



CDI BEST PRACTICES TIP SHEET

Job Seekers: Maintain Momentum After the Job Interview

You've just made it through the interview, and you hope you did really well. Don't stop now because it's make-it or break-it time! As the pressures of day-to-day work life creep back in, don't let "out-of-sight, out-of-mind" apply to you and your chances of being offered the job. Here's what you should do next.

During the Interview

The best time to prepare for post-interview and follow-up activities is in the midst of the interview process. It's true that people want to help or work with others they know, like, and trust. If in your resume you described yourself as "dedicated and thorough," make sure to portray those qualities in your interview and give examples of them in your answers. Remember to demonstrate those qualities again in your thank-you letter and follow-up communication.

Be sure to let your personality shine through everything you do during the final stages of the hiring process. Make a lasting impression by showing recruiters that you are a one-of-a-kind find. Keeping this tip foremost will allow you to relax and complete the final stages of the hiring process with the confidence you need to steal the spotlight. Make sure to show appreciation, let them know you want the job, and thank them for the opportunity to meet.

Interview Notes — Write brief notes during or immediately after the interview, capturing the following must-have information. It's OK to take notes in your interview to have specifics to address in your post-interview communications.

Questions You Should Ask

If the interviewer did not address the following questions, you should ask:

- If hired, what would be the most important thing for me to accomplish?
- If hired, what do you see as my most difficult challenge going forward?
- Where am I in the scope of the interview process? Typically, how many rounds do you have (1, 2, 3 or more) before making a decision?

Despite assurances that you will be notified of your status after an interview, some companies fail to follow through. Before concluding the interview, also be sure to ask at least one of the following:

- When will a hiring decision be made?
- What is the next step in the process?
- How do you prefer to be contacted?

Always Get the Contact Information of Your Interviewer(s) — You will need the name, title, email address, and phone number of each person that contributed to the interview. Ask for a business card from each individual connected to the interview process or check with the reception desk on the way out of the office to get the contact information you need.

After The Interview

Debrief after the interview with yourself or your support team. The best way to learn and evaluate one opportunity against another is to spend time reflecting on the interview just finished. Take the time to *sit down in a quiet* place and ask yourself the following questions, being very honest and specific with your answers:

- Did the interview go well? Why or why not?
- What excited me about the job?
- What concerns do I have about the job?
- Do I have the skills they are looking for? If so, which specific ones and why do I think I have what it takes? If not, why not? What skills do they need?
- What did I do well in the interview?
- What did I NOT do well in the interview?
- Were there any awkward moments? If so, what were they about, and why were they awkward?
- What could I have done better in the interview?
- What do I need to practice answering for the next interview?
- Am I a top candidate for this position? If I think so, write down why. If I do not think so, write down why not.
- How does this job fit what I want?

Next, take your answers to these questions and review them against what you want and against your other opportunities. The more realistic you are about your desire and chances of getting a job, the smarter you will be with where you spend your time and how you manage your emotions throughout the process.

Interview Thank You Correspondence

Thank you correspondence is MANDATORY, not optional. In fact, some employers WILL drop the top candidate for neglecting this courtesy. According to CDI's Certified Employment Interview Consultant program, here is why you need to send a follow up letter:

- Show courtesy toward the interviewer for their time.
- Convey interest in the position.

- Remind the employer about you in case you have faded into the memory of an employer who met too many people.
- Allow you to introduce information that you neglected in the interview or didn't do a great job introducing.

Despite these powerful benefits, less than 10% of applicants write and send thank you letters! You will stand out by taking the time to do this. Experience shows that between two equally qualified candidates, the one that sent thank you correspondence was usually hired. Why? Because they followed traditional business social graces, showed continued interest in the job opening, and demonstrated initiative and follow-through.

Don't Send Generic Thank you Notes

Thank you letters need thought, strategy, and substance. Therefore, don't drop off a generic thank you note at the front desk as you leave. Instead, use the letter to emphasize why you are the best candidate, to overcome any areas where you faltered or were not clear, and to give tangible examples of why you are a great fit for the open position.

When to Send and What to Send; It's So Confusing

Each of the items mentioned below has a specific purpose, and all of them have value. Which ones you use depend on the situation. Below is a brief explanation of each one and a suggested timeframe.

- **Email Thank You Note** — This is a brief introductory note to the recipient notifying them that you have attached a thank you letter to the email. **Send within 24 hours of your interview.**
- **Email Thank You Letter** — This is a formal electronic letter with your letterhead and contact information at the top. It is formatted using standard business letter construction and is attached to an email that you send to the recipient. **Send within 24 hours of your interview.**

NOTE: Some coaches recommend you send this email late in the evening, so that it will be in the contact's inbox the next morning. The logic behind that timing is because interviewer(s) were likely busy interviewing others on the same day and won't have a chance to read email until the next day. Sending it later in the evening shows you are still excited and thinking about the position.

- **Printed Thank You Letter** — This is the same as the formal letter mentioned above except that it is printed on resume stationery paper, placed in a matching envelope, and sent to the recipient using the postal mail service. A letter should be customized to each person with whom you interviewed. **Send it to be received within 2 to 3 days of your interview. HOWEVER, if they are making a very quick hiring decision, send it using an overnight mail service** such as UPS, FedEx, or USPS.

Some job seekers want to drop off or mail thank you cards. While this is nice, it doesn't leverage the value of the thank you letter to help you stand out in the process. It's generic and while appreciated, won't catapult you in this process. Spend the time to do this right with a letter.

When to use email or mail? Email should be used when that has been a chief method of communication between you and the interviewers. If that is not the case, printing and mailing is preferred. However, don't

be afraid to even walk in a letter to reception if the time frame is going to be that short in the decision-making process.

Who should receive thank you correspondence? EVERY person who interviewed you should receive a personalized letter via email or mail. You may choose to send thank you notes (simple note cards) to others who participated such as the person who scheduled the interview and the person who greeted you. When considering those who interviewed you, don't overlook initial screening with human resources, the person who took you on a tour of the office, the interviewer(s), each person on the interview panel or team, and any other person you meet with during your interview session.

For example, if you do three interviews, one with an administrative staff person, one with an HR representative, and one with the hiring manager, or the interview was with a panel or group of interviewers, they each should receive a personalized thank you letter.

NOTE: Don't neglect people with a lower-level staff position because you think they don't hold any weight. If they were in the interview process, they matter.

What Should You Say in the Thank You Letter?

Content is king. Use your one-page formal letter to say what you wished you had said during the interview. Include the following:

- Title of the position stated in the job announcement.
- Date of your interview.
- Thank the person for their efforts. This could be scheduling the interview, greeting you, conducting the interview, assisting with the interview questions, or taking you on a tour.
- Demonstrate your attentiveness during the interview conversations by making reference to specific points you feel are important:
 - Reiterate your value statement for this position and company.
 - Highlight the positive points about the interview.
 - Discuss your key career contributions.
 - Address any challenges in a "can do it" positive way.
 - Mention anything you are excited about which you learned in the interview.
- Be specific about the requirements you match, especially those unique qualities that you possess. What "special sauce" do you bring to this position?
- Include any new and relevant information such as additional experience or training.
- Share information you wished you had shared in the interview, such as when you stumbled or didn't add details you wish you had.
- Recap a point made in the interview that underscores your ability and desire to do the job.
- Conclude with a strong statement showing your interest in the job.

If content is king, then proofreading is your best friend. Always proofread your job search correspondence – several times – before sending it out.

How to Overcome a Less than Stellar Interview and Make it to the Next Round

Job interviews can be unnerving and stressful. Occasionally, you may feel like your efforts were less than stellar. Don't give up! It's not too late to turn around a bad interview, and you can use a thank you letter to do it.

Be encouraged by this real-life example:

An engineer interviews for a job he really wants. He doesn't perform well and feels horrible. After all, he's good with his hands, not his communication. He wasn't going to send a thank letter, but his career consultant convinced him he *had to*. Together, they talked about what went wrong during the interview. Then, they created a thank you letter that readdressed the botched questions, especially since he was an expert on that topic. The letter also included a quote directly from a letter of reference from a former boss. They also included that letter and an article the engineer had written on the topic. He ultimately got the job! On his first day, his boss told him that when he had left after the first interview, he was out of the running. They assumed he must have lied on his resume.

In this case, a thoughtful strategy letter made the difference between not getting a job and landing the job he wanted. Therefore, don't be afraid to use a thank you letter as a vehicle for selling your abilities and shoring up the places where you fell short in the interview. You can also include examples and supplemental materials as proof!

Send a strategic thank you letter and contact the hiring manager if you feel you did not meet your potential in the interview. Ask for another chance to share your value. It's a long shot, but what do you have to lose?

Prepare For The Next Phase – What to Do Differently and How to Stand Out

Stand Out in Subsequent Interviews — If you are invited to the next phase of interviewing, ask as many specific questions as you can regarding the information the company wants at this stage of the evaluation process. Keep in mind that this is a two-way street. You are there not only to be interviewed, but also to interview.

Try to develop a relationship with the hiring manager or an employee. Here is an unusual example of taking action as a job applicant.

A job candidate visited the office where she had applied for a position. The purpose of the visit was to obtain a better idea of the scope of the work and the environment, beyond what was offered in the job announcement. On that particular day the assistant was having trouble writing a letter and the candidate offered to help with the wording. The assistant was so appreciative that she championed the candidate to the executive director and board throughout the hiring process. What was the result? The candidate landed the job!

Follow-up

Don't be afraid to follow up! By continuing to communicate on a regular basis, you are demonstrating your continued interest in the position for which you interviewed. Follow-up is an important and strategic tool for moving the selection process forward.

We have seen clients who have expedited their job search and received a great job offer due to timely follow-up and relationship building skills. The candidate who builds and maintains a valued connection with the employer while articulating how they meet the prospective employer's strategic goals often stands out, is respected, and is more likely to be offered a position.

Hopefully, at the end of your interview you asked what happens next, so you have a sense of the company's timeline. Even if you forgot to ask or the company does not reach out to you within the time frame set, you can still follow up. Remember, it's the friendly and positive squeaky wheel that gets the grease.

Careful preparation and timeliness is essential throughout every step of the job search. This is especially the case during the post-interview process. Even if an interview was more challenging than anticipated, you can still make it to the next round. Below are several benefits you can receive as a result of continued follow-up, until a hiring decision is made:

- **Receive valuable feedback** from the employer after the interview. This can relieve frustration, advance your job search, and foster continuous improvement and growth.
- **Impress Potential Employers** by showing continued interest in the targeted role and company. You can do this by having a clear focus and demonstrating your achievement of key results.
- **Make a favorable impression on the employer. You can do this by honing** your focus on solving a unique challenge in the prospective company or industry.
- **Provide quality references to enhance a candidate's chances** of succeeding to the next stage. Use your follow-up as an opportunity to provide solid, professional, updated references. A professional reference sheet often serves as the final puzzle piece to receiving a firm job offer.

Which Person Do You Contact

Sometimes job seekers may be confused about who to contact during the follow-up process. Here are a few ideas:

- The person you were directed to contact about the selection status as listed on the job announcement.
- The person that was named during the interview.
- The main interviewer.
- The hiring manager.
- The recruiter.

How to Follow Up

- Follow up using email, phone, voice mail, or a LinkedIn message.

How Often to Follow Up

- Continue to follow up every week to ten days OR until you are asked to stop calling.

NOTE: Don't get lost — Never call or email on a Monday or a Friday. Use this suggestion to help your follow-up communication be seen and remembered amid a very busy work schedule. *Mondays* are always busy days and on *Fridays*, most people are cramming to get work finished so they can and enjoy the weekend and or leave early.

What to Say in Follow-up Communications?

If all prior communication was done by email, start there. But be ready to pick up the phone if you have no response within 48 hours. Keep your follow-up phone calls, voicemails, or emails short and concise.

Address the following:

- Inquire about your application status and if a hiring decision has been made.
- Ask how you stand next to the other candidates.
- How soon will they make a decision? Ask this **ONLY** if no timeline was given during the interview.
- Remind them of your **unique value** and offerings to the company.
- Show your enthusiasm for the position and your determination to land it.
- Ask how you should proceed.

Email or LinkedIn Messages

This method of follow-up provides an opportunity to include any of the following:

- New information.
- Link to a relevant news article.
- Additional reasons why you are qualified for the position and an example.

Voice Mail Phone Messages

- Write a brief script, to help you speak clearly and concisely, without stumbling for what to say,.
- Record the voice message while in front of a mirror with a smile on your face (which puts a smile in your voice). Below is a sample voice message

"Hello, this is John Smith. We met two weeks ago to discuss the Engineer III position. I'm following up to inquire about the next step in the process. You can reach me at john@iloveengineering.com or 321-555-5555. Thank you."

Persistence Is Good — Becoming a Pest Is Not

Some candidates are over zealous with their follow-up communication. You don't want to seem desperate, and you do not want to be a pest. Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Once a week is sufficient. More than that may be too much.
- Something legitimate changes on your end, such as, *"I have a job offer from another company, but I am very interested in yours!"*

Be Patient

Many factors affect how long it takes to hear back after an interview. The best way to know what to expect is to ask that question along the way. It is fair, appropriate, and typical to ask, "What are the next steps in your process, and how long do you anticipate it will take?" Believe it or not, if you are applying for a job with the government, the whole process can take up to six months. You'll have to be patient.

Addressing Unreasonable Requests

Some interviewers ask job candidates to take tests. A few examples include giving client contact lists, developing a solution to a company problem, or answering extensive essay questions at home and then submitting their responses. These requests may or may not be considered unreasonable requests, and each case may vary. If you are unsure how to proceed, go with your gut feeling. You can also ask your career consultant for their thoughts on the situation in which you find yourself.

NOTE: If you decide to complete homework or projects requested by the interviewer, we recommend doing so with the proviso that it will remain YOUR property. Ensure this proviso is clearly stated in writing.

Example: *"You (fill in the company's name) agree to use my intellectual property only for evaluating my candidacy for the position of (fill in the job title from the job announcement) and you will never use any version of my work and intellectual property for any other purpose."* You can also ask employers to sign an NDA, short for Nondisclosure Agreement, which is a fairly common confidentiality agreement in many business settings.

By doing this, you will accomplish two things

- Demonstrate your business acumen.
- Parse out bad employers who are just looking for free consulting.

Some clients have been burned by providing consulting reports requested by an interviewer without asking for an agreement for the use of their work. Unfortunately, the employer took the job candidate's work and then implemented it without the applicant's knowledge or permission — all to the benefit of the company. Good employers will appreciate the concern and sign either an NDA or agree to the terms of an agreement similar to the one mentioned above.

If you end up not being the successful candidate, you still own the intellectual property and can use it as an interview tool with other employers or perhaps develop and market it yourself.

Bottom Line — If their demands feel like they cross a line for you, reconsider whether you really want to be associated with this company.

When to Stop

Don't stop job searching while you are waiting to hear back after an interview because you feel you have a sure thing. Even what seemed like the best fit may fail, through no fault of your own. Sometimes hiring freezes occur, or they table filling the position for several months, or they make a selection and place a current employee applicant in the opening.

Remember, the interview process is when YOU have a closer look at the company you are considering joining. Sometimes, there are barely detectible signs that this may not be the company for you. Other times the warning can come like a fire alarm!

Here is a real life example that shows why it is important to listen to your gut feelings.

During one of our contributor's previous job interviews, the CEO stood up from the conference table and went on a screaming rant. Two managers and the interviewee sat in mortified silence. When the Ranter-in-Chief walked back to his desk, the managers assured her it wasn't about her. She wanted the job so badly that she accepted the offer in spite of what her gut told her. Big mistake! His reign of terror extended throughout the entire company and cultivated like behavior in other management, including her immediate supervisor.

All organizations have shining moments and potholes. Document what you see and hear. Note things that impress you. Notice things that make you wince. Then ask yourself, "Can you live with them? Are they deal breakers?" Make your best decision and keep moving forward.

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Curated by Posey Salem; edited by Sophia Marshall and Jeri Hird Dutcher.