10 top tips on interviewing techniques

Interviews are the final part of the selection process and can be just as stressful for both parties. Our free members’ event this month will offer help to both the interviewer as well as the interviewee. In addition, we have asked the CIPS recruitment partners, Hays, Langley Search & Selection and Barclay Meade to put together some top tips:

**Interviewers**

1. **Preparation**
   - Be prepared for the interview – what competencies are you looking for? Which are essential and which are preferable?
   - Be clear about the questions you ask to ensure they reflect the skills needed in the team. You will get better results if you ask open-ended questions, so the candidate will offer more information than just a simple yes or no.
   - Competency-based interviews are used to assess potential employee’s personality traits as well as skills and experience.

2. **Build rapport**
   - The interview remains your main chance to get to know them on a more personal basis and assess the candidate’s cultural fit. Remember procurement is a candidate-short market so good candidates may have other options. Therefore, remember that the interviewee is also assessing you. Some employers invite candidates to meet the wider team to get feedback on a potential new team member.

3. **Sell the job**
   - Be ready to summarise the role and a little about the business. Have a clear view on what the deliverables for the role are likely to be and communicate this.
   - Demonstrate the importance of the procurement function within the organisation, so highlight how it has impacted the bottom line and made savings for the business as well as sourcing the best possible suppliers for the organisation.

4. **Sell the company**
   - Remember to talk about training and development and career paths.
   - Also, explain what it is like to work in the company - candidates make decisions on more than the role and package alone.

5. **Be prepared to listen**
   - Follow the 70/30 rule, where you listen 70 per cent of the time and only talk 30 per cent. It is also good to paraphrase the interviewee’s answers to show you are listening. Be conversational – this is not an interrogation. If the interviewee strays into other subjects, be prepared to redirect as quickly as possible.
Interviewees

1. Be prepared
Know the job description and your own CV inside out. Research the company in detail as well as your interviewer. Demonstrate you are commercially aware, with questions on the organisation’s latest financial results.
Think about the challenges facing today’s procurement profession and how these impact the organisation.
Offer examples of procurement solutions you have implemented elsewhere to tackle similar issues.

2. Handling competency based interviews
Many employers use competency-based interviewing (CBI), which are designed to test whether your past performance demonstrates you match the job criteria.
Re-visit the job description and person specification before your interview and ensure that you can provide an example for each competency.
Increasingly employers want to see achievement led examples of where you have delivered savings against targets, renegotiated a complex contract, managed a difficult stakeholder, implemented category management and transformed a procurement department from a transactional to a strategic procurement function and how you went about it. You will also have to describe in detail an end-to-end tender process you have delivered and the learning you have made from this.

3. Be honest and engaging
Talk about what you know and have done rather than hypothetical situations or future promises.
Concentrate on your delivery: how you communicate is as important as what you say. Find a balance between engaging with your audience and delivering your prepared material. Even if you are nervous, smile and use open body language and eye contact to show your enthusiasm for the subject matter and the role you are being interviewed for.
Build rapport through firm handshakes, eye contact and subtly matching body language and verbal language.

4. Ask questions
Prepare some questions in advance to ask at the end of the interview that demonstrate that you have done your research and are genuinely interested in the organisation. You questions are a way to get across experience that you may otherwise not be asked about. Remember, this interview is not one-sided; you need to find out if the job’s right for you.
Strike a healthy balance between asking questions and listening. Listen to what is being said/asked – there’s nothing worse for an interviewer than to experience inattentiveness from the applicant.

5. Closing the interview
Take control. If the interview has covered your prepared questions, state that the interview was so comprehensive that it covered the questions you prepared previously. However, if there are more thoughts that come to light later can you call them? Ask when you can expect a decision and what the next stages are.
Shake hands firmly and express your interest in moving to the next stage, even if you’re not quite sure.