to think it over, be courteous and tactful in asking for that time. Set a date when you can provide an answer.
- Don't worry if salary or the position itself isn't immediately offered after the conclusion of the interview. Interviewers will likely

- need to speak to management first anyway.
- If you get the impression that the interview is not going well and that you have already been rejected, don't let your disappointment show. They might be putting you on, testing you for a reaction. If you don't give one and still shine through the rest of the interview, you could be right back in business.
- Thank the interviewer for their time and consideration of you. You have done all you can if you have answered the two questions: *Why are you interested in the job and the company? What can you offer and can you do the job?*
- **Smile.**
- If your interview was arranged through a recruitment consultant, contact them and provide feedback on how the interview went.

END GAME ESSENTIALS

All that remains now is the nerve-wracking end game scenarios. While the project management job candidate must remain patient in the downtime between interview and decision, it is also essential that they stay focused for the day that phone call arrives.

They Make You a Job Offer

Hurrah! Break out the Moët! Or, perhaps not. Certain scenarios exist in the job offer process that can affect job acceptance.

END GAME ESSENTIALS cont. / HANDLING ACCEPTANCE

They fall into two main categories: Factors You Can Control, and Factors Beyond Your Control. We'll start with the former.

FACTORS YOU CAN CONTROL

- **Partner objects to job essentials** — A long commute, for instance, can introduce strain into a relationship that hadn't previously existed. The job candidate might have some new reservations.
- **Candidate draws counter offer from old employer** — You will likely need the need to take the new company's interest in you to them for this to work, but it does force your current employer's hand.
- **Candidate messes up the final, "just a formality" interview** — This often happens when the candidate took this formality for granted instead of sticking to the interview essentials. Treat it like the celebrity who falls from grace — for all the good they did, they're remembered for one bad thing.
- **Status of other job applications changes** — Recruiters will likely be more open to use you if you've been up front about where you are in your job search. If your status has changed recently with other applications/interviews, your appreciation for this job offer might have changed accordingly.

FACTORS BEYOND YOUR CONTROL

- **Significant change in package desires** — Maybe you were in a relationship but decided to move in together since salary was discussed. Or you'll need private health after learning your health situation has changed.
- **Package is not satisfactory** — If you have an idea of what your market value is, and the package falls below that value, you will likely have reservations about the vacancy.
- **References and/or credit history don't support you** — If you've listed an unsupportive job referee or are dealing with CCJs, your accountability may suffer significantly.
- **'Cold' feet settles in** — Maybe you've realised you can't work with that line manager, or the company's tactics or methodologies don't mix with your style of management. It happens in life — but it doesn't have to happen at the expense of your career.
- **Long delay before the candidate starts** — This scenario arises if you have to provide a long notice period, for instance, or relocation is required, adding a new complication to the timeframe. Or both. It could force you into an 'Is it really worth it?' decision.

HANDLING ACCEPTANCE

If it all checks out and you want to accept the job, be sure to make clear when talking to all parties involved about what you're looking for in starting salary, relocation allowances, holiday entitlement,

HANDLING ACCEPTANCE cont.

benefits, and eligibility for employment (i.e. medical, examinations, references). If you have an idea of what you want versus what you can live with, you'll be ready for negotiation.

How to Accept an Offer

If you verbalise your acceptance, you're still in a good bargaining position. If you've signed anything pertaining to an agreement, you're not.

But you can have it both ways, too. Call it the non-committal commitment — if you use terminology such as "I'll accept an offer if (Insert Demand Here)", you put the onus on THEM to break the verbal deal and show what you're looking for.

It's advisable, however, to avoid throwing too many demands into a single statement. If the job offer is not giving you a lot of what you need, use words to the effect that make you sound open to negotiate and work with them, such as "There are a few things in the offer I'd like to talk about before we proceed any further."

A blanket statement like "I'll accept an offer that gives me V, W, X, Y and Z" will come off to the hiring manager as you appearing more greedy and needy than ready to negotiate.

For more, check <http://www.working-smart.co.uk/default/joboffer.asp>

Job References

The best information about job references can be found in the **Arras People — Job Applications** document (http://www.arraspeople.co.uk/DWP/Job_Applications.pdf). But as for the time to have your references ready to present, the project management recruitment industry seems to be of the opinion that the job offer stage is the best time to make them available.

This flies in the face of what you have been told, but the facts bear it out:

- A CV with references leads to potential employers contacting referees directly
- Referees don't like their contact details handed out to head hunters
- The referee may be reluctant to provide a reference

The later in the job recruitment process your referees are contacted, the better off your status with both parties will be.

Proof of Qualifications

Whatever your qualifications, a simple listing of your achievements on your CV isn't enough on its own.

HANDLING REJECTION / CONCLUSION

With trust in CVs waning due to detail fudging, employers have cracked down, so it's a good idea to have your qualifications filed and ready to hand over for proof at the job offer stage.

This is especially true for project managers who wish to impress upon interviewers their PM-related qualifications.

HANDLING REJECTION

The famous and successful have felt the pain of rejection in job settings. That list includes the likes of Albert Einstein (whose teacher said he'd never amount to anything), J.K. Rowling (who couldn't find a publisher for her first novel for over a year) and Michael Jordan (who was cut from his high school basketball team).

But perseverance won out for these three memorable figures in history, and perseverance can pay dividends for you as well in the face of rejection.

It is essential in handling job rejection. The method in which you handle it displays your ability to regroup and continue to display your development as a career-minded project management professional.

An article for Guardian Jobs Online (<http://jobs.guardian.co.uk/careers/200260/503127/>)

[handling-rejection/](#)) says upon rejection one should 'take stock', considering factors outside your control. Was there an in-house candidate? Did the interviewer show incompetence? Did the situation change at any point in the interview process? Was there kind of any bias at all? Answers can be found if you look for honest and helpful feedback, which interviewers usually provide. Taking stock means assessing yourself, too. What about the jobs you've been rejected for — is it too high of a level for you? Is your CV still sharp? Did you mess up anything at the interview stage? Hold nothing back at this point — it could get you that much closer to getting everything right the next time!

CONCLUSION

The main idea, said a famous sport manager, is to win. The same holds true with securing a job, especially a project management job. Ultimately, by the final interviewing stage we've been reviewing in this piece, you will have been able to show your next employer how effective you can be in the job opening you've applied for.

While exemplary documents showing off your capabilities get you to this stage, you have essentially put your services up for sale when you interview for a job. The details we dish out here are given as tools you can use to cultivate, manicure and perfect the candidate you intend for them to see when the light shines down.

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