



## **Contractor Interviews Preparation**

Okay so you might be a seasoned contractor with 20 years under your belt and think you don't need any pointers in preparing for or executing an interview either telephone or face to face. Or perhaps it's your first go at contracting. Either way, chances are that you are not as exposed to the interview process to the same extent, as we your Agent are.. Here are a few pointers from our recent experience that might ease your passage through the process to assist you in achieving your objective... getting a contract offer....plain and simple..

Admittedly some of the points seem extreme and most of the time won't affect the winners out there.. but just in case, indulge me anyway.. We are trying to avoid any of the following being repeated, as it costs you, our clients and more importantly us.

### **Preparation.**

Usual advice, give yourself enough time to get there, whether it's booking an office with a phone or traveling to the other side of the country to meet your next employer.. be cool and confident.. it's no good being a top specialist in your field turning up a shuddering wreck. Guess what, it comes across, clients get frightened and move on, quickly. One of our candidates recently left himself with such little time when he came out of the station he had no idea where he was, where he was going, couldn't find a cab and we were left nursing him with Multimap...needless to say they didn't get the job.. despite top references and being an expert in their chosen field ..

Be polite, professional, confident, and upbeat , no matter how long it's been since you last worked.....(for face to face ivs. firm dry handshake , and smile, professional dress at all times, refer to attached ). Nerves are good, they keep you alert.. but if you are the sort that becomes paralyzed then there are techniques out there for you outside the scope of this short doc.. look out for "fake it to make it" and others...perhaps call a friend, guru or relative who can calm you down.

You are most likely to be uncomfortable or over nervous because you are chancing your arm. Lets say you have managed to circumvent our referencing process, then good luck to you. However you are more than likely to be wasting your time, we'd rather you came clean because you are only delaying a suitable person getting the job. Today's SAP clients expect experts in their field, with a proven track record over several years, most likely gained initially from



working in a permanent role for many years at different levels supported by on the job training etc before you take the leap into contracting.

### **Confirm the job spec.**

Assuming you are well prepared, focused and just in front of your interviewer.

The contractor must find out what the interviewer is looking for.. job description.. etc.. when they are needed.. skills levels and why.. etc.. as soon as possible in the conversation.. as you want to avoid selling your skills etc to find the interviewer is looking for something completely different.. the interviewer might have a jd for an "SAP Transition Manager" in his hand .. the candidate might be a "SAP Test Manager"..it does happen..

Find out as much as you can about the role in terms of deliverables.. project scope.. people involved.. timescales.. technologies.. versions.. standards etc.. as you can.. maybe ask to see the system.. takes notes.. and detail the names and job titles of the interviewers.

### **Answer the questions.**

don't witter on.. answer the question.. it's asked for a reason.. the questioner is looking for specific info.. they are looking for a needle don't give them the haystack as well...

you might feel relieved to be talking about something you are confident about.. but be careful .. to an uninterested ear it will be rubbish and they will be too polite ever to tell you...but we will find out..

If you are an expert be careful not to come across too confident.. because that can be confused with arrogance.. another offer wrecker..

### **Skeletons in the closet.**

Statistically there are a lot of skeletons out there.. if you have some.. it's not a good idea to share them in an interview.. so if you are asked something like "Did you ever write a report that the client disagreed with, what happened and how did you feel.. don't say.. "I once wrote a report and the client strongly disagreed with it.. when I got back my manager fired me..... and I felt ... Crap.." ... Needless to say the candidate didn't get the job.. the client said he was doing fine up until that last question



### **Positivity**

Stay positive, avoid negative language.. don't bad mouth your lot in life.. your current or last contract, or previous client.. it's a small world and your interviewer might be best friends with you last client..

### **Interviewer Reservations**

During your interview, possibly near the end ask the interviewers if they have any reservations about you and your skills.

If they say they have.. welcome the reservation.. thank them for giving you a chance to deal with it... then answer or deal with the reservation.. and ask them what they think.

Once you've dealt with that reservation.. repeat the exercise until there are no further reservations.

If the manager says "I've heard that question before", say something like, "yes I think it's a good question and helps us deal with any issues that might get in the way unnecessarily."

### **Candidate Reservations**

If you have reservations about items other than your ability to deliver the work we suggest you leave them to us to deal with later. Your objective is to get an offer.. our job is to make the best possible, which we will .. however without an offer everything else is irrelevant.



**The following advice is from a very good recruiter friend of Hanson Regan who passes this on to candidates before an interview. He deals mainly with permanent placements but we think there are lessons to be learned here for SAP Contractors:**

### **Reasons for Rejection at Interview**

I thought that you find it useful if I outlined some recent reasons why people have been rejected at interviews. This is not a comprehensive list:

These are common themes:

**LACK OF FOCUS – 9 out of 10 fail for this reason.** When going for a ie a Corporate Development or Strategy role, telling the interviewer that they were also looking at other roles such as private equity/ hedge funds/ investment banking. Saying that you are looking at these areas is **almost certain** to lead to a rejection.

Being negative about your current role i.e. when asked why they want to work 'in house' the candidate speaks about how awful the hours are in their current role; them hating in; boss is a nutter; rather than the positive reasons about wanting to work for you.

Being unable to answer the following question: why do you want to come and work here/ why are you sat there?

Giving the impression that if you work in corporate development you will have a big team of analysts working for you doing the financial modelling. You will often be the only person doing it!

Failing to answer the following question: what do you think of our strategy, position in the marketplace and who are our big competitors

Candidate goes along to have a 'frank two way conversation about what they want' and forgetting its an interview for a role. **NEVER** go to an interview thinking its for an 'exploratory chat' please don't go, let me know and we can cancel the interview.

Telling the interview at the end that they will go and reflect on things and revert. They want people to show real enthusiasm.

Not demonstrating absolute focus on the reason they want the role and lots of positive reasons.



Saying that they were thinking of doing an MBA/ travelling in 5 years time

Coming across as a retail or media luvvie – ie at interview for MTV thinking it's a route into media sales and production.

Being unable to talk about deals you have worked on and difficult challenges that you have faced. They are always keen to find exactly what you did on a transaction and your exact involvement. Try and remember some major projects you were involved in; what the issues were; what problems were faced; and how you overcame them. They delight in finding people have put stuff on a cv they have not done.

Sadly, I have to remind people on appearance and dress. At the date of writing this paragraph (5<sup>th</sup> March 2007), three candidates have been rejected on appearance and looking slobbish in the last month. Therefore, please remember to brush hair "she looked like she had been pulled through a bush", pin stripe suits are to be avoided at all costs. Men to avoid visible jewellery. Please do not put on thick hair products, dirty shoes, comfortable shoes, aftershave, shoes with buckles on. Bits of food in teeth. Had not shaved. Tie undone. Creases in trousers. Dirty shirt.

Monday morning hangovers – again, please do not go to an interview on a Monday if you are going to have a heavy weekend. Best to cancel it in advance and rearrange. As soon as the words 'I had a big weekend' come out at interview, its all over.

### **Interviewer Feedback – What not to do!**

"He hadn't got a clue why he was sat there .... He talked about how much he hated the long hours in his new role and his long term ambition was to work in private equity but couldn't get it. We asked him why he wanted to work in corporate strategy and he told us that he was looking at M&A and Buy side roles as well as consulting. He didn't know anything about our firm apart from what he had clearly got off the website the night before. Other candidates we have seen had bothered to do a lot of research into the business, which is always a really good sign. Quite frankly, he was a waste of time and we expected more from an MBA of his calibre" (Corporate Strategy role)

"He has no idea as to what he really wants to do and has not demonstrated any initiative in starting a career in banking. Others in his position would have least read the FT, or a book on finance or got on the internet and studied the potential career path. Not to mention not knowing at all what level the FTSE has been trading at. The meeting was over in 20mins." (Equity research role)



" He would not shut up. He went on and on and on and loved the sound of his voice. When we gently tried to ask him a question, he talked right over us. He talked about all the opportunities he had been looking at, all the choices he had. We felt that we had to sell the role to him, rather than vice versa. We won't be calling him back. I didn't mind myself, but my boss said we should bin him"

" He left his mobile on and the phone rang. He answered it in the interview and spent a few minutes chatting away. He then put the phone back in his pocket and didn't apologise. It was surreal".

Some potential questions:

Please give me an example of how you have persuaded or influenced someone within business operations, different cultures to make a change or do things a certain way?

Please go through each career move you have ever made and explain why you made it? Why do you want to come and work here now? Why have you not done it sooner?

Tell me about a work crisis that you have had to deal with and how you overcame it.

Don't hang about.. get away asap.. and call us back with your feedback.

**Good Luck.**

**" Preparation and absolute focus is key"**