



## Interviewing for Success



Now that you've landed an interview, it's time to prepare so you can give your best first impression and get the job offer. Being well-prepared will give you confidence and let prospective employers know that you are the right "fit" for the position.

Your military experience has equipped you with highly sought-after characteristics that employers seek: discipline, integrity, managerial skills, and the ability to work under stress. It's your job to make sure the interviewer understands how you will apply these traits and your work experience to the position you are seeking. Here are some tips to help you prepare for an interview and sell yourself to a potential employer:

### Be Prepared

Just before your interview, review your resume or job application and the position announcement. If you have time, you may want to request a copy of the position description to get a better understanding of the job. In addition, review the organization's website, including their mission statement. Prepare a list of questions you may want to ask during the interview.

### Know the Organization

One of the most important things you can do to prepare for your interview is to understand the organization and what they are seeking in a potential employee. Look for:

- ▲ The organization's mission and values, and
- ▲ The position's core competencies

### Look Your Best

Dress to impress, but not in military attire. You will never get a second chance to make a good first impression! Dress in clothing that is appropriate for a professional office environment (e.g., a conservative suit).

### Highlight Your Skills

Highlight your military skills and experience. While it's important not to provide too much detail, describing your specific certifications, training and other specialized experience will give you an edge over other applicants. Describe situations in the military in which you achieved your end goal. Narrate one or two brief examples of how you put your skills into practice and how this kind of quick thinking will translate into your civilian job.

### Be Enthusiastic

Demonstrate that you're truly interested in the job you applied for and in the organization. Speak clearly and smile. Emphasize your dedication to the military and the time you spent serving your country. You've accomplished something most people never will. Prospective employers will likely recognize that your dedication and loyalty to your country will make you a dedicated and loyal employee. Discussing these traits will leave a lasting impression and could give you a competitive edge.

## Translate Military Language and Avoid Jargon

Avoid using ranks, acronyms and other military jargon. Practice translating military language before the interview. Using a military occupational classification (MOC), Veterans can identify civilian jobs that are similar to the jobs they did in the military. For example, if a military officer was a budget analyst or cost analyst in the military, he or she can use the MOC to translate those skills to those of a financial analyst in the civilian workforce. Also, review the job description closely, match your military experience with the experience and skills required, and discuss these thoroughly.

## Be Yourself and Be Honest

Don't put on an act for the interviewer. Being yourself may help you relax during the interview and eliminate unnecessary stress.

## Use the STAR Method

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) utilizes the [Performance Based Interviewing \(PBI\) method](#). This type of interview is based on the premise that past performance is the best indicator of future behavior. During the interview, you will be asked to speak about specific instances when you demonstrated particular behaviors or skills that are key to performing your desired job. Use the STAR method to help you prepare for this performance based interview by discussing the specific situation, task, action and results of the situation you are describing:

### ▲ Situation or task

Describe a situation you were in or the task that you needed to accomplish. You must describe a specific event or situation, not a generalized description of what you have done in the past. Be sure to give enough detail for the interviewer to understand. This situation can be from your previous military experience, from a volunteer experience, or from any relevant event.

### ▲ Action you took

Describe the action you took and be sure to keep the focus on you. Even if you are discussing a group project or effort, describe what you did, not the efforts of the team. Don't explain what you might do; describe what you did.

### ▲ Results you achieved

What happened? How did the event end? What did you accomplish? What did you learn?



## Remember the following tips:

### DO's

- DO** take a moment to think about your answer and ask for clarification if needed
- DO** be prepared to explain how you meet the qualifications of the position
- DO** have a mental list of examples to draw from and sell your competencies, KSAs (Knowledge/Skills/Abilities), experience and education in every answer
- DO** acknowledge contributions others have made to your success (i.e., use “we” where appropriate)
- DO** be prepared to give a two-minute self-introduction in which you explain your background, most significant skills, top accomplishments, and career goals. Try timing yourself, and keep in mind that two minutes is roughly 350 words
- DO** draw on volunteer work if it best demonstrates a certain skill
- DO** answer concisely
- DO** focus on how you will benefit the organization
- DO** monitor your nonverbal cues (e.g., appropriate eye contact, good posture, etc.)
- DO** practice, practice, practice (try recording yourself and see if you notice any areas for improvement when you play it back)
- DO** answer honestly

### DON'Ts

- DON'T** bring up a skill/competency if it doesn't answer the interviewer's question, even if it is one of your strongest skills
- DON'T** dwell on the actions of others (e.g., coworkers or supervisors) during your answer
- DON'T** over-embellish your answers
- DON'T** focus on how the new job will benefit you
- DON'T** complain or speak ill of your current or previous coworkers, supervisors, organization, etc.
- DON'T** draw multiple answers from the same experience

Sampson, Jr., J. P., Peterson, G. W., Lenz, J. G., Reardon, R. C., & Saunders, D. E. (1999). *The Use and Development of the Career Thoughts Inventory*. Lutz, FL: Psychological Assessment Resources, Inc.