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Preparation, polish and panache important during job interviews

By Lori McGinnis

Before landing a job, a candidate needs to land the interview.

Candidates need to prepare for the interview and realize that it is not the final step before an employment decision is made, said Teri Prochaska, staffing manager with Integrity Staffing.

Job candidates should educate themselves about the company and position being sought, said Jeff Woodfill, regional account executive with Aerotek.

Listening skills are critical to the success of an interview, said Roben Arens, account executive with Client Resources.

In order to even get an interview, a resume needs to stand out from the crowd, said Chad Thies, talent director at Talent Plus. It is very important that job candidates be prepared for an interview, Prochaska said. They should show enthusiasm, be courteous to every one they meet, greet the interviewer with a firm handshake, and maintain good eye contact during the interview.

During the interview, candidates should answer the questions clearly and to the point, she said. They need to stay focused and not drift away from the subject. Concentrate on strong qualities and accomplishments, and ask several questions about the position and organization.

Before leaving, candidates should inquire about the next

steps in the process and when they can expect to hear back.

"The interview does not end with the interview," Prochaska



said. "Remember to send a thank-you letter to the interviewer."

Woodfill suggests learning the answers to the following questions before an interview: Why is the position open? Who is interviewing you? What does the company do?

"In this day and age of the Internet, there is no excuse for coming into an interview unprepared," Woodfill said.

In addition to researching the company, performing a self-assessment will help, he said. Candidates should be able to easily state their strengths and weaknesses and how their skills translate into being a good fit for the position.

Once the answers are determined, practice them, Woodfill said. Candidates can record their answers and play them back, practice in front of a mirror, or practice with a friend or even the family dog, he said.

A candidate must listen to the entire question before answering and answer the question without rambling on with unnecessary information, Arens said. Prepare a list of questions to ask.

Body language also is important. Candidates need to sit

up straight and be attentive to the company and the position.

"You do not have a second chance to make a first impression so go in prepared, positive with a smile on your face and ask for the job," she said.

A great attitude is one of the most attractive traits in a candidate. A high initiative also is appealing. Companies are seeking candidates who go above and beyond the call of duty as well as those who can be flexible, Arens said.

Usually a large number of resumes are submitted for a single opening, so to be considered, a resume should stand out, Thies said.

"Your resume is going to have about seven seconds to make an impression on the employer so it needs to look and feel special," he said.

The resume isn't necessarily about past jobs, he said. Rather it is about conveying who the candidate is as well as his or her successes and accomplishments that are relevant to the position being sought.

The best resumes predict how a candidate will perform in the desired position. They are designed for the audience viewing it and have a clear sense of direction.

"Edit the resume mercilessly," he said. "Don't let grammatical errors be the reason you don't make it to the next step."