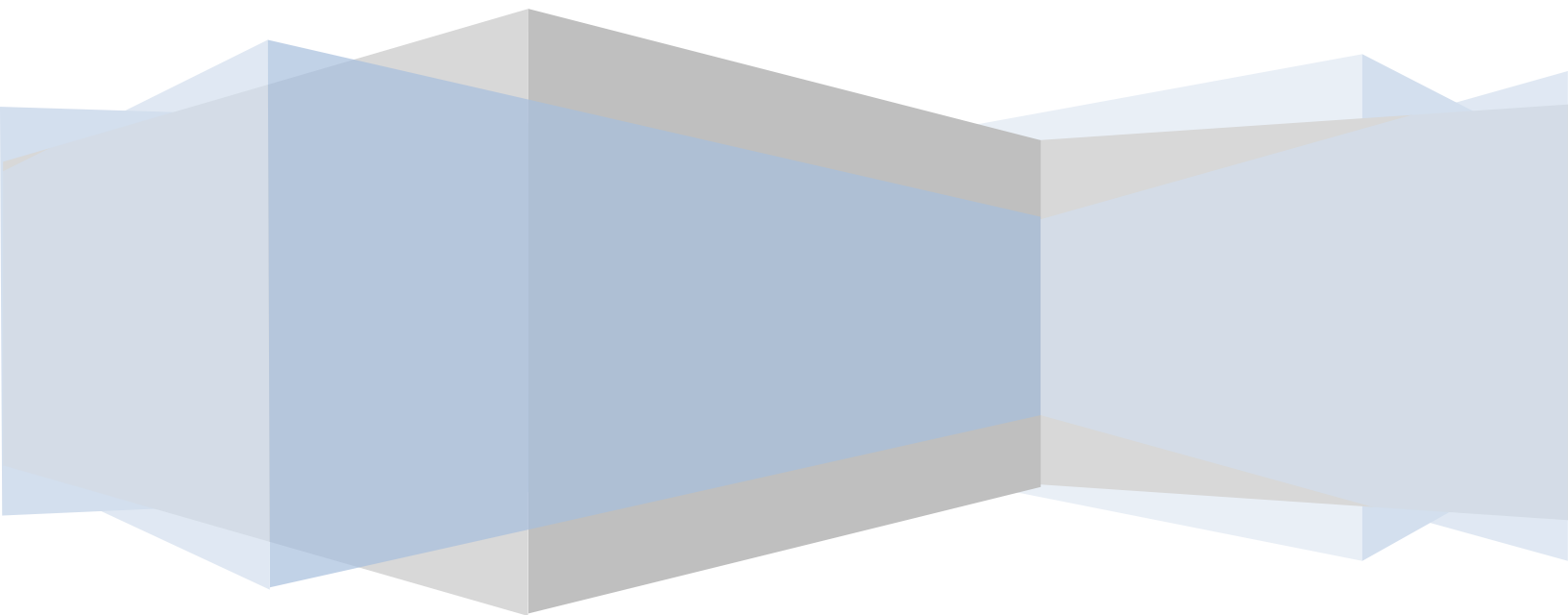


# **INTERVIEW WORKSHOP**

**Tips on how to survive an interview!**

**Vista Adult Education 2008-2009**



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## **PURPOSE OF AN INTERVIEW**

- To give the employer the opportunity to get to know you!  
And to give you the opportunity to get to know the employer!
- An employer only has a brief time to decide if you are the right candidate for the job. So how you perform in an interview can make the difference between being employed or having to go back to your job search.
- This booklet provides you with suggestions on how to dress, behave and answer tough interview questions. There are no absolutes, but following certain traditional interview etiquette can make the difference!

## TYPES OF INTERVIEWS

- One to One: One interviewer interviews one applicant.
- Panel: There are several interviewers who interview one applicant. This is becoming more common as many employers want the opinions of other co-workers. Again, an employer only has a brief moment with you to make a decision. Having co-workers assist with that decision making can make the process easier.
- Group: Several applicants are interviewed by two or more interviewers at the same time. This is often used to save time. Usually 2 or 3 applicants are chosen from the group to return to a one to one or panel type of interview.
- No matter the type of interview, questions can either be
  - Situational – situations are set up to create common problems that you may encounter on the job. Employer wants to see how you would respond.
  - Pre-determined – The company has pre-determined questions that each applicant is required to answer.
  - Free – The interviewer has no pre-determined questions and may ask whatever questions come to mind at the time.

## APPEARANCE

- Appearance plays an important role in whether you obtain the job or not. The first few moments of the interview often set the tone for the entire experience!
- How to dress for an interview will vary depending on the level of position, type of company, and industry. You should research the company to find out the every day attire: formal vs. informal!
- The rule is to dress a step above the every day attire – but again it will depend on the level of position you are applying for.
- Common Sense: No low neck or see through blouses, no short skirts, and stay away from extreme trends. The best bet is to dress on the conservative side with muted tones such as black, blue, beige, gray, or brown. Avoid loud colors and obnoxious prints!
- General Rules:
  - Body Odor – interviews are stressful so be sure to use deodorant, mouthwash, and very light or no perfume or cologne. What if the employer is allergic to your chosen perfume/cologne?

- Hair – Keep your nicely trimmed whether you have long or short hair, beard or mustache. The idea is to be presentable and to appear neat and organized.
  - Accessories – keep make-up, jewelry and other accessories to a minimum. Remember – you don't know the stereotypes or judgments an interview may have regarding wearing certain accessories for men and women.
  - Hands – you will definitely be shaking hands so be sure your nails are clean and clipped!
- Always have an interview outfit ready to go. You never know when you will be called.

## PREPARING FOR THE INTERVIEW

- Do your research! Be sure to have a general understanding about the mission, vision and goals of the company that you are trying to find employment.
- A great website to assist you to find this information is: <http://www.hoovers.com/free/>
- Make sure you know the address and have directions. It's no one's fault but your own if you are late! If you are traveling to a new area, be sure to drive there a day or two before the interview so you know where to go.
- Have copies of your resume, certificate, letter of references and anything else you might have to share with the employer. As there could be several interviewers, bring several copies of your resume just in case.
- Along with appearance, be sure to have a briefcase or nice folder that fits all your documents. You might want to have a pad of paper and pen to jot down some notes, if applicable.
- Arrive about 10 minutes early. You don't want to arrive too early so that you are hanging out in the waiting room. Some employers are annoyed by that!

- Make sure you obtain the interviewer's email and address so that you are able to send either a follow-up email/phone call or a thank you card after the interview.



## DURING THE INTERVIEW

- First impressions are lasting! That first impression will be formed within the first five minutes of the interview.
- Let the interviewer take control. In other words, let the employer extend his/her hand out first if he wants to handshake. Don't sit until he/she offers you a chair or until after he/she sits down.
- During the interview, you want to make sure that you appear confident:
  - Smile and firmly shake the employer's hand, if offered.
  - Maintain good direct eye contact.
  - Lean slightly forward with good posture.
  - Keep both feet together on the ground.
  - Hands should be gently folded in your lap, although it is all right to use them to express yourself- but do not overdo it.
  - Keep enthusiasm in your voice changing the tone and pitch frequently.
  - Use nods or exclamations to reinforce attentiveness.
  - Listen carefully to the questions asked before responding.
  - Make sure you have good posture and you're not slouching or slumping in the chair.
  - Most importantly, keep a positive attitude. Your inner thoughts will be reflected through your actions and body language.

## **TIPS TO REMEMBER!**

1. Do not just answer “yes” or “no.” Elaborate on your answers.
2. GIVE SPECIFIC EXAMPLES.
3. Use a warm, conversational tone.
4. Use plenty of eye contact.
5. Ask for clarification, if needed.
6. Do not hesitate to take your time - answering too fast is often a mistake.
7. Limit your answers to approximately 1-2 minutes.
8. Do not chew gum or smoke a cigarette prior to your interview.
9. DO NOT DISCUSS PERSONAL ISSUES!!
10. Do not use slang terms.
11. Do not boast or beg.
12. Leave promptly when the interview is completed.

## Sample Interview Questions

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Did you have any trouble finding us?
3. Why should we hire you?
4. What did you like / dislike most about your previous boss / supervisor?
5. What do you know about our company?
6. Why do you want to work here?
7. What are your short-range / long-range goals?
8. Why are you changing jobs?
9. What do you look for an ideal job?
10. Are you looking for a permanent or temporary job?
11. What two or three things are most important to you in your job?
12. Are you self-motivated? Organized?
13. How do you work in a group?
14. What did you like about your previous job?
15. How do you work under stress, pressure and deadlines?
16. What work do you enjoy the most? Least?
17. What are your strengths? Weaknesses?
18. Name three major accomplishments in your present job.
19. What qualifications do you have for this job?
20. How would you evaluate your performance on your present job?
21. What have you learned from your mistakes?
22. How do you think your education has prepared you for this job?
23. Are you more comfortable working by yourself or with others?
24. Tell me about a problem you have solved in your present job?
25. Have you had experience as a supervisor? In what capacity?
26. How do you behave when you're having a problem with a co-worker?
27. What salary do you expect? What did you earn on previous jobs?
28. What has influenced your career decisions?
29. Do you object to overtime? Travel? Rotating shifts?
30. What interests you about this type of work?
31. Have you had any experience in this line of work?
32. Tell me about someone you admire.
33. When you were in school, what courses did you like best? Least?
34. Give me three adjectives that describe you.

- 35.If you could change one thing about personality, what would it be? Why?
- 36.How would your supervisor describe you?
- 37.Do you have any physical conditions that may limit your ability to perform this job?
- 38.What do you like to do in your spare time?
- 39.What would you do if a dissatisfied customer started shouting at you about a defective product?
- 40.What types of books have you read lately?
- 41.Have you taken any classes recently? Attended workshops / seminars?
- 42.Define success. Define failure.
- 43.Describe your ideal job.
- 44.Would you be willing to relocate?
- 45.Give me a specific example of something you've done that shows initiative.
- 46.What can you tell me about your current job?
- 47.Why do you want to start working again?
- 48.What do you see yourself doing in five years?
- 49.What community activities have you been involved in?
- 50.Why have you changed job so often?
- 51.What is the biggest mistake you've every made in choosing a job? Why?
- 52.What do you feel this position should pay?
- 53.What kinds of personal crises have forced you to miss work days?
- 54.Do you have any objectives if we check your former employee (s) for a reference?
- 55.How long have you been looking for a job?

# ANSWERING TOUGH QUESTIONS

## **1. TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.**

This warm-up question can be a difficult one because it is so broad. Tell the employer about your skills and interests - - especially ones relating to the position for which you are applying. Indicate positive personality characteristics, such as being dependable, honest, and able to get along well with others. Most importantly, cite examples from your past to back up what you say.

## **2. WHY SHOULD THIS FIRM HIRE YOU?**

Clearly and specifically point out your related skills and experiences. Tell the employer about successes in past jobs and describe yourself as hardworking and dependable. State your interest in working for that employer and let the interviewer know that you are informed about the company and the position. Also mention education, training, and any hobbies or community activities that would be in any way related to the position or the skills necessary to do the work.

## **3. WHY DO YOU WANT TO WORK HERE?**

Mention positive things you might have learned about the company, its products or services, and its personnel. This is an excellent time to show the interviewer that you have done your homework about the company and the job, and that you are highly enthusiastic about working there. Be certain to let the interviewer know you can do the job and that you would fit in well.

#### **4. WHY DID YOU LEAVE YOUR LAST JOB?**

It is best to be truthful in most cases. Keep your answers brief and positive. Here lies the temptation to bad-mouth your former employer, but don't! If you had problems with co-workers, be certain not to blame others. Take responsibility for your part in the problem; state what you learned and why it would be different today. Remember, the interviewer is likely to identify more with your former employer than you during the interview so watch what you say about past employers, supervisors, or company policies.

#### **5. WHY HAVE YOU CHANGED JOBS SO OFTEN?**

Job-hopping need not be a blot on your resume. Simply describe what happened, where you were at fault, and how you've learned from your mistakes. Conclude that you now know what you want.

#### **6. HOW WOULD YOUR PAST SUPERVISOR DESCRIBE YOU?**

If it is true, talk about yourself as your best friend would. The interview is not the time for modesty. State positive traits and give specific examples to back up what you say. For example, you could say, "I was very dependable. In my last job, I missed only two days of work in three years. I was never late and was always willing to work overtime."

#### **7. WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST STRENGTH?**

Be prepared to answer this one – it is a favorite! Don't be afraid to say good things about yourself; if you don't, no one else will. Describe positive past experiences as examples to things you say about being dependable, honest, hardworking, creative, or whatever else you claim. These examples will stand out in the interviewer's mind much beyond

the general responses that most interviewees provide. For example, you might state, “I am very quick to learn new things. In my last job my supervisor had me learn all the tasks in our department and had me train new staff as well.”

## **8. WHAT IS YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS?**

This one can be difficult. Employers don’t really expect you to confess your true faults and weaknesses, though they will not stop you from doing so. The trick to this response is that you should state something that would actually be perceived by the employer as a strength! For example, “My weakness is probably that I am somewhat of a perfectionist in my work. However, I have learned that I cannot let perfection get in the way of getting the job done on schedule.”

## **9. WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE DOING IN FIVE YEARS?**

The employer wants to know if you plan to stay with the company. The interviewer is also checking out your maturity and whether or not you are a person who likes to continue to grow and learn. Avoid mentioning that you would like to be the “Manager” or “Supervisor” unless you are positive that would be the career path the company would have you follow. Remember, too, you are probably being interviewed by that supervisor and he/she may see you as a personal threat to his/her own job security. Be a bit more general in your approach assuring the interviewer that you would like to be with that company in five years, growing professionally and contributing to the organization.

## **10. HAVE YOU EVER BEEN FIRED OR ASKED TO LEAVE A JOB?**

If you have been fired or asked to leave a job and this information is likely to be uncovered during reference checks with former employers, be certain that it is you who tell the interviewer. Be as positive as possible and don't blame the former employer.

## **11. WHEN WOULD YOU BE WILLING TO START WORK?**

In most cases, the sooner you can start the better for the employer. If you are presently working and need to give a fair notice of termination to your current employer, most employers can make arrangements to give you that time. However, if you are unemployed, it could make a negative impression to ask for two weeks to "get ready" or "make child care arrangements" before you start work. Remember, you want to make a good initial impression with your new employer – one that shows you will be hardworking, motivated and cooperative.

## **12. DO YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ASK?**

It is usually a good idea to ask one or two relevant questions of the interviewer. Asking, "What do you consider to be the most important aspect of this position?" or "Would I be working closely with other staff?" shows a real interest in the position. Avoid asking trivial questions just for the sake of saying something. Never put the interviewer on the spot by saying, "When do I start?" This type of question is usually seen as pushy and tactless and can be very uncomfortable for everyone involved. Rather, ask something like, "By when do you expect to make a hiring decision?" Incidentally, most interviewers say they prefer an applicant who asks five to six questions during the interview as a natural course of the conversation.

Remember that an interview should be a dialogue –two people sharing



thoughts and ideas – rather than an interrogation. The interviewer will want to hire someone with whom he or she feels comfortable – someone who will “fit in” with the staff. That someone can be you!

## “WHAT ARE YOUR STRONG POINTS?”

This is a very tough question to answer, yet it will most assuredly be asked during an interview. It’s good to remind yourself just what makes you unique and sets you apart from other job candidates. Sometimes, however, if we’re under pressure or if we haven’t practiced interviewing enough, we forget what should be very simple things to say.

To avoid “dead air space” in your interview, use this worksheet prior to your interview. **By writing, reading, and re-reading your skills, you’ll feel confident about sharing them with your future employer.**

Examples:

I am **always punctual**.

I am **hard working and motivated**.

I feel **confident using Microsoft Word and Excel**.

I can **type 45 words per minute**.

***Fill in the blanks:***

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

| \_\_\_\_\_.

**NOTE:** Keep in mind, there is a fine line between being confident and coming across too strong. Wait for the employer to ask about your high points and skills. Then use two or three of these practiced responses.

## SALARY NEGOTIATION

1. Only discuss salary after you have received a job offer, but BEFORE you accept! (Your only position for bargaining is between the job offer and your acceptance).
2. Never answer the question, “What is the minimum you’ll accept?” or “How much money do you need to make?” or “What do you expect to get paid for this position?” (unless you have done your homework and know what the position pays!).
3. In order to negotiate a salary that will meet your needs and that of your potential employer, research and preparation are required in at least four areas:
  - Your BASIC salary requirement (what you absolutely have to make to meet monthly cash requirements); your ACCEPTABLE salary requirement, and your DESIRED salary requirement.
  - Your “value” in today’s market is based on the skills and experience you have for the position you are considering. Four factors will determine how much you’ll get paid: type of work, supply and demand of workers in that occupation, degree of experience required, and degree of education required.
  - Fringe benefits that are included in your compensation package such as: Health, dental, vision insurance; paid vacation and holidays; retirement / pension plans; life and unemployment insurance; and sick leave. In addition, compensation can include promotional opportunities, perks, travel, etc.

- Other non-monetary rewards that will increase job satisfaction and can compensate for reduced monetary rewards such as: working for a large or small organization; low or high level of responsibility / authority; short or long commute; working alone or with people; indoors or outdoors; and varied or routine work duties.

### **Remember . . . . .**

1. Always negotiate with the hiring authority.
2. Let the employer name the salary first. Otherwise, you may price yourself out of a job offer – or end up working for less than what the employer planned to pay. (If you are pressured to provide an answer – give a range, preferably based on your research of what the company and/or industry pays. Or simply state that the salary is open or negotiable).
3. Be sure to qualify a salary offer so that no misunderstanding occurs (e.g. If I understand you correctly, you are offering me this position at \$8.00 per hour?).

## INTERVIEW WORKSHEET

Interview questions vary greatly. However, the more you practice answering interview questions, the more comfortable you will become. The following lists some of the toughest and most frequently asked questions during an interview. Please use this worksheet to begin working on your responses:

1. Tell me something about yourself.

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2. What strengths do you have to offer this company?

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3. Have you ever been fired or asked to resign?

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4. What are your weaknesses and strengths?

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5. Why do you think you would like to work here?

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6. Where do you see yourself in five years?

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7. What are your short range and long range goals?

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8. What are your salary requirements?

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9. Why should I hire you?

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10. Why did you leave your last job?

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11. I see there are some gaps in your work history. Can you explain?

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## QUESTIONS YOU CAN ASK

- Describe a typical workday / week.
- What are the day-to-day responsibilities of this job?
- Is this a new opening?
- What are you looking for in the ideal candidate for this position?
- Can you describe an ideal employee?
- What are some of the skills and abilities necessary for someone to succeed in this job?
- Is there anything further I can tell you about myself?
- When will you finish interviewing for this position?
- What is the next step in the interview process?
- When may I check back with you?
- Are there any other positions available?
- **TELL THEM THAT YOU WANT THE JOB!!!!**



## INTERVIEW DOS AND DON'TS

- Do arrive 10 minutes early for the interview to show how organized, prepared and dependable you are.
- Do greet everyone including the receptionist in a courteous, friendly way.
- Do smile and show a positive attitude – act enthusiastic.
- Do be honest.
- Do wait for the interviewer to ask you to be seated.
- Do speak clearly and loudly enough to be easily heard.
- Do relax if you can.
- Do sell yourself for the good candidate you are!
- Do thank the interviewer for his/her time, smile, and shake hands and depart in a positive manner.
- Do send a thank you letter immediately restating your interest in the position.
  
- Don't chew gum.
- Don't smoke before or during the interview – even if the interviewer does.
- Don't put anything on the interviewer's desk – no elbows, purses, notebooks.
- Don't play nervously with your keys, rings, pen, or tie.
- Don't swear or use slang words.
- Don't slouch or look tired.
- Don't "tap" your fingers on the desk or table top.
  
- Don't mumble or speak too softly.
- Don't give limp handshakes.

- Don't avoid looking the interviewer in the eye.
- Don't look too scared or too serious.
- Don't argue, act defensive or secretive.
- Don't talk too much or too little.
- Don't wear a hat or dark glasses.
- Don't talk about personal problems.
- Don't talk negatively about past school, job or supervisor experience.

## **COMMONS REASONS WHY PEOPLE DON'T GET THE JOB!**

- Poor personal appearance
- Overaggressive
- Inability to express information clearly
- Lack of interest and enthusiasm
- Lack of planning for career; no purpose and no goals
- Nervous, lack of confidence and poise
- Overemphasis on money
- Unwilling to start at the bottom
- Makes excuses
- Lack of tact and courtesy
- Lack of maturity
- Condemns past employers
- No genuine interest in company or job
- Fails to look interviewer in the eye
- Sloppy application form
- Little sense of humor
- Arrives late at interview
- Fails to express questions about the job
- Vague responses to questions

## AFTER THE INTERVIEW

- Do not forget to thank the interviewer for taking the time to speak with you about the job opening.
- Immediately after the interview, write down what you discussed, why you are good for this job, and any possible objections.
- Within 24 hours, send a thank you card reiterating your interest in the job and in the company after your interview. A simple thank you can make all the difference!
- After a week (or depending on the timeline of when the job is going to be filled), send a follow-up email or phone call to determine if the employer has made a decision or is still in the interview process. Unfortunately, many employers do not contact applications if he/she did not obtain the job!

## INTERVIEW STRESS

- Interviews are stressful for most people. Employers expect you to be a little nervous. After all, you are generally in an unfamiliar setting about to begin a conversation that can affect the rest of your life!
- The first rule is to *ACCEPT THE STRESS*, and make it work for you. That extra bit of adrenaline can actually help you be more energetic, enthusiastic and competitive in the interview.
- Points to remember to help reduce stress and ensure a successful interview:

**EYE CONTACT** – It is important to meet the employer’s gaze directly – especially when you first meet. If this is uncomfortable for you, focus at a point on the interviewer’s face. During the interview, remember to look away occasionally. Staring is just as bad as avoidance!

**SHAKING HANDS** – A handshake is an integral part of an introduction. Handshakes are nonsexist and old social rules no longer apply. Women or men should feel free to initiate a handshake. If you tend to have sweaty palms, give them a last minute wipe with a tissue before you go in, then forget about it.

**BUSY FINGERS** – Men, leave your change at home. You do not want to jingle when you walk, and you certainly don’t want to fiddle with the coins in your pocket during the interview! Women, put your handbag on the floor – out of the way – or forget the handbag altogether; a

briefcase is more professional. Men or women, avoid temptations to play with a pen, twirl a ring, or do anything else that is distracting.

**POSTURE** – Hard chairs allow a more uptight posture than overstuffed chairs or sofas. Sitting upright makes you look more alert and you will be less likely to slouch. Try not to cross your legs, and find a comfortable position for your hands. If necessary, practice sitting in a straight chair and in front of a mirror so you can find a comfortable, appropriate position.

**BODY LANGUAGE** – Beware of nonverbal messages you send through body language. Crossed arms, hands in pockets, arms raised and fingers locked behind your head - these can all send a negative message to interviewers.

**BE AWARE** – Interviewers give nonverbal messages, too! Be on the lookout for signals. If the interviewer seems to lose concentration or starts shuffling papers, or pushes back from the desk, you can be fairly sure the interview is over. Finish what you were saying, thank the interviewer for his/her time, restate your interest in the position, and leave.

**EXIT GRACEFULLY** – Keep your composure until you have left the building. Don't rush. Leave with as much confidence as you arrived. Leave the premise immediately. Do not forget that from office windows, the interviewer could still be observing you in the parking lot!!!

**REMAIN POSITIVE** – Always keep a smile on your face and keep your thoughts positive. Remember, what you are thinking inside is often reflected on the outside! ***Keep Smiling!***

## DEALING WITH REJECTION

- When we are job seeking, rejection is usually a fact of life! Most of us receive more rejections – “turn downs” – in our job search than job offers.
- It may take the average person about three months to one year of very hard work to find the right job. This means applying with and talking to about ten employers each week! For some people it may take longer to find that right job. Of course, some people are lucky – and find a job sooner. The point is, job seeking is usually hard work.
- It is ok to feel sad or even angry about being turned down by an employer. However, you should never let the employer know you feel angry because another chance with the same company may come up later.
- You may come to recognize the stages you go through following rejection:
  1. Denial
  2. Anger
  3. Sadness
  4. Depression

- Allow yourself to experience these feelings, but don't let them take over. You must somehow re-motivate yourself to get back out there to continue your job search.
- Periods of unemployment can be very stressful to close relationships between you, family and friends. No one else will know how hard you are working to find a job – or how much it hurts to be turned down. No one else will reward you for your efforts – so you must reward yourself. This may sound silly, but rewarding yourself can make you feel a lot better and will help you to get back out and looking for a job again.
- Some possible ways to reward yourself might be:
  - \* ice cream sundae
  - \* eating out
  - \* walk in the woods
  - \* new item of clothing
  - \* bubble bath
  - \* fishing trip
  - \* going to the beach
  - \* watching a movie

Think of three rewards you can give yourself for your job seeking efforts:

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_



## **TIPS TO KEEP YOUR SPIRITS HIGH!**

1. Form a buddy job search team. Some school and organizations have “job clubs” where you can find additional support.
2. Think of rejections simply meaning you haven’t found a job match yet. At least 95 percent of job search rejections are impersonal, so don’t take them personally.
3. Maintain your health and energy level by taking care of your body, eating the right kinds of food and getting enough sleep.
4. Get up every morning and dress for work; you are working whether or not you have an appointment that day.
5. Get as much support from family and friends as you can.