### **Interviewing**

**NOTES TO FACILITATORS**

This session contains more information than most. Opening Doors facilitators have approached this by delivering content over two group sessions. In the first, they review handout content and give participants time in class to write out answers to difficult interview questions. The second session is devoted solely to role-plays.

Time permitting, address the issue of proper attire and grooming, either in group or one-to-one sessions. Help participants identify where they can get proper interview attire at little-to-no- cost. One place that participants have frequently identified as a favorite is Goodwill. Other resources (in the Boston area) include organizations like Dress for Success (mostly for women) and Solutions at Work (in Cambridge).

**AGENDA**

1. Warm Up
   1. Topic Presentation & Discussion
   2. Activity: Writing Answers to Difficult Interview Questions
2. Break
3. Activity: Role Plays
4. Summary & Reflection
5. Evaluations

**WARM UP**

What experiences do you have with interviewing? Which of your strengths do you think might be most helpful to you in an interview? Which aspects of interviewing are most concerning to you?

**TOPIC PRESENTATION & DISCUSSION**

Review session handouts w/ participants.

**ACTIVITY: Interviewing Role-Plays**

**Demonstration**

Facilitators engage in a role-play to demonstrate interviewing skills in action. One instructor will be the interviewer; the other will play the interviewee. If both facilitators are comfortable with improvisation, allow participants to choose the scenario. (If you are good actors, encourage participants to choose something humorous but also appropriate).

The facilitators will engage in three “takes” of the role-play, each lasting just a couple of

minutes. In the first “take”, the instructor playing the interviewee will make a number of errors (e.g., poor body language – arms crossed; too much detail in response delivery). In the second take, interviewee will make improvements but still make errors. In the third, instructor will exemplify effective body language and response delivery.

During the role-play demo, participants carefully observe. After each “take”, facilitators ask them to provide feedback. Before you begin the first role play, ask participants to watch closely to see how well you perform. At the end of the first “take”, ask participants what the interviewee did well and what they needed to improve. Repeat after the second take.

**Practice**

Depending on number of participants, break up into groups of three or four participants to practice. (There should be one facilitator per group). Participants will take turns being the interviewee, while the other participants will serve as observers and provide feedback. The instructor assigned to their group will be the interviewer. Allow participants to choose their scenarios. Each participant should do role play. Feedback structure should be as follows:

* *Keeping in mind effective body language and responses, what did Byron do* ***well*** *this time?*
* *What is one thing Byron could improve to make this role play* ***even better****?*

**Note:** it is important for participant’s confidence to begin each round of feedback with positive observations. If participants try to jump to “negative” feedback too early, instruct them to hold that feedback until the group has finished identifying what Byron did well. When it comes to “negative” feedback, take only one solid constructive suggestion. When participants engage in the next take of the role play, they should have one thing they’re focusing on improving (i.e., more frequent eye contact). After take 3, participants provide only positive feedback.

**REFLECTION**

What will you take away from this session? What phase of interviewing do you feel is your strength? Which would you most like to work on? How can you continue your work in individual sessions?

### **The 5 Phases of Interviewing**

* + 1. Shape**PREPARE**
       - Research the company
       - Write your questions for the interviewer
* Compile important materials
* Plan your trip
  + 1. Shape**DRESS FOR SUCCESS**
       - Get a good night’s sleep
       - Groom well
* Wear clean, professional clothing
  + 1. Shape**REHEARSE**
       - Practice body language that demonstrates confidence and interest
* Practice answering key questions.
* Practice traveling to your interview location
  + 1. Shape**THE INTERVIEW**
       - Arrive 10 to 15 minutes early
       - Pay attention to your body language (think SOLER)
       - Stay authentic and positive
* Illustrate your skills to the interviewer
* Ask for a business cad

##### **AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

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* + - * Send a thank you email or note  Reflect on your experience

### **Body Language**

Body language can make a big difference! When at your interview, use the acronym SOLER to remember how to hold yourself to make a great impression.

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| --- | --- |
|  | Sit squarely |
|  | Open posture |
|  | Lean slightly towards interviewer |
|  | Eye contact |
|  | Relax |

### **Key Interviewing Questions**

Some interview questions are trickier than others, but keep in mind that the bottom line of every interview question is: **Why are you a good fit for this position and organization/company?** Below are some suggestions for how to answer challenging interview questions.

1. **TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF**

This is one of the most common first interview questions. Your answer to this question **sets the tone for the interview**. This is not the time to talk about your personal life. What the employer is really asking is “tell me why you are the best candidate for this position”. This is the time to sell yourself, to give your pitch.

Your answer should be tailored to the employer’s needs. Make sure to emphasize your traits and skills that are most relevant to **this opportunity**. Here, you want to summarize your **professional** qualifications. Some interviewing experts recommend the **Present + Past + Future** formula.

##### **EXAMPLE**

Jaimie is currently unemployed, but she is maintaining her skills through volunteering with an animal rescue team. She is interviewing for a part-time assistant animal trainer position. Here’s how she responds to “Tell me about yourself”:

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*My passion in life is bringing people and animals together. I’m a compassionate, patient person, and I believe that with the right approach, any dog can be*

*trained to become a loving companion. Right now, I’m volunteering as a member of an animal rescue team. Part of my work involves rehabilitating dogs that have been abandoned or abused. This requires months of building trust,*

*little by little, before the animal can be engaged in training. Prior to this, I started a successful dog walking and grooming business. At one point, I had as many as 40 clients. What I am looking for now is a small company that*

*emphasizes the highest quality care for animals, where I can join an experienced team and positively impact relationships between dogs and their owners.*

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### **Practice**

Find a job listing that interest you. Imagine you are interviewing for the position. How would you respond to the “Tell me about yourself” question? Look back at the example on the previous page for ideas.

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| --- |
| **PRESENT** (relevant activities, work, or classes you are engaged in at present; strengths; skills) |
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| **PAST** (relevant past experience) |
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|  |
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| **FUTURE** (what kind of opportunity you’re looking for; how you want to contribute your strengths and skills) |

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##### **WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST WEAKNESS?**

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This is not a time to get personal and talk about vices (like smoking or watching too much Netflix). You want to answer this question honestly and from a professional perspective. You also want to reassure the employer that your

“weakness” will not get in the way of you doing the job, and in fact, that you are a desirable candidate because you care about your professional growth. Choose an area of growth that you’ve been actively working on. This way, you can spend time explaining the concrete ways that you have been working to improve.

##### **EXAMPLE**

Jose works part-time at the university IT help desk. He is interviewing for a full- time position as an IT administrator for a local health insurance company. The interviewer asks, “What is your greatest weakness?” Here’s how he responds:

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*By nature, I am introverted, which means I have had to work hard to overcome shyness. I do like being with people, it just hasn’t come as naturally to me as it might for others who are outgoing. In my current job, I have intentionally focused on developing rapport with customers and coworkers. This intentional focus has actually led to many people coming to me first when they have an IT issue – they feel comfortable with me and know that I will be patient and kind when trying to help them solve their problem.*

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**PRACTICE**

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1. **I NOTICE THAT YOU HAVEN’T BEEN EMPLOYED FOR THE PAST**

**COUPLE OF YEARS. WHAT HAPPENED DURING THAT TIME?**

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Remember, one of your objectives as an interviewee is to reduce the

employer’s concerns. When an employer sees a gap on a resume, they are usually concerned that the person’s skills are not up to date and/or that whatever caused the person to be out of work will happen again. First, the number one rule of thumb for answering this question is: DO NOT LIE! Second, you can use this question as an opportunity to sell yourself as a candidate. Give a brief, straightforward explanation, then talk about what you did during that time to keep your skills up to date. Finally, make sure to emphasize your enthusiasm and confidence in your readiness to return to work.

##### **EXAMPLE**

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*I completely understand your concern and am happy to discuss this with you. Following the death of my father, with whom I was very close, I went through a difficult time emotionally and I took time off to address it. I worked hard to*

*recover and am fully ready to return to work. Over the past six months, I have*

*focused on updating my skills through completing a certificate program at a local college. I am excited to bring the new skills I learned as well as my ten years’ experience in graphic design to a new opportunity.*

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##### **PRACTICE**

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1. **TELL ME ABOUT A TIME YOU HAD TO PERFORM UNDER PRESSURE.**

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This is an example of a behavioral interviewing question. Behavioral interviewing is a technique that many employers use. The rationale behind this approach is – past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. The best way to answer a behavioral interviewing question (which usually begins with

something like “Tell me about a time when…”) is to tell a brief story of a situation that illustrates your competence in the area of question. A simple way to approach this is by using the **STAR** method:

##### **EXAMPLE**

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*I used to work as the Fundraising Coordinator for a large corporation. Our biggest event every year was the Holiday Charity Ball. The week leading up to the ball was always very busy, but three years ago on the day of the ball our band backed out at the last minute. I had only five hours to figure out an*

*alternate music solution. I called several DJ companies in the area until I found one that had someone free that night, then met with that DJ personally an hour before the ball to finalize a playlist. When the night came, everyone ended up having a great time! Several people even remarked that they loved the music, and nobody ended up noticing that the band wasn’t there!*

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**PRACTICE**

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### **Extension**

Write your response to one or more of the tough interviewing questions.

Rehearse your responses at least a couple of times, preferably with a friend or

trusted support. Next session, we’ll continue spending time doing interview role

plays, in which we practice body language, our responses to “tell me about yourself,” and answers to tough questions.