

Seven Pointers for Group Interviews

Standing Out in a Crowd

By Robert Half International

Imagine showing up for a job interview only to discover four or more applicants waiting to speak with the hiring manager at the same time as you. It's a predicament job seekers are more likely to face as companies streamline the recruitment process. Interviewing multiple candidates at once also provides employers the opportunity to observe how individuals behave when under pressure in a group setting.

A multiple-person interview may seem more nerve-racking than a one-on-one meeting, but it's a prime opportunity to showcase your strong leadership, communication and teamwork skills. Here are some tips to help you shine:

1. Be ready to strut your stuff.

Before any interview, list three characteristics associated with the job description and prepare to demonstrate that you possess them during the session. For example, if you're interviewing for an event coordinator position, you might recount a conference you helped organize at the last minute to highlight your exceptional time-management and multitasking abilities.

2. Get the lay of the land.

A group interview can involve multiple job candidates, as well as multiple hiring managers. So, once the meeting begins, try to read the different personality types in the room. Don't assume the person who is quietly observing possesses no clout; often, the least talkative person is the ultimate decision maker. You can get a sense of the hierarchy by observing whom your interviewers make eye contact with as they speak; typically, employees will watch for their managers' reactions to what they are saying. Regardless of who appears to be in charge, show equal respect and professionalism to everyone in the room, including other applicants.

3. Assert yourself.

If the interview is structured as an open dialogue, make sure your voice is heard -- but never at the expense of interrupting others, which is a sign of poor sportsmanship. If you have something meaningful to say and someone else is speaking, wait your turn. At the same time, avoid dominating the conversation -- another sign of poor team play.

4. Show grace under pressure.

Because there are multiple people being interviewed, you may not have much time to formulate your responses to questions posed by an interviewer. If others start chiming in, and you're still considering your answer, resist the urge to immediately insert your thoughts; a poorly phrased answer can do more damage than saying nothing at all.

5. Expect the unexpected.

With more than one person vying for the spotlight, don't be surprised if someone makes your point first. If this happens, think of a statement that adds to the conversation; this will show the hiring manager you can listen well and think on your feet.

6. Play up your people skills.

During a group interview, a hiring manager may split the group into small teams and assign a hypothetical problem or case for each to resolve. In these situations, the interviewer is likely looking to see who takes charge, how well the person delegates tasks and how the other members react to his or her leadership. The hiring manager might also observe how well individuals improvise, use their reasoning powers to win others over, and give and receive criticism.

7. Up the ante.

Interviewers often favor candidates who ask meaningful questions because quizzing a prospective employer shows that applicants are genuinely interested in the organization and have done their research. Posing insightful questions is also an easy way to stand out in a group interview, since some candidates will likely arrive unprepared. To develop thoughtful questions, study the job description and research the company beforehand.

Preparing for a group interview is very similar to getting ready for a traditional one-on-one interview. The key to succeeding, however, is acknowledging the other applicants, and then acting strategically to distinguish yourself as the candidate of choice. If you can do this in a professional and polished way, you may be chosen for a follow-up interview or the job itself.

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