



Nursing that Works™: Mastering the Job Interview

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Graduate nursing students about to enter the workforce as well as seasoned professional nurses looking to further their careers can significantly benefit from mastering the art of the job interview. Successful job interviews are more than just a means to obtain employment. Job interviews are the first impression one will give to a potential supervisor and may serve as a catalyst by which future promotional activities may occur.

Preparation Is Essential

Preparation for an interview is a fundamental component for successful job interviews. Researching an organization and becoming knowledgeable about the person conducting the interview can dramatically improve a job candidate's likelihood of being offered a position. Using the knowledge from the research and determining how one's strengths and experiences may best complement the desired role are fundamental during the preparation phase of the job interview and during the artful negotiation of the terms of employment.

Researching an Organization

Prior to the job interview, it behooves job candidates to thoroughly investigate the organization to which they are applying. If you are knowledgeable about the current trends and complexities that an organization is presently undertaking, you will be better equipped to discuss how your strengths and abilities may find a significant niche within the organization.

While an organization's website may offer a broad overview of the company, it may not offer insight to the most recent events that have affected current economic and future direction of the organization. Larger internet search engines can help one ascertain what has recently been published by area newspapers, schools of nursing or other organizations. Most companies and healthcare organizations are strategic in what they choose to market to the public. Reading recent press releases and newsworthy articles will give a sense of an organization's high profile projects, goals and priorities.

Communicating Your Message

Michael Stern is a contributing author for the website, workopolis.com. In his web based article "Pre-interview questions to ask yourself," Stern talks about preparing to send a specific message to a potential employer. "Whatever your message, think about the best way to communicate it," states Stern.

Stern believes that when job candidates are acutely aware of the value they can bring to an organization, they can better articulate their strengths to a potential employer. By taking inventory of experiences, talents and potential offerings to the organization, candidates will be better prepared to discuss them with the person interviewing them for a potential role. They may use anecdotal stories to highlight personal successes and how they may contribute to the role to the organization one is seeking employment with.

Lisa Hathaway, RN, BSN, author of "How to Prepare for a Job Interview" in *Nursing 2006*, compares preparing for an interview to "preparing for a test." She speaks of the advantage of

The Center for American Nurses is a professional association whose mission is to create a community of nursing organizations that serve individual, non-union nurses by providing programs, tools and policies that address challenges and opportunities in their practice environments.

learning the background and experiences of the person one is interviewing with. Armed with this insight, a job candidate can enhance rapport with a potential boss by speaking about the congruencies of their backgrounds and interests.

Ms. Hathaway also addresses the importance of the last impression and describes it as “almost as crucial as the first one.” Prior to concluding the interview, job candidates should make a conscious effort to convey interest in the role they are seeking. She cautions against being discouraged if the job is not offered at the time of the interview as many hiring decisions are often made by multiple people after completion of an interview.

Salary

In a recent article titled “The Economics of Vocation or Why Is a Badly Paid Nurse a Good Nurse?” economist Anthony Heyes (2003) expresses the viewpoint that raising nurses’ salaries would decrease the quality of care because better pay would attract the “wrong sort” of people for nursing. He continues that only “good nurses” are willing to accept a lower salary for the calling into the nursing profession.

His opinions drew criticism from nurses as well as healthcare economists. Julie A. Nelson and Nancy Folbre, authors of “Why a Well-Paid Nurse is a Better Nurse,” (*Nursing Economics*, 2006), stated that Heyes’s opinions are based on fallacious reasoning and a disregard for considerable literature on quality of care, worker motivation, and nursing morale.

While Heye’s position was condemned by many nursing professionals, his opinion is one that is clandestinely shared by many experienced nurses. For years, the subject of financial compensation for nurses and nursing leaders has often been considered a taboo subject. The viewpoint of nursing as a “calling” may have served as a catalyst for the avoidance of discussion and negotiation of fair and appropriate salaries.

While many nurses may have chosen nursing for primarily altruistic reasons, the reality of financial constraints of everyday life necessitates that nurses take ownership and control of the fiscal aspects of their career. An essential part of preparing for an interview is the education of a job candidate to discern the optimal compensation to negotiate prior to consideration and acceptance of a new role.

Scrutinizing Salaries

With the advent of the internet, there are unprecedented opportunities for job candidates to become acquainted with appropriate salary requirements for a desired role. Websites such as salary.com offer specific salary ranges for many given roles within a multitude of organizations. This website offers a valuable tool that

will calculate the proportion of salary to cost of living within any area. Across the country, salaries can vary greatly but not always proportionately in areas where the cost of living and housing is higher, and learning what salary requirements are necessary for the location of the job is a valuable negotiation point.

To learn more about the salary range for a specific role, candidates can extend their research to job search websites and national recruiters who may offer insights as to the potential monetary and benefit range for like positions. Healthcare recruiters are often quick to make connections with potential future clients and are frequently willing to serve as a source of salary information.

Leaving an Hourly Paid Job for a Salaried Job

Many nurses leaving a pay-by-the-hour job are unprepared for the potential decrease in take home pay of a new salary-based job, despite an overall increase in the hourly rate. The gap in take home pay is due to lost overtime and shift differentials: this may be significant and unforeseen by many nurses as they cross over to a salaried job.

To prevent surprises, negotiation of a new salary begins with knowing exactly what one made as an hourly employee. The previous year’s W2 statement will tell you how much you earned including all the shift differentials and overtime: it can serve as the basis from which a new position’s salary should be negotiated.

Timing of Salary Discussions

Many career experts concur that a person seeking a new position should not initiate the conversation about salary but should be prepared to discuss salary at any point of the interview. While each interview and process is different, salary will eventually be a topic to be discussed, and learning the appropriate salary range is an imperative step to take prior to beginning any interview process.

Linda Jenkins, a contributor to the website, Salary.com, states that the best time to negotiate a salary is the time between a serious job offer and acceptance. Jenkin’s insightful Salary.com article, “Everything Is Negotiable,” speaks about the importance of timing salary discussions. Once an initial offer is made, Jenkins suggests letting a potential employer know the interest, but recommends you request additional time to consider the financial consequences. Jenkins states, “If they really want you, there’s time.”

Monetary compensation may not be the motive for why a person initially chooses nursing, but it is an indispensable component for leading a financially healthy life. When negotiations results in an optimal salary, both the candidate and the organization will benefit. They will receive the quality and talents that you will bring to the company and you will feel valued for the remarkable role that they you will play.

