

Interview Tips

Introduction

At Azon we share a goal to be one of the most credible, respected and ultimately successful recruitment consultancies in Ireland.

We know the job-seeking process inside out, and understand that nerves can hinder any applicant from reaching their full potential in an interview situation.

Our mission is to place every one of our customers into a job they love and that helps to progress their skills. In turn, we also strive to supply employers with the perfect candidates they need to grow their business.

Hence the creation of this eBook: a resource designed as a helping hand for those going through a career change.

Whether you're a new graduate, returning to the workforce or even looking for a promotion in a current role, there is something for every professional to learn here.

Assisted and bolstered with experienced recruitment insights and consultant tips, this document combines all of Azon's years of interview experience into one succinct and easy-to-read download. Tips are quick, memorable and simple to put into practice.

Azon hope that this eBook will help with your job search.

Research Yourself

You may have studied the company inside out before an interview, but have you re-read your own CV?



Whether you're looking to change your career path or move vertically in your sector, potential employers all have one thing in common: they want you to be self-aware.

In a working environment, this means being able to use your professional achievements and personal skills to make decisions during your day without the need to be micro-managed. At interview level, however, this will require you to accurately demonstrate how your skills have helped you to achieve success in your career thus far, and why they may make you suitable for the role.

This type of reflection helps you to understand your strengths, and tends to be the focal point of the interview. It offers you an opportunity to sell yourself to a potential employer, and leave them with the impression that the competition will not match up to your experience.

In order to effectively portray your top achievements, it is recommended that you prepare this portion of the interview in advance; you will need to research yourself. Scan your CV and extract a list of educational and professional highlights.

Try to have an example of how they were helpful to your

past employers, and integrate these learnings into why they make you a good fit for this new position.

Be careful, though. Speaking hyperbolically about your experience can lead to inflated expectations on the employer's behalf: do not exaggerate your learnings or abilities – just be honest.

In researching yourself you may discover that there are areas of your background that you are worried about mentioning in the interview, be that a gap in employment or even under-achievement of grades. Again, prepare in advance to be asked about these elements of your CV. For every negative, prepare to turn it into a positive and the interview will run smoothly.

For example: *"There is a gap in my employment for the Summer of 2017. Whilst applying and interviewing, I used my free time here to brush up on my _____ skills, which I know is an essential requirement for this position."*

In an interview setting you are presented with a limited time slot in which to make an impression; make every second count. After all, there is rarely anything easier than talking about yourself.

Prepare 3 Examples

Be sure to have a number of go-to examples ready that quantify your experience for potential employers.



Your interview is only as memorable as the stories you share, so it is important to stand out – for the right reasons.

When deliberating who to bring forward for final interviews (or deciding who gets the job) the hiring committee needs to be able to recall your interview, and envision the skills you would bring to their company. Therefore, it is vitally important that you make an impact.

An easy way to do this is to give concise, relevant examples of your talents in action.

Many people have fascinating experiences but forget them when placed in a pressurised situation like an interview. To remedy this, Azon recommend having three examples prepared in advance that you can use as a response to a multitude of scenario-based questions.

To prepare, your answers should follow a simple format: PAR.

Problem – what was the situation?

Action – what did you do to solve it?

Result – what changed afterwards?

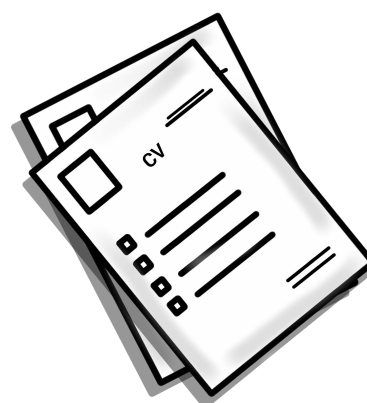
With this format, you can adapt your PAR anecdotes to fit a variety of questions such as “*tell me about a time you worked with a team?*” or “*tell us how you resolve conflict?*”.

Establishing examples like this beforehand will help to calm your nerves if you encounter a question you were not prepared for.

Explain a Gap

Struggling to account for a noticeable gap on your CV?

Here's why it could prove to be your USP against the competition.



It is becoming increasingly common for people to take some time out to explore the world. However, the blank space it leaves on your CV is often perceived to be problematic when it comes to interviewing for a new role.

So how do you explain this gap?

In the majority of cases, the experiences gained abroad can be useful in your working life.

“Make your travels into a professional story, and be ready to explain it,” says James Mackey, Azon’s Senior Consultant for Insurance and Wealth Management.

“If the skills you used while abroad are not suitable for the main body of your resumé, put them under a *Skills/Achievements* section so that the hiring committee can see that you’re not afraid to address the time spent away.”

Whether you experienced a new business outlook, volunteered abroad or simply honed new skills, these are all attributes that enrich a candidate's life experiences, and can often help – not hinder – an application.

“If I see someone that has a gap in their CV but can adequately explain the benefits of the trip on a professional level, I would never see it as a negative,” continues James.

Indeed, this school of thought is becoming more commonplace. Businesses are keen to hire candidates with second languages and a proven ability to work in a multicultural environment.

“Just because the things you learned abroad are intangible does not mean they are not valuable,” James concludes.

“If you prepare enough in advance, no question around your CV gaps should be negative or anything to worry about. It could be the USP that differentiates you from the competition.”

What is your biggest weakness?

How do you reveal your weaknesses but evidence that they won't hinder your ability to do the job at hand?

Find out below.



When preparing for an interview, the “*what is your biggest weakness?*” question is arguably the one that jobseekers dread the most; in fact, a huge majority of respondents in a poll conducted by Azon selected it as the most difficult part of an interview (62%).

Typically, candidates prepare canned answers with vague examples for this question, unlike their specific, personalised responses to most other interview topics.

According to Ed Rossiter, Azon’s Associate Director for Accounting and Professional Services, a huge percentage of interviewees tend to give a disingenuous answer, or one that falls short of what the question is really asking.

“9 times out of 10 a candidate will answer this question with the generic ‘*I’m a perfectionist*’ push, or similar,” he states. “While this might be true, it doesn’t give us the full insight we’re looking for.”

His advice? Be honest, and create a narrative. “This question is popular with recruiters and interviewers because it exposes a candidate’s ability to recognise – and improve upon – their own shortcomings. It’s not about admitting personality flaws. The best way to answer this question is by stating your weakness, and outlining how you tend to (or intend to) overcome it, with particular focus on the role you’re applying for.”

Your answer can be bolstered, Ed continues, by revealing the systems you put in place to guarantee this weakness will not be an issue for your new employer. “Strengthen your answer by outlining the progress you’ve made since this weakness came to light – we want to really know how you coped with overcoming it in your previous roles. This will help us to determine your ability to deal with this weakness in relation to the open role you’re interviewing for.”

Finally, stay relevant and remember these 3 guidelines:

Keep It Short

Answer in 3 – 4 sentences maximum. If they ask you to expand be sure you can, but revealing too much initially could lead the conversation down an indeterminate path.

Avoid a Vital Element of your New Role

This may seem like common sense, but needs to be reiterated. If you are applying for a role as an Accountant it is not a good idea to state your weakness is dealing with numbers. Instead, focus on something less likely to be a red flag for a new employer – like giving presentations in a large group setting, or public speaking.

Finish on a Positive Note

Where possible, try to turn the answer into a positive – one that is quantifiable for the interviewer.

Dressing for Success

First impressions count.

You don't have to be a fashionista to dress appropriately for an interview.



When preparing for your big interview, deciding what you should wear may not be your priority – but it should be a major consideration, Azon's research has found. "First impressions count, and what you wear can influence this," says Ruth Lyndon, Azon's Head of Legal Recruitment.

"While different industries do have fluctuating expectations for what candidates and employees should wear, you should never presume to know the dress code of the organisation – always dress professionally just in case. Dress for success." The way you present yourself initially – in clothing, general appearance and behaviour – will help to form the interviewer's impression of you. "It's not just what you wear," Ruth continues, "it's *how* you wear it."

There are, of course, exceptions to every rule. The IT/online community does not fit the mould of most other interviews these days, and the wearing of suits is becoming scarcer in this industry.

For these interviews, Azon recommend researching what the employee base of the company is wearing for the most formal types of meetings within the business. Mirror that dress code where you can.

Wearing appropriate attire to an interview shows respect to the company you are going to see, and can be the difference between two candidates, particularly for entry level positions. "If we see a candidate has clearly gone the extra mile to portray themselves professionally, it sets the interview off on a positive note from the outset."

Ruth insists you don't have to go over the top: "You don't have to break the bank to look appropriate; suitable work attire can be found at all prices. Using this as an excuse to wear casual or unsuitable clothing will not be appreciated by any hiring committee." In general, businesses view your fashion choice as an echo of your commitment to the opportunity presented to you.

"Whether you are meeting complete strangers for the first time or applying for a promotion in a company you've been in for years, your interviewers will appreciate that the chance you're being given matters to you enough to dress up," Ruth concludes. "Put it this way – it can never go against you to wear a suit versus wearing jeans and a t-shirt."

Sample Interview Questions

Top-level questions to help you prepare in advance.



Project Management

- Describe how you assisted in developing a project team's plan?
- How did you decide what the interim targets and goals were?
- Outline for us how you go about prioritising tasks?
- If 2 projects are of equal importance and are due on the same day, how do you manage your time effectively?
- How do you react to unforeseen circumstances?
- Describe how your leadership skills have influenced the outcome of a project?
- In larger projects that involve many teams, how do you ensure everyone stays updated on progress?
- Please give us an example of a project that you had to organise and see through to fruition. How did you coordinate and plan it? Looking back now, would you change anything?

Expectations

- Outline an effective technique you use to manage so many clients?
- What tools help you to priorities tasks?
- When representing your team members, how do you effectively handle customer complaints?
- Are there any go-to conflict management techniques you employ when required?
- Tell us about a time you were tasked with analyzing the performance of a team on an ongoing basis. How did you manage it? What KPI's did you set?
- What are your time management skills like?
- Tell us about a time a project was not going according to schedule. How did you rectify this? Did you miss the deadline? What did you learn from the situation?
- Giving a specific example, outline for us how you managed client expectations under a tight deadline.

Relationship Management

- Please give an example of how you successfully developed relationships with your team members or clients?
- Provide an example of a situation in which you have gone above and beyond to deliver for a client. How do you consistently maintain this client relationship?
- In what ways do you impact the satisfaction of clients?
- How do you deal with many clients at once? What struggles do you have to overcome?
- How do you handle a dissatisfied customer? What do you do to ensure the relationship is repaired after their dissatisfaction?
- Discuss a client relationship that you've owned from start to finish?
- Have you ever up-sold to a client? If so, tell us how you went about it.
- What is your biggest business win? What portion of the success could be attributed to you?
- How do you turn down customers when a request cannot be completed?

Sample Interview Questions

Top-level questions to help you prepare in advance.



Sales

- What part of the sales process do you enjoy the most?
 - Are you uncomfortable with any aspect of the sales process?
 - What challenges have you faced within your sector hitting sales targets? How did you overcome these challenges?
 - Describe your preparation when making a sales call to a new client?
 - Describe to us the most interesting trend you see emerging in your sector.
-

Negotiation

- Describe a time you dealt with a dissatisfied client. How did you deal with this?
 - Outline for us what happened on your most challenging day of work. Why is it so memorable? Looking back, what changes would you implement to avoid it happening again?
 - Tell us about the last time you had to negotiate with someone.
-

Targets

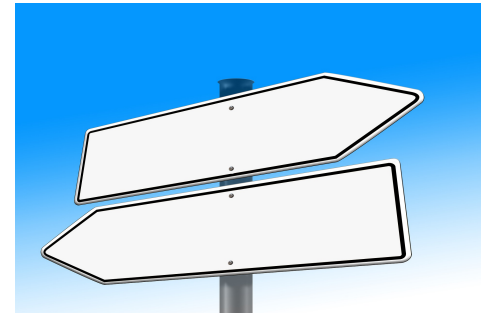
- In what way are goals and targets measured in your current position?
 - What is your performance target - monthly or quarterly? Is it based on individual performances, or a vertical team effort?
 - How do you keep track of your own goals?
 - How do you feel about managing a team's goals and targets?
 - If a team member was consistently falling short of their goals, how would you address this with them?
 - Have you ever managed to make target when you had been at risk of missing your goal throughout the quarter?
 - How did you overcome the issues at hand?
-

Prioritisation

- What do you do if you are falling behind your targets?
- How would you prioritize a large book of business, across multiple regions?
- Provide us with an example of a time your prioritization skills worked to your advantage.

To Change or Not to Change?

You find yourself with an offer on the table. Now the ultimate question: to change, or not to change?



Pros and Cons

Make a list of the positives and negatives of your current employer and current role. Try to be as professional and objective as possible when doing this; if it has been a particularly rough day at the office, maybe wait to do it over the weekend. Consider this list carefully as it provides a useful insight into what your overall motivating factors are in a professional context. This is invaluable when trying to decide the best company and culture fit for you.

The Driver for Change

Examining your main motivators behind a potential change is a must. For example, if you have one or two concerns but overall you enjoy your current role/ employer, then going straight to the nuclear option is not advisable. Instead, have an open, honest, frank conversation with your manager. If you no longer feel sufficiently challenged in your current role but enjoy working with the company, perhaps there is a project or new client that you could get involved with.

Or maybe there is a brand new role that your employer feels could be a good fit. If you have concerns about career progression, talk it through. It could be that your fears are unfounded and there is a particular career path in mind for you. Also, this should be good learning piece for your employer that perhaps they need to engage with their employees more regularly - you could also be doing them a favour.

Decision Made

If having considered the above, you still feel that a change is the right move for you, the following may prove useful:

Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway

Change is scary and tends to result in an extreme case of “*what if I make the wrong decision?*” syndrome. However, if there is something in your gut telling you to explore new opportunities or changes, listen to it and don’t ignore it. Instincts are there for a reason.

Back Yourself

Consider the quality and transferability of the experience and skills you have gained in your career to date and don’t underestimate them. Your professional qualifications gave you a skill-set that maybe you won’t fully appreciate until you start considering a career outside of your current industry.

Talk

Whether you are considering a move within your current organisation or a complete career change, leverage the experience of your peers and friends. Knowledge really is power and the more informed a decision, the more comfortable you will feel with your choice. That twenty minute cup of coffee could prove invaluable.

What is For You Won’t Pass You

Cheesy but true. Open yourself up to new opportunities and if one presents itself, don’t be afraid to explore it.



Azon.ie

11 Merrion Square, Dublin 2

Bedford Row, Limerick

63 Jermyn Street, London SW1Y 6LX, United Kingdom