

Job Interviewing Skills for Radiologists

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Physicians are interviewed for most residency and staff positions. This article addresses the skills and preparation helpful to do well on a radiology job interview. The topics covered in the article include research before an interview, practicing for the interview, and other advice for the interview day.

Key Words: Interviewing, interviewer, interviewee, job interviewing, interview questions

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Physicians applying for most residency and staff jobs can expect to be interviewed. A variety of skills and actions can be of great value to a candidate trying to do well during an interview.

RESEARCH BEFORE AN INTERVIEW

Once an applicant receives an invitation for a formal interview, the candidate should research the organization, selected people in it, what the job entails, and the city. This will help the person being interviewed ask the right questions and seem prepared and interested [1,2]. It will also help the interviewee point out, when the time is right, how their credentials are an excellent fit for the needs of the position.

Certainly, any material given to the candidate should be carefully studied. In addition, using various search engines on the Internet, such as Google, and a variety of freely available other sources can help in preparation for the interview [1,3,4]. The hospital or clinic will often have a Web site, and many radiology practices and some individuals have Web sites as well. The city and state will also have information readily available on the Internet. There may be individuals whom the applicant knows in the organization who can supply valuable information. It may be that some of the candidate's mentors and peers can provide some personal information on the practice.

It is helpful to request and study the agenda of the interview in advance [5]. The names can then be researched, and the candidate will better know what topics to bring up. For example, the interviewer may have gone

to the same college or lived in the same city as the candidate. Books such as those published by Marquis, *Who's Who and the American Board of Medical Specialists*, give some biographical information on individuals who may be interviewing the candidate [6,7]. It may be helpful for the candidate to do a literature search on the publications of the interviewer, even for a private practice position. The interviewer may have published articles in areas of interest to the applicant.

It is useful for residency applicants to study the relevant sections on the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education's Web site and look at some special comments available from residents from radiology training programs on the Web. When several residency applicants meet during private times, it is helpful to share their impressions about programs they have visited. The facts gleaned from research can provide invaluable help for the interview candidate.

PRACTICING FOR THE INTERVIEW

It is frequently useful for candidates to practice for the interview, especially if they have rarely done this. The exercise may allow the applicant to answer and ask questions better and be less nervous. Practicing in front of a mirror, making an audiotape or videotape, and having friends and other radiologists administer mock interviews can be helpful [2]. In rehearsing answers, it can be helpful to talk about how the applicant personally, rather than an abstract "individual to be employed," will be expected to do the job. Doing so helps the potential employer see the candidate as a future employee.

It is important that applicants be prepared with a response about any negative aspects of their background. It is crucial to be honest, but to place a positive spin on responses. If the interviewee is called on to explain an unhappy private job or academic experience, it is better not to blame others for the failures. Similarly, it is unwise

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to call others names or be emotional about past difficulties. Rather, it is best to give the facts in a neutral or positive manner. Otherwise, the applicant will likely be thought of as being negative or a malcontent. A positive approach is to say what was learned from the unfortunate incident and how it will be handled differently in the future [2,5,8].

Common questions by interviewers for staff positions, depending on the situation, include [1-3,5,8,9]:

- Why should I employ you?
- What strengths and weaknesses do you have?
- Give me a brief personal history of yourself.
- Why do you want to work here?
- Why is there a gap in your educational [or job] experience?
- What do you see yourself doing in 10 years?
- What are your leisure activities?
- Do you like teaching and research?
- Describe your style of leadership.
- How are you motivated?
- Why do you want to change positions?
- List some of your mistakes and what you learned from those experiences.
- What characteristics made your best mentor so valuable?
- Did you ever have a departmental chair or section chief you didn't like?
- How do you work with someone you dislike?
- How do you deal with conflict or success or failure?
- Why or how have you achieved success?
- How would you go about making changes here?
- What special skills would you add to our organization?

In all answers, the interviewee should attempt to work in how their background or training would be helpful to the organization. This could include topics other than radiology. Thus, a radiologist could also mention expertise in any pertinent subjects, such as designing Web sites, computer programming, photography, community relations, or business administration as an extra reason to hire the candidate. It is best not to hide any major problem areas [5], and helpful to brainstorm with the interviewer the solution to a vexing problem the organization has. This makes the candidate seem to already be part of the team [3]. Indeed, demonstrating knowledge and experience about teams on an interview is important for prospective departmental leaders [10].

It is helpful in the candidate's responses to identify what personal qualities and skills contributed to their various successes. It is best to respond to queries with full answers and personal examples. However, a typical question can be answered in the first few sentences, even if some elaboration follows. Answers will be better received if they are concise and organized. Also, it is wise to keep

responses relevant to the hiring process. Therefore, if applicants are asked about their life experiences, much of that answer usually will be why their life makes them excellent for the job [2,4]. One tip for success is for the interviewee to speak clearly in a reasonable volume.

The job applicant should remember that body language is important. Superior candidates smile, lean forward slightly, shake hands firmly, maintain good eye contact, and keep their feet on the floor and hands on their lap when seated. Applicants should not slouch, fold their arms in front of their chest, or fidget [1,4,5]. Successful candidates have a spring in their step, show some energy, and are enthusiastic about the opportunity [1,5].

Interestingly, it has been found that the delivery is usually more important than the answer in an interviewer's assessment of a candidate. It is key that answers be delivered with confidence. In one study, only 7% of the reaction of an interviewer was based on the words of an applicant. Body language, tone of voice, passion, and other factors are more critical [3]. If a presentation is part of the candidate's job interview and delivering a lecture is not one of the applicant's strengths, it may be helpful for the individual to take lessons from a speech coach or join one of the clubs associated with Toastmasters International [11]. If the candidate wants to make an important comment that the interviewer is likely to remember, it is best to make it during the start or end of the meeting. In the middle, the interviewer tends to remember less of the conversation. The opening comments by the interviewee and the initial perception of the interviewer are the most lasting impression [4].

It is important that the candidate be professional at all times during the interview. Applicants should always remember that the more they are liked and respected by the interviewer, the more likely they are to be hired [4]. Establishing a relationship of trust, respect, and goodwill with the interviewer is very important [12]. Also, if two applicants are equal in other respects, the one manifesting the most interest in the position is more likely to be hired [13]. In an interview, applicants have at least two jobs: to determine if they want the position and to promote their own suitability for employment.

THE INTERVIEW DAY

The word *interview* can be thought to be an acronym for the words "*integrity, negotiate, trust, enthusiasm, rapport, vitality, innovation, educated, (and) win*" [3]. These are many of the qualities used during a successful hiring meeting. Who the candidate is as a person is at least as important as one's radiology skills [3]. Integrity, a positive attitude, a high energy level, thinking outside the box, and the abilities to learn, work hard, and get along with others are high among the characteristics the candi-

date should demonstrate [3]. Trust is critical between the interviewer and interviewee, and for that matter, between any leader and followers [3,14].

It is wise for a candidate who has an out-of-town interview not to make reservations for the final plane flight of the evening to the destination city. If that flight is canceled, it will often be impossible to get to the meeting on time the next day. Also, it is prudent not to make an airplane reservation that results in the applicant getting in late at night. It is important to get at least 8 hours of sleep the night before an interview and eat breakfast the morning of the meeting [2,4]. If the candidate is coming in from out of town, it is wise to pack an extra change of clothing in case an outfit is stained. Although most physicians believe that they know how to dress appropriately for an interview, there are common mistakes, such as dirty or wrinkled clothing, unshined shoes [2], too much or inappropriate jewelry, too much or too little makeup, overpowering perfume [1], or clothing inappropriate for the workplace. Attention to hairstyle and grooming is important [15]. It is a good precaution for the applicant to take a small comb or brush to the interview and to go to the restroom before arriving at the meeting place. Because some people are sensitive to certain chemicals, it is best not to put on any hairspray or apply any fragrance immediately before the interview [1]. It is wise to have a supply of breath mints handy.

It is important to know exactly how to get to the interviewer's office and to arrive about 10 minutes early. On the interview day, it is helpful to have a small notebook to jot down contact information, notes, and impressions. Some say that taking notes during an interview shows interest and is desirable, although some would prefer that most note taking occur during free moments during the day. It is useful for the applicant to take a date book or electronic scheduler to the interview, in case the candidate needs to make a follow-up meeting [2]. The prepared applicant typically also brings an attaché case with extra curriculum vitae copies and, if a presentation is expected, a notebook computer when appropriate [1]. Some candidates bring selected articles or testimonial letters or graphs of their successes [3]. Better yet is for the candidate to bring a full portfolio containing a selection of exemplary work that shows professional growth and accomplishments. In the case of a radiologist, the portfolio might include reprints of original papers, photographs of exhibits, a presentation given at a conference, case logs, and copies of letters of commendation. An educator's portfolio might include comments by residents about the teacher. Some applicants put together a personal portfolio Web site to be reviewed by the interviewer in advance.

Everything the candidate does on the interview day may be brought to the attention of the decision makers.

What the applicant does in the waiting room may even be noted, especially if the interviewer comes out to meet the candidate personally. It is not a good idea for the interviewee to pace nervously or read something unprofessional [1]. Some recommend that the candidate comment positively about something they have seen in the reception area or interviewer's office.

Bringing a list of questions prevents the interviewee from forgetting to ask some important queries, and it shows that the candidate took the time to prepare [5,8,13]. Factors such as expectations, the scope of duties, the environment, and institutional personality are some of the questions the candidate needs to have answered. For a radiologist looking for a staff position, include queries about the institution or practice, its stability, the strength of its balance sheet, the threat from competitors, and the rapport of the radiologists with referring clinicians and the administration. What is the case mix? What do people like and dislike about the place? What is the turnover rate of staff members? What are the hours worked and the expectations during nights and weekends for medical coverage and the social, business, and meeting obligations? Does the organization have a strategic plan and mission statement? Are the goals of the organization in concert with what the candidate wants? Do the members of the health care team in the organization get along well? What are the opportunities for promotion and professional growth?

It is important for the applicant to find out what the prospective employer wants in a new staff member in terms of interests, productivity, and skills. This refers not only to current radiology skills but also to such characteristics as conscientiousness, collegiality, putting the organization first, willingness to learn new things, initiative, responsibility, fairness, being a team player, and happiness with the community. What subspecialty rotations will the candidate be on and in which institution? In what types of cases will the candidate be expected to be expert? What are the expectations for clinical productivity, and how will that be measured? If a desired group wants someone with fellowship training, sometimes the practice will be willing to subsidize such training. An out-of-towner is expected to inquire about the community, and such questions show interest. Such queries could include the topics of entertainment, schools, cultural attractions, the cost of housing, traffic, and so on [5,8,13,16]. It is best to keep all comments short. The prudent candidate does not initiate a discussion on controversial subjects such as politics and religion, unless asked [4].

The applicant for a residency position also will ask about supervision, the quality of teaching, the number and type of conferences, opportunity to do procedures, the caliber of the equipment, research, board passage

rate, how the program fared on the last site review from the Accreditation Council for Graduate Medical Education, what changes are anticipated in the program in the next 5 years, and the opportunity to participate in certain types of cases, such as angiographic or interventional procedures, nuclear cardiology, obstetric ultrasound, and so on. It is a common mistake of resident applicants, among others, to not understand that residents, the residency coordinator, the receptionist, and others may discuss their perceptions of applicants with the person doing the hiring. Courteous, polite behavior during all parts of the interview is very important for the candidate. This may seem obvious, but one of the authors of this article had a resident applicant for his program engage in a food fight with the residents during the interview day. It is not uncommon for resident applicants to brag about themselves to residents in the program, which does not leave a good impression. One of the authors of this article also had a number of resident applicants who made statements to the effect that they were so wonderful that they were applying to the program only as a safety precaution in the matching program process. It is also very important that the applicant come across as being prepared for the interview and look enthusiastic. A resident applicant who has not read the residency brochure and has not thought of pertinent original questions does not make an optimal impression. One of the authors of this article recalls an applicant for a residency position who had to struggle to remember what institution he was in that day! Such residents are usually not put on the program's match rank list, or are ranked low.

Sometimes there is a luncheon meeting. The applicant should sit down last and not eat until all at the table have their food. The candidate should not order the most expensive item on the menu, not order food that is likely to stain clothes (such as spaghetti with meat sauce), observe etiquette, and not crush their napkin into a ball before putting it on the table at the conclusion of the meal. If there is a bread basket on the table, the interviewee should pass the basket to others before taking any bread [2].

Sometimes a spouse is invited to come for an out-of-town interview trip and may be included in certain meetings, often in a social setting or for dinner. The candidate and spouse should keep dinner entrées and reimbursable expenses for their trip to a minimum. An argument between the applicant and spouse in front of those doing the hiring may eliminate the chance of a job offer. Sometimes the spouse is questioned relevant to the hiring process, often while the candidate is not present.

It is important that applicants have positive attitudes and do not defeat themselves with pessimistic attitudes regarding their gender, skin color, or age [12]. Market yourself [17]. Regardless of what type of job is sought, all

candidates should give complimentary feedback when appropriate, instead of maintaining a reserved, noncommittal attitude [5,8]. Applicants should try to establish a common interest or relationship with everyone they meet during the interview time. This serves to personalize the discussion. If the applicants are negative during the interview—even about subjects extraneous to radiology, such as a recent vacation or the city where they live—they may come across as being overly critical or negative [18]. The candidate should avoid confiding unnecessary information, especially if it is not positive. The friendlier the interviewer is, the more likely the candidates will let their guard down and confide information that might not otherwise be available. The radiology applicant should be comfortable with silence and not fill the time with unnecessary verbiage [19].

In seeking any job as a radiologist, it is best for the candidate not to inquire about salary or benefits in the first interview [2,16]. If the candidate must ask about salary in the first interview, it should be near the end of the meeting [8,13]. When the discussion does turn to salary, it is recommended that the applicant not answer a specific question about an exact salary unless the job is offered and details of the job are clear. If the candidate responds with too low a salary, the person could be stuck with that salary level if they take the job. If the interviewee responds with too high a salary, often the person will be excluded from further consideration. Counters to such a question can be, "We can discuss this later after I learn more about the job's responsibilities," "What do you pay people with similar responsibilities?" "What pay range do you have in mind?" or "Does this question mean you are offering me a job?" Furthermore, if the job is offered to the applicant, and a salary figure is mentioned, it is often wise initially to say nothing. The interviewer will probably talk more about the offer or raise it. One approach is that the applicant asks to discuss this more the following day. The next day, the candidate then either tries to negotiate the salary or fringe benefits higher or tries to negotiate something else, such as more vacation or academic time, a flexible work schedule, or extra money for doing a good job [1,3]. If a salary offer is accepted immediately, the departmental chair or president of the group may think that too much was offered [3]. In the business world, often the salary offered is 10% or 15% greater than the person is earning currently [3]. There are numerous other financial issues that can be discussed aside from salary, such as how income is distributed, buying into a partnership or joint venture, and years to partnership, or a discussion of the track to tenure. Other issues include time off, academic or course time, and termination clauses (eg, is there a provision in the contract that precludes future employment in the area for some years if the candidate leaves their new job?)

[16,20]. Negotiations contract provisions may take days, weeks, or months.

Interviewees should try to work in a closing statement that summarizes why they are qualified, give specific examples of successes, and mention how they are looking forward to working there, provided that is true [1,3]. Both parties should know who will contact whom about follow-up after the interview. Finally, the applicant should thank the interviewer for the opportunity to meet, and when appropriate, ask for the job [5].

Sometimes an interviewer will find it inappropriate or illegal to bring up an issue they are concerned about, but if it is an obvious issue, the interviewee may wish to bring it up. For example, if candidates have an accent, they can introduce the subject and say that they are working on it with a teacher, and furthermore, that it will be an advantage in the department to have someone who can speak a foreign language fluently. As another example, if radiologists are senior in age, is to not point out that they are dependable, do not intend to retire for many years, stay longer in a position than many younger people, have a mature demeanor, and keep up with new developments [1]. Also, not just male but also female employers often want to know that a female candidate has adequate day care arrangements for children; a radiologist who is a young mother may choose to volunteer that she has arranged for this.

AFTER THE INTERVIEW

The candidate should write thank-you letters or e-mails that repeat why their credentials are ideal for the job and mention any areas talked about in detail in the interview. If the interviewer seems to have some doubts about the applicant, address those in the note. It is important to express continued enthusiasm for being hired for this position. For a staff job, at the conclusion of the communication, it is reasonable to ask for the job or to ask when an employment decision will be made.

SUMMARY

In brief, radiologists seeking a job should

- research the organization, selected people in it, what the job entails, and the city;
- learn the common questions asked on an interview and formulate answers;
- be prepared to talk about how their background, skills, training, work ethic, and personality will be helpful to the organization;

- participate in practice interviews with others critiquing the responses for content, delivery, and body language;
- be on time for the interview;
- bring curriculum vitae copies, a portfolio of accomplishments, a list of questions, materials for note taking, and a comb or brush;
- be professional and display a positive, courteous attitude at all times; and
- follow up after the interview.

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