



# **JOB INTERVIEWS**

## So You Have an Interview - Now What?

In today's world of work, the interview is a crucial step in landing a new job. In all fields of work the interview process has become more complex than it once was. Today, nurses looking for work are sure to encounter at least one interview as part of the job search process. Interviewing can be a scary process. Nurses are often faced with various types of interviews and need to be prepared to sell themselves and their skills. Developing strong interview skills is essential for your career success!

### *The Purpose of the Interview*

The interview is the most important component in the job search process. Getting an interview is a general sign that the employer thinks you have the qualifications for the job. It's up to you to sell yourself to the potential employer during the interview.

### *The Employer's Perspective*

The interview allows the employer the opportunity to meet you and assess your fit with the organization. Do you have the right qualifications, abilities, and style for the particular job being offered? Besides the qualifications, the employer uses the interview time to explore your ability to think on your feet and to determine your understanding of the position and the organization. It is also an opportunity for an employer to compare you with other applicants who are also being interviewed.

### *Your Perspective*

The main objective of the interview is to use this opportunity to present yourself as the best candidate for the job. You must convince the employer that there is a strong fit between your skills and knowledge, and the position. You must be able to clearly articulate what skills you have to offer, how you have developed those skills and how you have been able to demonstrate those skills through past experience. It is also an opportunity for you to find out more about the organization and the job for which you are applying.

### *Types of Interviews*

As indicated earlier, the interview process has become more complex for all types of work. Nurses looking for work should familiarize themselves with the various

types of interviews which they might encounter. As the position becomes more advanced or management oriented, the interview process generally becomes more involved. It is important to note that nurses at all levels need to be aware of the different types of interviews and learn how to prepare for them.

### *Single Interviewer*

At one time, this would have been the most common type of interview for staff nurses to face. It seems this is not as common a practice by most large employers today. If you are faced with a single interviewer, it may be with the immediate hiring manager (nurse manager) for the unit to which you are applying. In other cases the applicant may be interviewed by a human resources staff member prior to being interviewed by the nurse manager.

### *Group or Panel Interview*

Group interviews may be conducted by two or more individuals. It is not uncommon for nurses applying for staff nurse positions to be faced with a small panel of three to four people. Generally the panel would consist of a human resources staff person, a potential coworker (staff nurse from the unit to which you are applying), and in some cases, a physician for the respective service or program. In this type of interview, the group often decides ahead of time what questions will be asked and which member of the panel will ask them. When answering questions in a panel interview, always direct your answer to the person who asked the question.

### *Behavioural Interviews*

This type of interview is used to assess how you would react to various situations. You are presented with questions that relate to potential situations that you may face on the job. The main goal in behavioural interviews is to determine how well you think on your feet, how you relate experience to situation, and problem solve. Questions may relate to specific clinical situations, conflict management, or working as part of a team.

Your answers will provide the interviewer(s) with some insight regarding your knowledge of the clinical setting and how you might handle the situation on

the job. Behavioural interviews are being used more commonly by nursing employers for staff nurse positions as well as advanced positions.

#### *Subsequent or Serial Interviews*

This refers to the process of having more than one interview before the job is offered and is the case for many jobs today. A second or third interview is often conducted to determine the fit between you and the position. In nursing, this type of interview is more common for management or specialized roles such as clinical nurse specialist, nurse practitioner, nurse manager or educator.

#### *Telephone Interviews*

Nursing employers in Canada may use a telephone interview as a method of conducting an initial interview. This method is used when distance between the candidate and the employer may be an issue. Telephone interviews offer advantages and disadvantages to both the employer and the applicant. They require the same level of preparation as does a person-to-person interview. If you are invited to be interviewed by telephone, ensure that you prepare for it and be sure to ask how many people will be listening at the other end. You may find yourself on speaker phone to a panel of individuals.

#### *Preparation is Essential*

Contrary to some beliefs - we can no longer “wing it. Interviewing is a serious process and those who are successful at interviews generally undergo some preparation before walking into the interview. If you are called for an interview, here are some tips to help you prepare.

Find out what type of interview to expect. How many people will be interviewing you? Confirm the date, time and location of the interview. This is particularly important because some employers may have more than one site.

Do some research about the organization/hospital. What is their mission, values and philosophy? What is the strategic plan? Usually this information can be found on the organization's website.

Know yourself well! Review your skills, experience and accomplishments. Study the position description and note how your knowledge and expertise meet

the positions requirements. Think about which skills you want to highlight in the interview.

Anticipate potential questions that you may be asked during the interview and prepare answers to those questions. Writing out the answers may be helpful.

Practice interviewing with a friend, colleague, mentor, instructor or career counselor. Ask for feedback and suggestions as to how you can strengthen your presentation.

Make sure you know how to get to the site of the interview. Allow extra travel time to ensure you are on time.

Bring extra copies of your resume to the interview. There may be someone at the interview who requires a copy or you may be asked questions about specific aspects of your resume, in which case, you will want a copy to refer to.

Be friendly to everyone in the organization. Receptionists may play an informal role in the hiring process.

Prepare some questions to ask the interviewer(s). Include questions that will allow you to learn more about the organization and the position itself.

Some questions might include:

1. Will there be an orientation period?
2. Do you have 8/10/12 hour shifts?
3. Do you have self-scheduling or how is the scheduling done on the unit?
4. What are the key responsibilities of this position?
5. What would be my primary challenges if I were selected for this position?
6. What are your expectations of me as a staff member?
7. Does your organization offer continuing education incentives?
8. When will I know about the successful applicant for the job and when will the job start?

### *What Will They Ask Me?*

There are all kinds of books and resources that give sample questions during interviews. For most interviews, you will be asked some general questions about yourself along with other questions related to the specific job to which you have applied. Some common examples are:

- Tell us about yourself, describe your career history
- What words best describe you?
- How would others describe you?
- What are your strengths?
- Identify areas for self development?
- How do you handle stress?
- Where do you see yourself in five years?
- Why do you want to work for this organization?
- How can you contribute to our organization?
- What is the most difficult work situation you have had and how did you handle it?
- Describe a conflict resolution scenario.
- How do you stay current in your practice?
- **Do not ask about salary and benefits until you are offered the job.**

### *What To Do After the Interview?*

Take a few minutes to reflect on how well you did. What questions did you feel you answered well? What would you do differently next time? Were you adequately prepared? Follow up with a thank you letter. Address the letter to the person who called you for the interview. Thank the person for their time and restate your interest in the position (if you do in fact

want the position). Also include any points you want the interviewer to remember that sets you apart from the other candidates.

Think about how you will respond if you are offered the position. Do you want to do the type of work if the job is offered to you? Are the mission and values of the employer compatible with your own work values and professional goals? Will this job allow you to build existing skills and experience to further enhance your career? These are important questions to think about before making the choice to accept a position.

Successful interviewing requires developing the ability to sell your skills and abilities. To do this means knowing yourself well. Preparing for interviews means investing some time and effort. Taking the time to prepare can result in a successful interview and ultimately the job offer. If you weren't successful in getting the job, contact the employer for feedback. Ask for feedback in a non-threatening manner and use the information to help you prepare for your next interview. Each interview can be a learning opportunity. Practice and preparation will help you succeed at interviewing. Remember practice makes perfect!

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## Are you concerned about being too old to find a new job?

to valuing the experience and skills of mature job-seekers. And you, on the leading edge of the eldest baby boomers, are blazing the trail for a complete re-evaluation of opinions and stereotypes about older workers. Some of the common mistakes I see with mature job-seekers are the following:

- **Job Search.** You must be open to all avenues of job-searching. Of course, your network will still be vital, but since many of your contemporaries may be retiring, you'll need to build a new, younger base to your network.
- **Resumes.** Include only recent experience, say the last 15 years or so. No need going back 30+ years, where much of that work experience might be unrelated. Remove dates from older educational degrees/certifications. Use a contemporary style and follow current rules of resume-writing. Certainly someone with your varied experiences needs to include a summary of qualifications section to sum up your top three or four key attributes.
- **Cover Letters.** The biggest mistake I see in cover letters written by mature workers is an undertone of superiority because of your vast work experience. One of the myths about older workers is that they are inflexible — that they know it all — and you must walk the fine line of showcasing your varied accomplishments without sounding rigid or superior.
- **Interviewing.** Since you may be older than the interviewer — your key is to not intimidate him or her. You'll also want to showcase your adaptability and knowledge of current trends and technology.

*Adopted from: Empowering job-seekers to conquer college, career, and job-search ailments*



## Addressing Termination During the Interview Process

Interviews can be scary at the best of times, especially if you are a new graduate nurse or if you are a nurse who has been working in the same position for many years. Added to this worry for the experienced nurse is the issue of termination from the previous job. So, how should one address termination during a job interview when there is such a negative stigma attached to the issue? How can nurses put a positive spin on the answers given to potential employers, and turn this life-changing or sometimes traumatic event into an opportunity of growth and development. Experts in the field have consensually agreed that the best answer is to be honest and open about the situation, and to keep the explanation as brief as possible. Others suggest that it is best to volunteer the information even before the question is asked. Regardless of the reason for the termination, nurses should view this as an opportunity to engage in a new career path towards professional growth and development. This can be accomplished by taking courses to strengthen their workforce potential in order to springboard into another area of nursing; or returning to undergraduate or graduate school to complete the degree that will help them launch into formal leadership roles.

- My competencies were not the right match for my previous employer's needs but it looks like they'd be a good fit in your organization.

- Although circumstances caused me to leave my first job, I was very successful in school and got along well with both students and faculty.
- Certain personal problems, which I now have solved, unfortunately upset my work life. These problems no longer exist and I'm up and running strong to exceed expectations in my new job.
- I was desperate for work and took the wrong job without looking around the corner. I won't make that mistake again. I'd prefer an environment that is congenial, structured and team-oriented, where my best talents can shine and make a substantial contribution.

Practice in advance what you'll say. Then keep it brief, keep it honest and keep it moving. That way, you'll get past the sticky issue and move on to your skills and why you're qualified for the job.

Reference: <http://jobsearch.about.com/od/interviewquestionsanswers/a/interviewfired.htm>

*Adapted: career expert and author, Joyce Lain Kennedy 12 best job interview answers to the questions "Why were you fired?" and "why did you leave your job?"*

Even though one of my students just referred to someone in their 50s as "old," many employers are



## Sample “Thank You” Letter after Interview

Date

Name

Title

Organization

Address

City, State, Zip Code

Dear Mr./Ms. Last Name:

Thank you for meeting with me yesterday to discuss the position of Registered Practical Nurse at (insert company name).

I found the interview both interesting and informative, and left with a much clearer picture of what the position entails. It was helpful to have an opportunity to collect information about the patient population and nursing care model.

I was pleased to have had a chance to talk with you, and thank you again for your consideration.  
Sincerely,

Your Name