

What do you remember about your first session as a Jumpstart Corps member? You prepped the core story book and carefully reviewed the session plan, but how closely did the session actually follow the plan? How did your partner children react to the story? What did you do to adjust to the situation when something went awry?

While a job interview is very different from a Jumpstart session, both demand a balance of thorough preparation and flexibility. Here are a few tips to help you prepare and stay confident in a job interview.

You can never have too much information

- **Research in depth.** Begin by dissecting the organization's website. Make notes as you review each section to ensure that you don't miss anything important. Many sites will include an archive of press releases and required filings with the SEC or IRS. Not only will this information make you a very informed candidate, but it will also help develop your ability to research.
- **Don't wing it.** Too many candidates assume that saying, "I love your team, and the organization's mission is so critical," will be enough. It is a nice sentiment, but be ready to respond to follow-up questions. Make sure you can do more than repeat the same statement with a minor variation.
- **Know the organization.** If you are meeting with a non-profit, be sure to understand the primary services delivered and the populations being served. If possible, knowledge of the annual operating budget can also be beneficial. Most of this information can be found in an annual report on the organization's website. You can also search for the IRS Form 990 for the organization.
- **Know the company.** If you are interviewing with a for-profit group, be sure to know their business model. Who are their customers? What are their product lines? How long have they been around? Have their sales been increasing or decreasing over the past few years? If they are publicly traded, find out how the stock price performed. How does the company interact with the community?
- **Know the people.** Having basic information about your interviewer(s) can help to ease your mind. If you know the names of the people with whom you will be meeting, search LinkedIn, the organization's website, or Google to find their profiles, pictures, or other information. It can be helpful to know:
 - How long has the interviewer been with the organization?
 - What is his or her educational background?
 - Where did he or she work before?
- **Know yourself.** Before entering any interview, ask yourself what information you have to know before committing to work for the organization. Having your own questions prepared for the interview will show interest in the opportunity and help you learn more about life with the

organization. Don't be afraid to ask questions about the office environment, work-load expectations, the team you'll be working with, and the nuances of the organization's culture. You want to make sure that the position will be a good fit for you before you say yes to an offer.

Know how to talk about you

As difficult as it may be, you must be prepared to talk about yourself. Interviewers will ask about your technical skills and your depth of knowledge in particular subjects, but they may also ask behavior based questions. Here are some general guidelines when preparing your answers to anticipated questions:

- What specific knowledge and skill sets do you offer that set you apart from other candidates? How do they apply specifically to the position for which you are interviewing?
 - What examples can you give that highlight your technical skills?
 - How can you promote yourself as the subject matter expert in your area of discipline?

Behavior based questions require a little more work. These questions ask you to describe situations in which you have displayed the skills, abilities, and personal traits needed for the position to which you are applying. Your examples should be brief stories. Give each story a beginning, middle, and end. To help you do that, prepare stories that follow the STAR model. STAR stands for Situation, Task, Action, and Result. Stories that follow the STAR model incorporate these elements:

- **Situation:** Briefly set up the situation by describing the context of your example (who, what, where, when, how).
- **Task:** Explain the task you had to complete or the problem you had to solve.
- **Action:** Describe the actions you took to complete the task or solve the problem.
- **Result:** Close by explaining the result of your efforts.

Think of some STAR answers that could address the following behavior based questions:

- 1) How do you ensure that all parts of a task, both large and small, are accomplished without any of them being overlooked?
- 2) Describe a situation when a project you were working on did not meet established deadlines. What caused the delay(s)? What did you do?
- 3) Describe a new idea you have originated to improve work efficiency or make the job easier. How did you get that idea implemented?
- 4) What do you do specifically to model energy, enthusiasm, competence, commitment, and a hard-working attitude for others?
- 5) How do you distinguish between what is urgent and what is not when setting priorities?
- 6) Describe a situation in which you had some difficulties in achieving desired results. How did you succeed?
- 7) Describe a situation where you went above and beyond a specific requirement. How did you achieve more than was expected?
- 8) How do you evaluate and edit your own writing for grammar, spelling, style and content?

Practice makes perfect. Sit in a chair in front of a mirror and practice giving answers to questions. Pay particular attention to your facial expressions and body language. While you shouldn't become paranoid or awkward, this can be a good exercise to see if your demeanor is consistent with your tone.

Other helpful tips

- **Get plenty of rest.** While you are sure to have some nervous energy, do all you can to get rest the night before your interview.
- **Know what to wear.** As a general rule, business professional is the way to go, but don't take that for granted. If you are interviewing with a startup, the culture can be very different. If you know anyone from or familiar with the organization, ask for their feedback. If you can, visit the interview location and observe people as they enter and exit the venue. How are they dressed?
- **Bring copies of your résumé to the interview.** The interviewers should already have your résumé and other information printed, but it never hurts to have additional copies ready.
- **Know where you're going.** Don't have blind trust in your GPS. Technology has spoiled us, but it is not perfect. To make sure you are not late on the day of your interview, consider making a test drive or commute to your interview location a day or two before the appointed time. Even if your test drive does not reveal any surprises, you will have extra confidence knowing how much time to allow for travel.
- **Arrive 5-10 minutes early.** Punctuality is critical for the interview, but don't show up too early. Should you arrive at your destination 15-30 minutes early, wait to check in. Drive around the parking lot. Pace a little to burn off energy. Give yourself a pep talk in your rearview mirror. Checking in more than 10 minutes early is more likely to irritate than impress.
- **Wait for the handshake.** The rules of a handshake have changed over the years. Wait until the interviewer extends their hand to you. Remember to not crush a person's hand.
- **Remain standing.** Don't sit until you are directed to do so. There may be other people participating in the interview, and it's best to show that you are "open to direction."
- **Only answer the question asked.** Be succinct and precise in answering questions. Be careful not to ramble, and look for cues (verbal and non-verbal) that the interviewer may be sending.
- **Follow-up appropriately.** Send a thank you email to your interviewers within 24 hours. This will be easier if you have their contact information, so try to remember to ask for that at the end of each interview. A hand written note is a matter of your taste and discretion, but acknowledging the time invested by each interviewer soon after your meeting is critical.
- **Celebrate after the interview is over!** Job interviews are difficult and uniquely stressful. Celebrate, whether you think it went well or not. You will either learn from your mistakes, or you will (hopefully) get the job of your dreams!

*Sources for this document include Monster.com's article "Interview Prep for New Grads" by Peter Vogt, ed. 2013, and Open Education Database's article "[How to Ace Your Job Interview: 88 Surefire Tips and Tricks](#)" ed. 2013.