

The Employment Journey

PEI's Top Source for Career Planning and Job Seeking

The key to a successful job interview

by Gloria Welton

Be prepared to market yourself. That was one piece of advice from the members of the National Technical Committee (NTC) of the job interview competition at the **Canadian Skills Competition 2009** held in Charlottetown in May. Job Interview was among the 40 skilled trade and technology categories at this event, which was held on PEI for the first time.

Four NTC members from across Canada spoke to the competitors after the job interviews. The members, who are all involved in the HR field, shared tips for marketing yourself.

It is important to be eager as well as relaxed during the interview. Both will come naturally when you are prepared.

Practice the questions

Make a list of questions you think the employer will ask you and practice your answers with someone. Also, list some questions you would like to ask the employer.

Relate your skills to the job

"When hiring new staff, employers generally look for specific qualities related to the job," says NTC Chair **Karina Garrett**, who is the Manager of Human Resources for the city of Richmond, BC. "Before the interview, take time to think about the challenges you have dealt with in different areas. To keep them fresh in your mind, write down four success stories and highlight how you handled them."

Many interviewers ask behavioral questions. For example: **If a customer wanted more money back in change than you thought was owed to them, what would you do?**

This type of question can really put you on the spot. The NTC members suggested using a system to quickly draw on your experiences. Organize your answers by keeping three letters in mind:

B - talk about the **background** you have in the area.

A - talk about the **action** you took. What did you do?

R - talk about the **results**.

Then relate your answer specifically to the question. "Give a detailed explanation of the action you took and the results because this is what the interviewers really want to know. You can also explain what you learned from the situation.

"If you get a question about something that you have never done, be honest and say it is a new area for you," says Karina. "Try to draw on your transferrable skills."

Why should we hire you?

This question is an opportunity to really shine. "This is a chance to summarize by recapping your skills, knowledge and experience. Even though it may be the last question, put all your energy into this one."

Know the company and the job duties

Read the job posting carefully. If you are not clear on the duties or qualifications, there are a few ways to become more confident. Research the company online and talk with others who may have worked there. Also, go to websites such as www.pei.jobfutures.org or www.jobfutures.ca and hunt up that job. You will find descriptions of job duties, education requirements, wages, and more.



Competitors in the Job Interview Canadian Skills Competitions 2009: Stephanie Matthews, Nunavut; Lynn Dawn, Newfoundland and Labrador; Katherine Melnyk, Manitoba, Jen Walsh, Alberta, Alyscia McMullin, Ontario, Katelyn Larson, Saskatchewan, and Katie Gallant, PEI. Alyscia won the gold medal.

Getting stumped

"It is perfectly OK to ask the interviewer to repeat a question," says Karina. "If you are not sure what to say, ask if you can come back to that question later."

Also, repeating the question out loud will give you time to think about the answer and it will show that you understand the question.

Hint for the interviewer

It is now becoming more common for the interview questions to be placed in front of the person being interviewed. "Having a paper copy to refer to helps the person being interviewed to be clear about what is being asked."

Competitors share tips to help with nervousness:

"Take deep breaths to try to relax."

"Treat the interview like a conversation and try to have fun with it in a professional way."

"When you are nervous you may start talking too fast - be aware of this."

"Practice doing interviews with a friend."

What to bring to the interview

Bring copies of your résumé, letters of reference, and a list of references to the interview. Refer to your résumé and references when given the opportunity.

Many job seekers now have a portfolio which lists their accomplishments. If you bring the portfolio to the interview make sure you refer to it and don't leave it behind. "The achievements, goals, and awards listed in the portfolio can come in handy when describing your experiences," says Karina. "Take the initiative by showing the information at the right time during the interview. Don't assume they will ask you about it."

Follow up and ask for feedback

Thank the employer at the end of the interview. Also, send a thank-you note by e-mail within 24 hours to everyone who interviewed you.

Ask for feedback on your interview skills whether you get the job or not. "We all have our strengths and weaknesses and everyone can improve," says Karina. "Feedback is valuable information which will help for future job interviews."



For more information, visit www.skillscanada.com

Read more about the 2009 competitions on our blog at www.employmentjourney.com