

the second interview

This is an opportunity to get a closer look at the job, other employees, the culture and the community, and find out whether your work style and personality are a good fit.

The company visit is a standard part of the hiring process for most organizations. It usually involves a day of interviewing and related activities at the company site and serves to help the company screen final candidates following initial interviews. This guide will help you prepare for the second interview and anticipate what might occur during the company visit.

The interviewer is confident that the candidate who is invited to visit has the technical skills and intelligence to do the job. Now the company wants to know whether your career goals match the job and its future prospects, whether your energy and willpower will enable you to go beyond the call of duty, and whether your personality fits the organization's culture. This is an opportunity for you to get a detailed, close-up view of the job, other employees, the organization, the culture, and the community. The company will usually do as much "selling" as evaluating, because this is the information that you will use in deciding to accept or decline an offer.

Preparation

Considering the importance of this visit, it is imperative you be prepared for this day. Learn all you can about the company beforehand. If applicable, visit its retail outlets or view its products. This will increase your confidence when you are at the site, prepare you to ask informed questions, and equip you to better interpret your experience. Peruse some of the company's promotional material, visit its website, research related articles in business and industry publications, and review your notes from the initial interview. Also, talk to employees and others who have dealt with the company.

Use this information to develop insightful questions that show your interest in the company and the position.

These questions should demonstrate your thorough preparation, but the responses to the questions should also provide information that will support an informed decision to accept or decline an offer. The questions should be well-positioned during the interview process. For example, ask recent hires of the company about training, promotion, performance evaluation, and community life. More experienced employees can be asked about corporate culture, long-term plans, company history, and other topics where experience enhances the value of a response. Good questions may cover a wide range of topics:

- Corporate goals and direction
- Market growth opportunities
- The company's competitive environment
- Research and development
- Corporate culture/management style
- Career paths of recent hires
- Commitment to training/professional development
- Community lifestyle

Logistics

Consider the logistics of the trip beforehand. This would include major considerations such as accommodations and transportation to the city, as well as smaller details including dining, wake-up calls, and transportation from the hotel to the company site. The company will usually help you arrange most of this, but make sure all the details are covered. Ask about appropriate dress for your trip, the day's itinerary, whom you will meet, and designated times and places. Get the who, what, when, and where for every meeting. Your contact should also provide you with an emergency number for you to call 24 hours a day as you travel. Remember the importance of the person making arrangements for you. He or she may be asked about you by your interviewers.

Generally, most major expenses (travel and lodging) will either be prepaid by the company or put on your own credit card to be reimbursed by the company at a later date. Collect receipts for all expenses incurred during the visit. Make sure you have a major credit card and enough cash to handle miscellaneous expenses.

The company may arrange for you to arrive the night before your interview. Sometimes the company will even provide you with dinner, complete with a dinner companion, when you arrive. Be aware that this person is giving you an informal pre-interview. Your dinner companion may be evaluating your communication skills, ideas/views, ability to mix business and conversation, social graces, and maturity.

Make sure you schedule a wake-up call, use a travel alarm, or have someone call you in the morning to ensure you are awake in plenty of time to prepare. Tardiness will put a shaky foundation under your entire visit.

Knowledge, good questions, and a sharp business outlook will go a long way toward a successful company visit. In summary, things to remember:

- Research, research, research
- Take copies of your résumé and transcript, a list of questions, and a portfolio with a pen and paper for notes
- Have cash and/or a credit card for expenses
- Wear appropriate business dress
- Be well-groomed (hair, face, skin, nails, etc.)

The Company Visit

On the day of the interview, the company may schedule three to five hour-long interviews with various levels of management in one-on-one or small group settings. You may be asked the same questions by three or four different people during the day, yet you must give as solid an answer to the fourth person as to the first. This can be tiring, but the questions may indicate an area of particular concern to the company.

It is probable that you will be given a tour. While this is usually informal, you should be aware that you are still being interviewed even in this setting.

Remember that everyone you meet, even for a few minutes, is a potential evaluator, from a custodian to your company liaison; all may have an opinion about you. That is why it's key to remain sharp and confident at all times. If you are expecting a positive evaluation, at no time during your visit can your attitudes or actions reflect a lack of professionalism.

Many companies test candidates either before or during the visit. These may consist of standard mathematical and verbal tests similar to the SAT or ACT, but more brief and concise.

You should be aware that testing may occur, and understand that no preparation is possible. Getting plenty of rest the evening before is helpful. Some organizations have instituted drug testing, which encompasses testing for all controlled substances. Failure to submit to a drug test may end further employment consideration.

Salary is a touchy subject, and candidates often are caught off guard when the topic comes up in an interview. If questioned about your salary expectations, you might respond in one of two ways:

- Give a broad range: "I would hope with my background and qualifications to be making between \$35,000 and \$45,000." The range should be realistic and based upon prior research of starting salaries in the industry and position being discussed.
- Sidestep the question: "I'm sure that if you make me an offer, it will be in line with my qualifications and the current salary structure for your industry."

If pressed on the issue by the interviewer, you need to respond, but it is best to give a range. As a general rule, it is preferable not to mention salary and benefits until the topics are brought up.

Be sure all of your questions have been answered before you leave. You need to understand both your responsibility and the company's role regarding the next step in the interview process, which should be discussed during the last session of the day.

Follow Up

Collect business cards from everyone you meet. After your visit, write your interviewers personal letters of thanks (handwritten or email are acceptable). If interviewed in a group setting, send the thank you letter to the person leading that group, and ask him or her to pass along your thanks to the rest of the group.

Additionally, a letter of thanks to your main contact person is mandatory. This letter should reaffirm your interest in the position, highlight qualifications one last time or, if applicable, indicate that you have no further interest in the position. The letter provides you one last opportunity to stand out above the competition.