

# CV makeovers

Showcase your career with a Dynamic Power-CV!

## Interview Guidelines

This e-Book guides you through the interview process



*Knowing the different types of interviews you can expect will enable you to be prepared.*

- Valuable advice and real-life examples.
- Outlines the five types of interviews.
- How to compile an interview portfolio.
- Examples of difficult questions and how to answer.
- Negotiating a better salary.
- Employment Contracts and Restraint of Trade.

**For Professionals**

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## **FOREWORD**

I have written more than 2000 CV's for a variety of clients at all levels, working in every type of profession here in South Africa and overseas. Many of these clients later contacted me to give feedback on their progress. I realised that very few people actually understand how the recruitment and interview processes work, and find the job search experience highly stressful and frustrating.

Over the years I have networked regularly with recruiters, head hunters and in-house HR / Recruitment Managers, who gave me their perspectives and explained their recruitment needs. I compiled a set of guidelines to help clients in their job search and during the interview process. This has proved hugely popular and I have received such positive feedback, that I decided to develop these guidelines further, and conducted intensive research. I also worked closely with a senior HR professional, Len Heyneke, who gave me input 'from the coal face'.

The resulting book is divided into three sections, available as PDF downloads. Visit the CV Makeovers website at [www.cvmakeovers.co.za](http://www.cvmakeovers.co.za) for more information. You are also invited to connect personally at [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com) and [www.linkedin.com](http://www.linkedin.com).

## **1. THE INTERVIEW PROCESS**

Your CV has made the short list, and the recruiter contacts you for an interview. Twenty years ago it was quite simple – there was an interview with the Recruitment Agency, then the employer, and you were offered the position (or not). As with everything in the business world, the interview process has grown in complexity and it is now a very thorough and in some cases, exhausting and stressful process.

**There are 5 main types of interview:**

1. One-on-one interview
2. Psychometric tests
3. Panel interview
4. Case Interview (also called 'in-basket' interviews or simulations)
5. Presentation

### **Feedback from client:**

“My first job after graduating from Stellenbosch University was in the Finance Department of the University. I progressed through the ranks with several promotions to my final position as Senior Director: Finance and Asset Management. Having never been interviewed by an external company before, I found the process that led to my appointment as CEO of the SA Rugby Union far more demanding than I expected. There were five different interviews over a period of two months.”

*Jurie Roux, 2010*

### **1.1 One-On-One Interview**

This is the first interview with the Recruitment Consultant or, if the employer recruits in-house, an HR Officer / Manager.

## 1.2 Psychometric Tests

This may consist of two different types of tests: Personality Assessments and Competency (or Aptitude) Tests. It is usually the second step after the initial interview with the recruitment agent or in-house HR manager, before the panel interview with the decision-makers.

### TERMINOLOGY

There is a lot of confusion around the different terms. The definition of **psychometric test** is any test used to quantify a particular aspect of a person's mental abilities or mindset – e.g., aptitude, intelligence, mental abilities and personality.

*McGraw-Hill Concise Dictionary of Modern Medicine. © 2002*

### PERSONALITY ASSESSMENTS

Companies use Personality Assessments to measure your motivation and preferred culture. The results will describe distinct features of your personality such as leadership qualities, results orientation, creativity, the ability to work in a team, and so on. These are not tests, but may have a time limit. There are no right or wrong answers - they are intended to give the employer a profile of your interests and working style. You should answer honestly and avoid trying to second-guess 'correct' answers. Below are some personality assessment sites for you to try out:

- [SHLDirect.com](http://SHLDirect.com)
- [Keirseychemistry.com/temperament tests](http://Keirseychemistry.com/temperament-tests)
- [Team technology](http://Teamtechnology.com)
- [People Maps](http://PeopleMaps.com)
- <http://kisa.ca/personality/>

### IMPORTANT

Personality is hugely complex and incredibly difficult to measure. Although the results of a questionnaire can suggest what your personality type is, these "DIY" assessments are general indicators ONLY.

## COMPETENCY / APTITUDE TESTS

These are formal, timed tests, taken either online or by filling in a printed answer sheet. They usually take the form of multiple choice questions. You will be given full instructions before you start the test and there will be some example questions to try, with no time limit. If you have special requirements, it is advisable to declare this before the test, as the organisation may be able to make reasonable adjustments, allow you extra time or grade your results more appropriately.

### The tests most commonly used in recruitment are:

- verbal tests - such as verbal reasoning, analysis and word sort;
- numerical tests - such as reasoning, analysis and sequential tests;
- diagrammatic and spatial reasoning - testing your logic and ability to deal with shapes;
- specific tests - for example syntax for computer programming; typing speed tests for admin staff or technical tests for mechanics.

### Practice tests

Below are a range of practice aptitude/ability test sites for you to try out, either in preparation for the real thing or just to find out more about yourself and your abilities.

[Aptitude Tests Online](#)

[Numerical Reasoning](#)

[Psychometric Success](#)

[SHLDirect.com](#)

[Morrisby](#)

[Saville Consulting](#)

### 1.3 Panel Interview

The Panel usually consists of:

- The line manager / direct report that the position reports to.
- An objective participant (HR Officer) who may facilitate / co-ordinate the interview.
- Any other relevant manager / senior staff member who will be directly involved in the individual's duties within the organisation.

#### EXAMPLE

If you are applying for a position as a **Sales Coordinator**, the interview panel may consist of the following key players:

- HR Officer - coordinating / facilitating the interview
- Sales Manager - would be your direct line manager
- Admin Manager - would work closely with you in respect of generating invoices, delivering products and solving queries.

**In an unusual case such as SARU's recruitment process of their new CEO, this is how their interview panel was structured:**

*"The final interview was conducted by an independent panel chaired by Mr Raymond Fenner, a partner with Alpha Milliard Chartered Accountants Inc, and also included Mr Trevor Munday, a director of several companies and representative of the lead sponsors, Ayanda Mjekula, a banker by profession and current CEO of SASDA (South African Supplier Development Agency) and Arness Siame, human resources practitioner and managing consultant of SIARTE Consult."*

Available: <http://www.blitzbokke.com/?tag=saru> accessed on 29 September 2010

## **1.4 In-Basket Interview / Case Interview**

Case interviews require applicants to resolve business challenges for unfamiliar industries under time pressure. They are given a profile of a company or project, then asked to sit at a computer and answer up to 40 e-mails from fictitious clients, suppliers and employees. The e-mails must be read and replied to in a limited time – this test is to judge how quickly the candidate can absorb information, whether he can respond to queries and problems effectively, and cope under pressure.

## **1.5 Presentation**

The candidate is asked to prepare and deliver a presentation (usually with MS PowerPoint slides) of up to 30 minutes, to a panel.

## **2. INTERVIEW PREPARATION**

***The objectives for a successful interview are:***

- ◆ Establish a positive connection with the interviewer.
- ◆ Identify what the needs of the organisation are, by asking questions.
- ◆ Explain how you can make a contribution.

### **2.1 Set your communication objectives**

Prepare and have clear in your mind one or two clear messages or statements about yourself and what you have to offer to the potential employer. Study the job requirements thoroughly – if the advertisement is not detailed, ask the recruitment agent for more information or, if possible, the job description.

Know your own strengths and combine the requirements of the job with your strengths. You have to be able to ‘sell’ yourself verbally in the interview. Keep it short, and ensure that it is relevant to the position you’re applying for.

**This Regional Manager described himself as follows:**

“During the past 12 years I have gained extensive experience in general management, distribution and logistics in the manufacturing sector. I have a proven track record of reducing costs whilst maximizing efficiency. Specific projects include a key role in a major downsizing and restructuring project, and the implementation of a new warehousing, distribution and management information system.”

### **2.2 Conduct research and prepare yourself**

#### **Self knowledge**

Knowing and leveraging your personality strengths is important for career success. A Career Development Profile describes distinct features of your personality such as leadership qualities, results orientation, creativity, the ability to establish effective collaboration, and so on. Use it for self-marketing.

For example, you can incorporate the strengths into your CV or mention them at the interview to promote yourself. Personal testing by an industrial psychologist would be the best option, but if you lack the time (or budget) for this, we suggest buying an online assessment. Try the following:

[www.personalityexplorer.com](http://www.personalityexplorer.com)

[www.discprofile.com](http://www.discprofile.com)

There are several free online personality assessments, which may not be as detailed as the ones you pay for, but can give you some good feedback:

[SHLDirect.com](http://SHLDirect.com) – various practice personality assessments

<http://ipersonic.com/career/?qclid=CK6DmtaJlqQCFZCW7Qodt34QCA> – match your personality to career choices

<http://kisa.ca/personality/> - a personality test that analyzes your exact type in percentages, then gives you a report on the best work environment for you

### **Career Knowledge**

Be prepared to answer any relevant questions about recent jobs. At management level, you should know key background facts such as –

- Company turnover and pre-tax profit.
- Main products and contribution to turnover and profit.
- Locations of main functions, offices, branches, with numbers employed
- Organisational structure.
- Numbers and functions of employees for whom you were responsible.
- Competitors both local and overseas.

Certain additional information may be required depending upon your position and responsibilities within the organisation; for example, if you were responsible for a computer installation, make sure you remember details of the hardware components, software systems and types of peripherals.

If you can't remember these facts accurately, write them down on a postcard or use a notepad; you should not walk in with a bulging briefcase or sheaves of paper.

## **Knowledge about Prospective Employer**

Make sure you do some research on the company so that you know, for instance, that they have a centralized distribution warehouse (or that they utilise a de-centralised, regional distribution system). If the company has experienced strike action recently, or launched a new product line, it will impress the interviewer if you are aware of it.

- Visit the company website.
- Talk to anyone who knows the company.
- Phone the company directly. You have a perfectly valid reason for requesting such information. Talk to the secretary. 'I am meeting Mr Brown on Thursday at 16h00. Before then, I want to brief myself on your company and your activities. Could I collect, or would you prefer to send me some sales literature, your annual report and any other information that you feel might help?'
- Read the 'quality' newspapers such as The Financial Mail, Finance Week, Finansies en Tegniek, Business Day and Business Times. They will keep you up to date on major new industry developments as well as background, policies and problems of different companies.

## **Job Knowledge**

Always remember that interviews are also to enable you to determine whether the job and the company are right for you. To do this:

- Read all the information you have about the job to identify its technical requirements. Jot down any questions you wish to ask.
- Try to determine whether the organisational climate is one in which you will thrive and be happy. Discuss this with the recruitment consultant and prepare some key questions.

## 2.3 *Plan your presentation*

You will be amazed at how quickly interview time passes. Consequently, you must be organised with everything you need in the interview, and get across your key information as soon as possible. Make sure you have the facts to answer possible questions.

Let's take the Regional Manager from our previous example. He is now being interviewed for a position as a National Distribution Manager, so he should emphasize this experience.

“During the past six years as Regional Manager, I have gained extensive experience in distribution and logistics. One of the projects I was involved in, was the implementation of a new warehousing, distribution and management information system that integrated all the regional warehouses.”

He mentions a project he worked on and should be prepared to answer specific questions about the hardware and software of the MIF system, as well as the costs and benefits.

### **Material you will need in the Interview Room**

#### **INTERVIEW PORTFOLIO**

This is a presentation folder with plastic sleeves inside (don't use a ring binder or leverarch file; get a proper display folder with the plastic sleeves bound into the spine – one with a leather cover if you're senior management).

Into the sleeves, insert your CV, reference letters, certificates of qualifications, as well as anything relating to your jobs. For example, if you're in marketing and launched new products, include prints of the product advertising. If you're in a creative field, include samples of your work.

Note: Never leave this Portfolio behind – it may be passed around to other people and you'll struggle to get it back!

## MEETING NOTES

Put another small folder into your briefcase with all the material you will need in the interview room – a notebook, the e-mail from the company confirming the interview in case there is confusion in their diary; also, if you were unavoidably delayed on your journey you would have the telephone number to make a call; a summary of the research you did on the company and its activities – and a list of job-related questions which you have compiled. It is essential that the interview is not a one-sided affair and that you participate in the process.

### **2.4** *Develop key questions*

**See Page 18 for  
question examples**

This involves anticipating and making a list of the kinds of questions most likely to be asked – including the toughest ones – and planning the most appropriate answers for each of these questions. You should identify where you are most vulnerable and focus on them, preparing an honest, forthright and considered response for each question.

When you have prepared for the interview, have someone ask those questions, out loud. We use a different part of the brain to verbalize, so just thinking about possible answers is not sufficient – you may still get lost for a word or become tongue-tied under the pressure of the moment.

### **2.5** *Before the interview*

#### ***The receptionist / secretary (PA)***

It may be necessary for you to speak to the assistant of the person who is going to interview you. It is important that you get on with the secretary, because if she goes back to her boss and says that you sound a bit of a pain, you are already a loser.

There are two things that you should ask the secretary. Firstly, confirm the time and place of the interview and try to establish who will be there. Secondly, ask ‘can you give me some idea how long the interview is going to take in order that I can plan my day’.

You may be told 'you are meeting X at 10h00 and he has another meeting at 11h00.'  
This will help you plan the interview.

When you get there, remember that you are under observation. Don't squirm, don't scratch, or slump back in the chair. The manager may ask the receptionist 'what does he look like' and she may say 'well, he's lying back in the chair and scratching'.  
Try to arrive 20 minutes before the interview; go to the toilet, prepare yourself for the interview, return to the reception area, relax yourself and observe the environment and how people interface with each other. Is it a place you would like to work in?

### **Your image**

Your image is your clothing, hair and make-up. Obviously your look will vary depending on whether you're applying for a Graphic Designer at an Advertising Agency or an HR Manager for a bank, but think carefully about the image you are projecting. Play it safe and rather dress too formally than too casually.

**Ladies:** avoid tight or revealing clothes, and excess jewellery. Wear well-defined but subtle make-up. Watch these YouTube videos for more tips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpMQLe2pCD0>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=89QypHm4iIY&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OX73I-aRQI&feature=related>

**Men:** clean shaven, neat hair cut, collared shirt, smart jacket, dress pants and a tie. Watch these YouTube videos for more tips:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BpUvygEgVk4&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otd5OfQRli8&feature=related>

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OX73I-aRQI&feature=related>

### **Your Mood**

Your mood and enthusiasm is vitally important. If you're feeling tired or anxious, this will be very apparent to the interviewer. Try to be energized, yet relaxed. Pretend that you are going to meet a person who already likes you. Remember that the recruiter is not there to stop you getting the job – he's hoping that you'll be the right candidate so that his search is over!

## 2.6 *The first 60 seconds*

When we meet people for the first time, we tend to capture our first impression – this is a list of major points that will affect the interviewer:

- Stance, posture, how you walk into the room
- Voice
- Handshake
- Eye contact – very, very important
- What are you carrying? How are you carrying it?
- Opening words
- The energy you project
- Confidence
- Clothes
- Personal grooming and hygiene

All this is taken in during the first 60 seconds. Analyse all these separate factors. Decide whether you need to work on any of them. Never dash in and breathlessly exclaim about the traffic jam or the parking difficulties you've experienced. Smile, and pretend that someone's just told you that the interviewer has heard about you and is really keen to have you join the company. Your demeanour should be one of quiet confidence.

Step forward with your hand held out to shake, smile and say your name clearly. 'Good morning, Mr Brown. My name is Jane Wesley. Pleased to meet you'. If he appears a bit perplexed add, 'We arranged to meet today'. If there is any doubt in your mind who he is, you start, 'Mr Brown? I'm Jane Wesley. We arranged to meet today'. You allow a little pause in case he says, 'I'm not Brown, I'm Smith'. Always introduce yourself with your first name as well as your surname. Never presume he knows you. Always use his name - if you're not sure what it is, just ask him.

### ***Very important!***

Always shake hands firmly, even if the interviewer is a woman. A 'lady' shake (holding just the fingers of the hand softly) is considered good manners in some cultures, but **not** in a business situation.

### **3. WHO IS INTERVIEWING YOU?**

Learn as much as possible about the person who'll be questioning you. This will not eliminate all surprises, but it will provide some helpful insight into the kind of interview situation to be encountered. Ask the recruitment consultant or in-house HR person, who will be in the interview – don't assume that it is the person you have been in contact with. Find out what is the status of the person who will interview you. To whom does he report? Is he the decision-maker for this appointment? Will he be interviewing you on his own or with another person, such as a company director?

Remember that a casual discussion over a cup of coffee or lunch can be an interview; don't let your guard down if you are not in a formal situation.

***During the job search process, you are likely to meet different types of interviewers:***

#### **3.1 Recruitment Consultants**

They are normally experienced interviewers. They prefer you to be clear about the type of position you are looking for and not be indecisive. The problem is that you may exclude yourself from a number of opportunities. Big recruitment companies may also use software to scan CV's and identify those that are highly ranked – thus it is important to include all your skills in the "Key Skills" section of your CV. None of your job titles may have included the word "Inventory" but as a General Manager, Inventory Control would have been part of your job, so list that term as well.

#### **3.2 HR Managers**

They are more likely to 'play safe' and find out if you will fit into the 'culture' of the organisation. They will want to know about your management style and psychometric profile and how you react in different situations. '*Talk about a time when your work was criticised*' is a question to see how defensive you become.

### 3.3 *Line Managers*

Line managers normally make the decision. They tend to talk about their department and their specific needs, and conduct a ‘technical’ interview. For instance, if you’re applying for a position in the marketing department, the Marketing Manager may ask “Do you have experience in retail merchandising?”. Ask them questions that focus on the job, for example: “Is your merchandising outsourced or is it handled in-house?”

### 3.4 *Skilled interviewers*

Skilled interviewers will look for patterns of behaviour and check out possible weak areas of either personal or technical skills throughout the interview. Be consistent in your answers otherwise you may seem to be indecisive or illogical.

### 3.5 *Bad interviewers*

Bad interviewers are likely to tell you about the job and the concerns of the employer. They may not ask you appropriate questions or give you a chance to sell yourself. If necessary, you may need to take control of the interview by saying, ‘Would you like to know about my achievements in my previous position?’ or ‘Yes, I’ve encountered that situation before – this is how I managed it / solved the problem.’

Sometimes, an original job description can change completely at the interview, as ideas and possibilities present themselves to the employer. Put yourself ahead of other contenders for a position by finding out their needs and telling them how you can fulfill these. Most people who go for an interview tell a nice story about themselves and hope they get selected. No matter how good the story is, **unless it matches the needs of the employer, the person will not be hired.**