PA Job Interviews: What To Do and What To Avoid

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You have been invited for an interview with a prospective employer and you have never interviewed for a job before. This article is designed to focus on positive attributes and how to avoid negative impressions. The information gathered in this article is a compilation of advice from various online agencies that prepare people to enter the workforce.

Do your homework.
Research the employer to determine if it is a solo practice physician, a medical group, or a large medical corporation. See what information can be found online about the future employer or employer group. Does the physician have a current license in good standing? Are there any claims on the physician? What are the positive and negative things being written about the employer or group? If this is a major group, be familiar with the mission and vision statement. Many organizations have a value statement that should be reviewed. Check the services offered by the future employer. Ask other PAs who may have worked for the potential employer how they felt working at that facility, and if they were offered a job there today, would they take it? If they are unwilling to state anything positive or negative, take that as a sign. All this homework will provide a broader knowledge and understanding of the cultural environment established by the employer.

Prepare in advance a list of the most likely questions to be asked during the interview. Rehearsing answers will enhance the interview experience. Just be cautious that the answers are not totally memorized for fear of insincerity.

Dress appropriately.
The acceptable industry standard for dress is the protocol for interview dress. If not sure of the standard, it is best to dress conservatively, which means a suit and tie for men and a suit for women. Usually darker tones and gray tones are always acceptable. Be leary of excessively loud colors because they suggest being outside of the norm. Even though no one will formally admit to it, dress can play a role in the employer’s decision to hire, especially if there is more than one applicant.

Maintain good grooming.
Monitor personal grooming habits. A good appearance implies that the applicant takes pride in himself/herself, and can relate positively to an employer. Men should be shaved. Hair should be clean and combed. Nails should be clean and in good repair. Women who choose to wear fingernail polish should make sure it is conservative and not have it be a source of visual distraction during an interview. Do not overuse perfume or cologne; the adage “less is more” applies in this case.

Remember the interview starts when you walk through the door.
Be courteous with any staff member you encounter. The smart employer will ask the staff about their initial impressions of the applicant. Treating everyone with respect is the universal mantra. A good way to make a positive impression is with a firm handshake.

Make the most of your interview time.
Listen to the questions and respond appropriately. The interviewer is determining critical reasoning skills, listening skills and cognitive skills while trying to ascertain if the applicant is capable of fulfilling the responsibilities of the job. Be honest about your answers. Take responsibility for your past actions. It is advantageous to be a little lighthearted in the interview which can put you and the interviewer at more ease.

Respectfully talk about your accomplishments without being conceited. It is acceptable to let the interviewer know why the job is appealing, but do not let good geographic location be the main or only answer (even if it is true). Use active listening. Be attentive to the verbal and non-verbal cues provided by the interviewer. Do not interrupt the interviewer.

Ask questions.
The applicant should ask questions that enhance your knowledge about the job. It is acceptable to ask questions that could not be found in your personal research of the employer or company. However, there are questions that make the applicant appear in a less than favorable light. Those questions include ones that could have easily been researched prior to the interview. Asking bad questions makes the applicant appear lazy, uninterested, or lacking research skills; all of which reflect poorly on the applicant.
Be aware of your body language.
Make frequent eye contact with the interviewer, but do not stare them down. Infrequent eye contact may be a sign of shyness or insecurity, which could make an applicant less competitive. Blank stares or daydreaming will appear as if the applicant is trying to distance themselves from the interview. Sit up straight with a slight forward lean. This posture projects interest and engagement in the interview process. To enhance the interview dynamics, it is recommended to loosely mimic the interviewer’s body postures. Provide gestures that indicate attentiveness such as head nodding, but do not look like a “bobble head.” Regard the interviewer’s personal space by providing a buffer of about two feet. Any conversation that takes place closer than that is uncomfortable.

Do not rub the back of your neck or head during the interview as these motions project disinterest. Rubbing or touching your nose can subconsciously suggest incomplete honesty. The applicant seated with arms folded across the chest suggests uneasiness and lack of openness.

Slouching in the chair also appears as an uninterested or unprepared posture.

End on a positive note.
Conclude the interview with a firm handshake and a smile. Thank the interviewer for their time. Remember to say goodbye to any staff that you see on the way out of the office. If the interview went well, do not perform the touchdown dance in the lobby; save it for a more appropriate location.

Always follow up.
Sending a thank you note can leave a positive impression with the employer. The thank you note should be just that, a thank you for the opportunity to interview. Do not add information you forgot to include in the interview as it will appear as if you could not communicate adequately when given the initial opportunity.

Focusing on positive interviewing skills while avoiding common mistakes that detract from the interview will help improve your chances of landing your dream PA job. Good luck!

Congratulations Graduates
CAPA would like to congratulate all students graduating from the Physician Assistant Programs across California. Best wishes as you prepare to take the NCCPA PANCE exam, and begin your career as a PA. We look forward to working with all of you as our colleagues as we continue to advocate for our profession.

Congratulations to the 2012 Graduates of:
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- Riverside County Regional Medical Center/Riverside College
- Samuel Merritt University
- San Joaquin Valley College
- Stanford University, School of Medicine
- Touro University - California, College of Health Sciences
- University of California, Davis
- University of Southern California, Keck School of Medicine
- Western University of Health Sciences