

## **Prepare for Interviews with a Recruiter's Advice**

Sapient's Director of Global Recruitment

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"It's unbelievable how many people don't come in prepared," laments Austin Cooke, director of global recruitment at Sapient, a business and technology consulting company. "With all the research information out there that you can find on the company and on the culture and on the people, there's no reason not to get it. At the very minimum, go to the company Web site and know a lot about that."

Cooke estimates he's interviewed an average of two candidates a day since joining Sapient in 1995. In other words, Cooke knows what he's saying when he offers interview advice. Here are some of his insights:

### **Uncover Background Information**

You can do more than checking the Web to research potential employers. "You can ask the HR department to send you an information packet," says Cooke. "You can network with people that used to work at that company. You can pretend like you're an investor in the company and call investor relations. You can call a broker and get analyst reports if they're publicly held."

### **Dress Like an Exec**

Another thing that still leaves Cooke aghast is when a candidate shows up for an interview underdressed. He points out that when people dress to fit the environment within a company, they may not have it quite right. He advises interview candidates to dress like an executive at the company with which they're interviewing. Given the dress codes of executives these days, that doesn't necessarily involve a suit, but it probably doesn't allow for Birkenstocks either.

### **Make Them Feel Important**

"Show interest," is another one of Cooke's simple, common-sense suggestions. "It's amazing to me how many people don't necessarily show interest in the company. They come in for an interview, and they almost feel like the company should be showing all the interest in them. It's a two-way street. You get excited about people who are excited about you. You tend not to be excited about the people who are not excited about you. Know about the leadership. Know about the history of the company. Know about the core values. Know about the direction of the firm. Know about the direction of projects."

### **Defy Convention -- Embrace Your Weaknesses**

"Everybody talks about avoiding your weaknesses," points out Cooke. "I actually say address them, and talk to people about how you're working on them. I think you come across as so much more compelling."

"Sapient may be a little bit different than other companies in this regard, but we are an extremely open culture," he says. "And one of the things we want to know a lot about is whether a candidate can identify some of their growth areas. As a candidate, you have to understand that everybody has growth areas. The candidates that can actually talk about the growth areas in a compelling way look so much better than candidates who think that they're not supposed to talk about their weaknesses or their growth areas in an interview. The number one mistake everybody always makes is they always talk about how everybody thinks they work too hard. We can read through that."

### **Final Nuggets of Wisdom**

Cooke urges candidates to do anything they can to "try to find out cultural information. What's the culture like? What does it feel like when you're working there?" He suggests doing this by tracking down former employees, as they can be more open in their assessment of companies.

Cooke advises against broaching the subject of money in a first interview. "Talking about compensation is bad policy," he says. "Listen to your mom: It's still not appropriate. I think that you have to get to a point where it makes sense to talk about the cents."

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