

What kind of interview is it?

By Eli Amdur

OK, so I'm on record as saying that 2011 will be better than 2010. Not that it takes a whole lot of guts to predict an improvement over what we've been going through, but I'm still one of the few saying it.

Well, if that's the case, and since my theme for this year (which I've already emphatically propounded) is that you must be highly proactive, then we can draw two conclusions. One, there will be job growth, which means more interviews; and two, since proactive means acting in advance (in an anticipatory way), you'll need to be well prepared.

Preparing for an interview involves more than researching the company, industry, job, and the person interviewing you. For sure, that's plenty to do and this research is all indispensable. But it's nothing new; we've discussed this many times over the years here. Let's just assume that you get this part – and that you will not go into an interview without having done all this.

That still leaves one important issue about which, I'm afraid, most people are woefully unprepared: what kind of interview will it be? Knowing this can make the difference between a memorable performance and a forgettable one.

When Gertrude Stein penned her famous line “A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose,” it's a good thing she wasn't handing out interview advice. An interview is not an interview is not an interview is not an interview, and if you don't know what kind of interview you'll be facing – and develop strategies for each – you probably will not get to the one after that.

Interviewers have different objectives for each interview, depending on the position, the phase of the hiring process, and the field of candidates, and you can count on the fact that they've prepared well for the kind of interview they'll be conducting.

Of course, in most cases you can't ask in advance what type of interview it will be (duh!), so you need to recognize what's going on as quickly as possible.

Just being aware that so many different interview scenarios exist is a big step. Given how much could be written on strategies for each interview, let's just try to identify what you might face: 12 different ways you might be interviewed.

Screening interviews are used early in the process to qualify a candidate before meeting with a hiring authority. Employers use these to eliminate candidates, not hire them. These interviews are usually short, and can be done by telephone, computer, or videoconference, very often by a junior HR clerk or office manager.

One-on-one interviews are the traditional interviews in which candidates meet with one interviewer. By this time, you're a first-round serious candidate in the employer's eyes.

Tag Team interviews are used for the purpose of getting multiple opinions of the candidate, who sees a succession of interviewers during the day. If you're scheduled for a series of meetings, it's a tag team. Decisions will be made only after all the interviewers have a chance to discuss the candidate.

“Installment” interviews have the candidate meeting several interviewers, one-on-one, over the course a period of time. This is different from the Tag Team in that usually, the candidate gets some homework in between, and doesn't see everyone all on the same day. Still, you're getting looked over by more than one person.

Group interviews, where more than one candidate is in the room at the same time, are used to see if a candidate has leadership potential and confidence in front of competition. These are very awkward but an unusual chance to shine.

Audition interviews are used when employers want to see a candidate in action. It's role playing in real time, and is used for positions like teachers, coaches, computer programmers, engineers, customer service representatives, and trainers. You may even be asked to propose a marketing or sales plan.

Stress interviews put candidates under stress to see how they react. Interviewers might use prolonged silence, negative facial reactions, bluntly challenge an answer, or even keep a candidate waiting in the lobby for an hour. The purpose is clear: to see how you work under pressure.

Panel interviews subject the candidate to a committee or panel. Usually used for scheduling efficiency, these can be very intimidating, but are used to see how well candidates can think on their feet.

Behavioral interviews are based on the theory that past behavior predicts future behavior. A typical question in a behavioral interview: "Tell me about a time you had a problem with a coworker" or "Tell me about a time when you led a team to success in the face of great difficulty."

Informational interviews are held when there is not necessarily an immediate job opening. They're great for both the interviewer, who might be keeping his list of available talent up to date, and the candidate, who can use the opportunity to get on that list, as well as to find out more about the company. Informational interviews are virtually stress-free and of high value – in the long run.

Lunch (dinner) interviews determine what a candidate is like in a social setting, especially important for candidates being considered for client-facing positions: sales, marketing, client relations, and investor relations.

Confirmation interviews bring candidates back for a last look before hiring, the candidate's chance to "close the deal."

Remember: what kind of interview is it?