



INTERVIEW TIME

IN THE PRESENT CLIMATE, GIVING YOUR BEST INTERVIEW PERFORMANCE IS VITAL. HERE ARE TIPS FROM A SALES DIRECTOR

ENSURE YOUR CV IS WELL WRITTEN AND CONCISE. The long-winded CV is a real no-no. Employers have hundreds of CVs to wade through and a short attention span, so no-one wants to read through pages of information. If you can't convey your key messages and skills in a couple of pages, you are unlikely to get an interview. Moreover, we are looking for our salespeople to be good communicators, so you should demonstrate this on the CV. And don't forget, gaps on CVs still raise questions.

■ **PREPARE.** This sounds like such an obvious one, I know, but still we get candidates turning up for an interview with only the faintest knowledge of the company. If someone is serious about working with us, I would expect them as an absolute minimum to have read the information on our website; to have gained at least a basic understanding of our firm, products and market positioning.

■ **TURN UP ON TIME FOR THE INTERVIEW.** Again, this might seem obvious, but you wouldn't believe how many times I've had candidates call me to say they are going to be delayed, perhaps because they missed the train, they're stuck in traffic, or the cat's been sick. Or the number of people who phone up and ask if they can reschedule for another day. The mistake they make I think is treating the interview as though it's just another business meeting, which of course it's not.

■ **EMPLOY A STRUCTURED QUESTIONING TECHNIQUE.** I would expect experienced salespeople to take a methodical approach to questioning, and to demonstrate this to me in the interview. They should certainly not be shooting from the hip. That's because the interview for a sales position is in truth a dummy sales call, certainly from the perspective of an employer looking to see if you cut the mustard. Throughout an interview for a sales position, the pertinent questions I am asking myself are: "How would this person handle my most important customer?" And, "Could I trust this person in that situation?"



Paul Sloane

■ **DON'T RAMBLE.** One of the worst things you can do in an interview is to ramble on and on. Sales professionals need to be excellent communicators, so all the time I am talking to them I am expecting them to provide concise, considered answers to my questions rather than going off the track. Sometimes candidates go off track to prove a point, but it's really not necessary – or desirable.

■ **LISTEN.** If a candidate doesn't listen, this is a very bad sign for me, as listening is a key skill for a salesperson. In a customer-facing situation, salespeople need to be able to do more than just ask the right questions. They also need to listen to the answers, and respond accordingly.

■ **SHOW ENTHUSIASM FOR THE PRODUCT AND MARKETPLACE.** If a candidate starts asking questions about our pay rate and commission plan early on in the interview then again alarm bells are ringing. They have already signalled to me their lack of interest in the product and, without enthusiasm for a product, and a sound knowledge of its benefits, how can they expect to sell it?

■ **DON'T BE TOO GENTLE.** The ideal sales candidate should not be too technical or too laid back at interview, and they should seize upon the opportunities I give them during the session to take control. In fact, at certain points they

should be interviewing me, since I need them to demonstrate they are capable of leading customers at the right moments.

■ **PREPARE TO TELL THE INTERVIEWER ABOUT THE BIGGEST SALE YOU LOST.** One of my favourite interview questions is: "What's the biggest sale you ever made?" But

I then closely follow that up with: "What was the biggest sale you lost?" I look for candidates that have bid and lost as well as bid and won and, crucially, people who have learned from their mistakes. I ask them how they would have done things differently next time.

■ **PREPARE TO ELABORATE ON YOUR ACHIEVEMENTS.** The ideal candidate should have a strong track record of achievement that should be apparent from the CV. At interview you should expect to be asked to elaborate on any number of achievements, as the interviewer attempts to establish to what extent those achievements were down to the candidate alone.

■ **QUALIFY THE DECISION MAKING PROCESS.** While for certain positions it might be considered cheeky to ask about the next stage, I would certainly expect sales professionals to qualify the decision making process at the end of the interview by asking questions such as: "What sort of person are you looking for, what is the next step in the process, and how many candidates are you seeing?" And so on.

■ **DON'T FORGET TO CLOSE.** If you want to land a sales position, you must certainly demonstrate an ability to close. The interview is your only chance to do that, so you need to close with questions such as: "Do you have any concerns about my ability to do the job? Would you hire me?" Questions like this are your best chance to reassure employers you are the person to do the job. If you are interested in landing the job, I would expect you to close me down on it.

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Paul Sloane is CEO of Monactive. He was part of the team that launched the IBM PC in the UK and MD of Ashton Tate. Tel: 08700 113111 www.monactive.com

BY PAUL SLOANE