



The 8 MINUTES THAT MATTER



Bob Boad knows how to make your crucial interview moments count

According to a survey conducted by insurance company AXA, potential employers reach a decision about a candidate after just eight minutes. Maintaining eye contact was the factor most highly rated as creating a positive impression, scoring slightly higher even than knowledge of the relevant subject. The survey also revealed the factors that can create a bad impression, with swearing and scruffy clothes leading the list of negatives, followed by lack of knowledge of the relevant subject, appearing unprepared and body odour.

So, heed these survey findings of course. But there is plenty more that you can do to help make yourself a stand-out candidate.

SPEND TIME ON RECONNAISSANCE

If you are going for an in-house position, start your research with the company's website, but also conduct wider investigations to discover what the important issues are for the company and its business sector. If the company is a business that interfaces with the public, visit one of its outlets; if it is a manufacturer, familiarise yourself with its products so that you can speak confidently about its commercial reality.

If the position is in private practice, research the firm, its key clients and what makes it different from its competitors. Via trusted personal contacts in the profession, you may even be able to discover how current

and former employees feel about working there. If you can find out who is likely to be involved in the interview, it will help you prepare for their personal preferences and style.

Whatever the firm, try to find out how members of the team you hope to join engage with the wider profession. See what articles existing staff have published or whether they blog, and find out what presentations they have made at conferences. Search out any important IP cases that they have been involved in during the past few years. These can all provide clues as to which issues the team sees as being important, or where it has particular expertise or experience. If the team has supplied committee members,

examiners or tutors for relevant professional bodies, then your own participation in such activity or other training may play well with the interviewer.

KNOW YOURSELF

Be clear about what you are looking to achieve in your career, both in the long term and more immediately in your next position, as well as what you are able to offer your next employer in return.

Don't be surprised to be confronted by several interviewers. It is quite common for a panel of three or four people, each with their own perspective on the recruitment decision, to be involved. Make a note of their names as they are introduced to you and try to address them by name when responding to each of their questions.

Be prepared for the predictable but important questions: "Why do you want to work here?" and "What can you bring to the role that other candidates cannot?" Be prepared to explain what makes a good team player or team leader and, however tempting it may be, resist criticising your existing manager or colleagues. Watch out for a prompt along the lines of, "Tell us about your weaknesses", and have an answer ready – one that is not too damaging.

You will sound much more credible and convincing if you can demonstrate that you have thought carefully about whether you will be an ideal fit for the role and how you can add value for the organisation. It is also important that you have a clear plan for your personal career development and you are able to show how this job fits with that.

KNOW YOUR BUSINESS

There are likely to be questions designed to check that you are keeping up to speed with key developments in the field, and establish the extent of your experience and competency. Refresh yourself on recent high-profile cases and the hot issues in the relevant sector of IP law.

Some of the questions are intended to test skills that may be required in

the role. So, for example, if negotiating settlements is an important element, you may be asked to try to sell the interviewer an everyday object that is in the room.

EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED

Brace yourself for the unexpected questions, aimed at finding out if you can react well to an unforeseen event and think laterally or imaginatively.

Networking with those who have previously been through the interview process may provide a clue to the sort of unlikely question that an individual or organisation likes to fire at candidates. If you aren't lucky enough to know someone who's been through the process, listen carefully to what is being asked and take your time in answering. If necessary, ask the interviewer to restate the question to buy yourself a little time to work out what might lie behind it. Try not to be too flippant or cocky in your answer, but a little humour or originality may be well received.

POLICE YOUR PROFILE

These days, you should also expect that potential employers will check you out using searches of the internet and social media. Hopefully, you have been careful about what you have posted online, but if there is anything that may now embarrass you, it is worth exploring whether it is possible to get it removed. Guidance on how to tackle this is available online and may also be covered in the terms and conditions of the relevant site or media operator.

BRING IDEAS TO THE TABLE

Don't be surprised if you are asked to suggest ways in which your potential employer might improve. If you have been thorough in doing your homework you may well have a few ideas or have spotted potential

opportunities. For example, some years ago we had a candidate for an in-house position who impressed the interviewer by mentioning that, as well as looking at the corporate website, he had been familiarising himself with the company's trade mark portfolio using the UK IPO online search facility. He had noticed that it had a number of single-class registrations of an important mark that would soon be due for renewal and which, under the current legislation, could have been merged into a single registration to significantly reduce the renewal fees. This demonstrated initiative, creative thinking and an awareness of the importance employers place on receiving ideas that may help to reduce costs or drive revenue, helping to make him stand out from other candidates.

QUESTION THE QUESTIONER

In most interviews, you will be asked if there is anything that you would like to ask the interviewer. Make sure that you have at least one intelligent question to ask. However, do take care to avoid anything that might be considered insensitive or could cause embarrassment for the interviewer if they do not know the answer but feel they ought to.

KEEP YOUR COOL

At the end of the session, thank the interviewers for considering you but do not prolong the discussions unnecessarily. If afterwards you think of a better answer to a particular question and consider contacting the interviewer to pass this on, don't – unless they specifically invite you to do so. Relax, and remember the other candidates will feel the same, and that the interviewer will have taken account of interview nerves and will have been grateful for succinct answers, not lengthy learned opinions. ■



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