

Unusual Interview Situations: What Do I Do?

Sometimes, you might be asked to participate in a unique or non-standard interview situation, such as a phone interview or a group interview. Sometimes, you may be forced to deal with illegal or inappropriate questions. Here are some tips for handling these situations.

Phone Interviews: Employers are trying to avoid spending a lot of money on a hiring process if they can. It is much cheaper to conduct a phone interview with you rather than to fly you in, pay for lodging and meals and use a lot of human time during an interview. So, if you have a phone interview scheduled:

- ✓ Have your resume in front of you. You can then refer directly to it during the conversation, and it will serve to remind you of your skills/qualifications.
- ✓ Dress up. Studies show that people perform better when they dress the part.
- ✓ Stand up. You will speak more intelligently, more seriously and use a elevated vocabulary than if you're slouching in a chair or on the couch.
- ✓ Face a blank wall and have no distractions. This will force you to concentrate on the conversation, and you'll be able to hear the vocal cues from your interviewer. One of the disadvantages in phone interviews is that you can't see your interviewer so you can't see the nonverbal feedback (facial expressions, pen tapping, smiling, nodding), so you need to really tune into to the vocal cues.
- ✓ Just like a "regular" interview, you should have your responses ready and your own questions for them prepared.

Group Interviews: Because teamwork is so important in any organization, many employers are using group interviews to judge a person's qualifications for a job. This is also time-efficient: Four people interviewing one person for one hour is much more efficient than four individual one-hour meetings. A group interview can be a little intimidating but try to:

- ✓ Speak to everyone when you answer each question, with a slight emphasis of attention directed to the person who asked the question.
- ✓ Watch the nonverbal cues carefully. One person may fully "get" your answer, but someone else may not. Check to make sure everyone understands.
- ✓ Listen for sub-text. A group interview is a good indication for you about how well the team operates right now, and what type of person they need to round out the team.
- ✓ As you are introduced to the group, jot each person's name down in a small sketch of how they are seated in front of you... then use their names! Etiquette demands that you use "Mr." or "Ms." unless they tell you to use their first name.

Illegal/Inappropriate Questions: This is a tricky area, because you have the right to decline to answer these questions, but the reality is that your refusal may cost you the job. Most of the time, interviewers who ask inappropriate questions do so simply because they don't know any better. Most people don't deliberately break the law!

How do you know if it's an illegal question? Generally, if the question is seeking information related to gender, religious practices, sexual orientation, age or physical disability, or marital status, it's probably illegal. Remember, though, that some jobs do require employees to be capable of lifting 50 pounds, or able to work on Saturdays. If the interviewer can explain *how the question directly relates to the job requirements*, then it is probably a legal question. Essentially, you have four choices:

- Answer the question even if you believe it is illegal. Don't make an issue of it.
- Ask the interviewer to clarify how the question relates to the job function.
- Explain that you are uncomfortable with that question but answer it anyway.
- State that you believe the question is illegal and decline to answer.

Only you can decide what you'll do.

