

# How to ace your first job interview



By [Catherine Wijnberg](#)

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As someone who has owned and operated businesses in five different sectors and three countries, I have done my fair share of interviewing prospective employees, and interns. Here are some tips drawn from my own observations, to help prospective first-time interns or job seekers make the very best impression possible.

## 1. Be yourself

I always think of an interview rather like a first date - I am trying to get to know this new person, what they like, what they don't like, their personality and skills, their dreams and desires, and of course the reason why they want to join my company - and what value they could bring. So as the interviewee you want to be open and honest so that your true colours can shine.

## 2. Be respectful

Respect is a two-way street and includes respect for yourself as well as the company and person you are meeting. Start by dressing smartly, without making it a fashion parade. Perhaps visit the website (or even the building) before the interview so you can see what style of clothing is the norm, and match that. Respect is also arriving on time, and greeting people politely - including the receptionist, car guard and tea lady!

## 3. Be interested

Good candidates are those who are genuinely interested - in the conversation, the company, the answers and the environment. So take note of what is around you, ask appropriate questions and display a genuine interest in the company and its people. Of course, if you are not really interested in the position you should rather avoid the interview - your disinterest will show and you won't get the job anyway.

## 4. Be informed

The best candidates are those who have researched everything about the company, the founder, the directors, the purpose, ethics and passion. The more informed you are, the more interested you will appear, and this will encourage the interviewer to speak in more detail about the position, its prospects and how you can fit in. The opposite of course is that any applicant that arrives for an interview without bothering to learn about the company really doesn't deserve the job, and will usually be sent away with 'a slap on the ear'.

## 5. Be honest

Honesty is the best policy, just remember that there is a difference between honesty and over sharing! For example, the answer to the question "Tell me about yourself" is not an invitation to say that you 'have a bit of a drinking problem, have just left your abusive husband and struggle to get out of bed in the morning...' Honesty in your skills levels and capabilities though is essential. The answer to a question like "Do you have any project management skills?" is **not** "Yes, I have project management skills." The right, confident answer would be "No, I have never been a project manager, but I am very organised and often led the student team in our group assignments, and I am a fast, enthusiastic learner." You get the idea.

## 6. Be different

Successful interviewees are those that stand out from the crowd. Dressing smartly, being confident, asking informed

intelligent questions and preparing a good CV are a given. Adding something special that characterises who you are such as a smile, an article of clothing that shows you have your own style, a yellow feather on your lapel, or even a sample of your work are examples of some ways to stand out from the crowd. The interview is the time to be bold and stand out, not the time to shrink back and hope that you won't be noticed!

## **7. Be value-orientated**

If this is your first job, chances are you have never really thought about your value-add. Value-add is what you can bring to the company, not what salary you think you should earn. So the answer to the question "What value can you bring to my company?" should be something like "I am a positive, enthusiastic person and always try to inspire people around me to do their best, which increases everyone's output". Or "I am a great sales person, I can sell ice to eskimos!" or "I am meticulous with numbers - I can add great value to a team because I can see a mistake a mile off, and that saves money and improves performance."

## **8. Be determined**

I always advise people to go for their dreams and never settle for second best. Of course, there may be a long road from where you are now as a lowly junior employee or intern and your dream of being a CEO, but the most important thing is for you to see how this particular job can get you to the goal in the end. Don't squeeze yourself into a job you hate just for the sake of it - search for a position that can advance you on the way to your dream, give it your best and be determined to keep adjusting your strategy and finding ways to succeed until you get there. As Sir Winston Churchill said, "never, never give up!"

## **9. Be organised**

You are here to seek work, so look organised and efficient. Ensure that you have a copy of your well-written CV to share, arrive on time, and have a pen and paper ready to make notes. A personal quirk of mine is that I look for people with 'well organised' hair - strange perhaps, but if your hair is all over the place, chances are so is your desk, your work and even your mind...

## **10. Be great**

Greatness is the sum of your passion, integrity and commitment. Greatness is a can-do attitude and a willingness to go beyond the average to succeed. Greatness is working harder, learning more and putting your hand up to grab opportunities that come your way. Greatness is the belief that 'It can't be done' is never the right answer, and that 'How can we succeed?' is always the right question.

Good luck - make yourself, your family and your country proud!

## ABOUT CATHERINE WIJNBERG

Catherine Wijnberg is the Director and Founder of the Fetola Foundation ([www.fetola.co.za](http://www.fetola.co.za))

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