

Steps to acing a panel interview

By LAURA SMITH-PROULX

HAD a call for a group or panel interview? While you might be thrilled to make it to this stage of the hiring process, the mere thought of fielding not one, but a whole team of interviewers can be enough to put your stomach in knots.

However, the reason most employers conduct panel interviews isn't to intimidate you; rather, it's a time-saving way to meet with people that will likely interact with you in the new job, and gather their impressions all at once.

So, when you stride into that group interview, remember that the team is there to learn about you and your value-add, not to interrogate you or make you uncomfortable.

These tips can help you feel more in control of the process while facing a group of interviewers – with a professional, enthusiastic demeanour that helps win the job.

> **Direct your attention to each person on the panel:** Upon starting the interview, get each person's name, then look at each person as you introduce yourself. This will help to break the ice and establish a connection to all of your interviewers.

While fielding questions, avoid staring at a single person. Instead, make it a point to relax, smile and open your gaze to the others in the room. Even if a single member of the group asks you a particular question, look around at the others while you answer it.

Doing so will help you project a confident image and build rapport with the entire panel.

> **Expect to repeat yourself:**

While one of your interviewers might take your answer the first time, you can almost expect someone else to either ask for clarification – or ask it again, later in the interview.

Why? Because, just like our verbal abilities, many of us have different listening styles. What is clear to one panel participant may

need further explanation for another person. In addition, each panellist comes to a group interview with a different agenda.

You can expect a prospective peer to be interested in your technical or analytical skills, for example, while the boss might be more curious about why your last job was so short in length.

> **Find out who you'll need to impress the most:** Within most panel interviews, it becomes obvious very quickly who's on "your side" and who still hasn't made up his or her mind.

While it may be comforting to direct your answers and gaze toward the interviewer who seems

more open to your responses, you're better off tackling the naysayer first.

Why? Because winning over the person most likely to reject you shows you have the ability to read the audience as well as problem-solve on your feet.

Most employers are looking for leaders that will challenge issues head-on, ask numerous questions, and hone in on the thorniest problems first. If you respond well to someone that throws challenges your way, you'll come across as an unflappable professional ready to take on the demands of the job.

> **Thank all participants promptly:** At the conclusion of

your group interview, thank everyone personally and gather business cards if you haven't done so. Then, as you're sitting in your car post-interview, write thank you notes immediately and bring them back in for drop-off to the receptionist.

In summary, a panel interview is nothing to dread, especially since it offers an opportunity to establish rapport with your potential new co-workers and bosses. Arm yourself with a stack of success stories, answers to tough questions, thank you notes and a smile, and you'll be on your way to a faster job offer.

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