



## Second Interview Preparation and Presentations – Top Hints, Tips and Advice

### Contents

Second Interview Preparation and Presentations – Top Hints, Tips and Advice .....	1
Introduction .....	1
The Difference between First and Second Interviews.....	1
Getting the balance right .....	2
It’s all in the detail.....	2
Money – Do I mention it, or not?.....	2
Negotiating the package that’s right for you .....	3
Top Hints and Tips for Second Interview .....	4
Second Interview Presentations .....	5
Obscure and Tricky Second Interview Presentations .....	5
The Paperclip Presentation .....	6
And finally....Closing a Second Interview .....	8
You’ve got this far and put in so much effort, don’t let it slip through your hands.....	8

### Introduction

Congratulations if you’ve made it through to the second round of interviews. Second interviews are very different to first interviews. First interviews tend to be around personality, character and basic skills and experience. Second interviews are around facts, figures and ultimately can you do the job!

### The Difference between First and Second Interviews

We commonly hear after first interview that it was great, really enjoyable, ‘like two strangers having a chat in the pub’ and then, after the second interview, ‘gosh, that was tough, he was a completely different person, no warmth or rapport at all’.

Is this fair? Yes totally. At the second interview stage, a business has to take a conscious business decision as to whether you are the right person to meet their needs!

Therefore, should you change your approach accordingly? Not at all. You were invited back after the first round because the company felt that there was a cultural match, and you had the prerequisite skills to succeed. To change would make you appear a fake; a phoney.

Second interviews are commonly more formal than first-stage interviews and often involve at least two representatives from the employer (and it is not unheard of to have a panel of five or six!). Second interviews may involve a formal presentation, in technical interviews a practical exercise, it may contain role-plays, it may even



mean going out for a day with one of the team. Typically at the end of the meeting you will get the opportunity to meet the team that you will be working with and have a tour around the premises.

### Getting the balance right

Remember interviewing is a two-stage thing. As important as it is for the company to take a business decision on you it is imperative that you alleviate any concerns that you may have to ensure that you are making the right career decision. Ten minutes of questions could save ten months of pain and a career setback! Therefore, prepare some probing questions to ensure that the business is right for you and do not be afraid of being direct and frank in your questioning.

### It's all in the detail

You've got to know your facts. At the second stage simply being 'above target' isn't enough. The detail will be grilled and you simply must know the detail. What is your target? What is your performance against the target? Who were the major accounts that you won? What were they worth? How did you win them? Etc., etc., For some reason, many sales professionals fall apart at this stage; their facts go straight out of their mind so have them to hand.

It is useful to create a brag file. A file containing any information that will back up your claims at interviews to include things such as educational certificates, P60's, sales league tables, testimonials from clients, references from employers, military service records, proof of membership of associations, etc., etc. Then when the detail is grilled you have the information to hand.

It is imperative that you do not contradict what you said in the first interview, or indeed that you change your style and persona from the first interview. If you've followed the 'How to WOW' series to the letter you will have taken notes at the first interview. Ensure that you read them again the night before the second meeting and it is also useful to have another read through the website and the financials.

Second interviews also give you the chance to expand upon what was discussed at the first stage. Where certain projects, plans, targets, new product development, new routes to market, etc. were discussed you've now had the gap between first and second to research the subject in more depth.

### Money - Do I mention it, or not?

Money is a subject that should be discussed at second stage but rarely is. It's just not 'English' to discuss something as crass as money in an interview! My recommendation is to not bring up the subject of money too early as you don't want to come across as an individual that solely cares about money. It's also good practise to wait until the employer is definitely interested in you before discussing money when you are then in a position of strength!

Whilst discussing basic salaries may be somewhat of a taboo it is perfectly reasonable to ask about the commission/bonus scheme at the second stage interview. If the OTE is £60K off of a basic of £35K and the bonus scheme is 5% of Gross Profit, ask to see the sales figures to corroborate that the OTE is realistic and achievable.



### Negotiating the package that's right for you

Right from the first email in the 'Career Success Masterclass' series you should have completed the job search checklist so you'll know your 'bottom line' for both basic and OTE. Know your market worth – look at sales salary surveys or search for your job on job boards to get a rough gauge. Aaron Wallis will be able to give you current advice on the 'going rates'.

If you are attending an interview via a third party, like Aaron Wallis, it is always best to leave the negotiating to the 'go-between'. Money is a very emotive subject and both the employer and the candidate can be unassailably offended if the negotiation is not handled correctly.

However, if you are in the second interview and the employer is looking to 'thrash out the deal' then always try and get the employer to quote the figures first. You are then in a better position to negotiate. If you are asked the question 'What basic salary will you accept?' answer either 'what do you think an individual with my skills or experience should expect' or alternatively, 'I am looking for a basic salary in the range of £x (slightly above your bottom line) to £x (slightly above the maximum advertised or detailed by your recruitment consultancy)'.

Different companies remunerate their staff in different ways. Some pay high basics with no OTE and no frills. Some pay an adequate basic, minimal OTE but offer loads of additional perks. You therefore need to weigh up a total package and it is useful in negotiating terms to put a price on all of the various elements of the overall package. Remember to take into consideration additional costs such as:

- Driving to and from a base, which normally you cannot reclaim;
- Loss of pension contributions during the initial few months of your probationary period;
- If you have to relocate is this being recompensed?
- Private healthcare for the initial months of your probation period, etc.

A clever way of negotiating, if offered less than you were expecting, is to ask for an early pay review (say after three or six months) based upon achievement. Set the targets necessary from the start to achieve the package that you need, make them specific and tangible and get it in writing!

In negotiating a deal, don't be afraid to buy some time to consider things. Say 'thank you for the offer, I'm flattered, I will discuss it with those closest to me and revert by midday tomorrow. Is that okay with you?'

**Golden rule:** never lie about your previous earnings. Your employer will see the truth when they receive your P45 and if there is a radical difference it will not give your working relationship the best possible start!

Finally if you have reached an agreement confirm everything that was discussed and agreed. Confirm every detail whilst you are face to face to ensure there is no confusion on either part. Ask when you are likely to receive this confirmed in writing and when they would expect you to confirm your agreement back. Now you know where you stand!



### Top Hints and Tips for Second Interview

- Apply all of the tips we recommend in preparing for the first interview; they still apply!
- Do your homework – talk to people in the role currently. Talk to suppliers, talk to clients, talk to competitors. This 360 degree approach will give you questions to probe to ensure you're making the right decision.
- Invest a fiver in downloading the company's financials from Companies House – don't join a firm where employing more sales staff is the last throw of the dice to remain solvent!
- Call the person that interviewed you at the first interview for hints and tips. How should you approach the other interviewers, what's their style, what are their interests, what do they like in a sales professional, etc.
- Google the names of the interviewers to get a flavour of them – what projects have they been involved in. Wrap their whole name in quotation marks such as "Fred Bickerdyke" and add the company name. Try the name just on its own as it may bring up their previous employers. Along the same vein, do a check on 'LinkedIn' and other social networking sites to try and find out more about them
- Prepare a SWOT analysis on the business and the industry sector (not to take with you but to generate ideas and get you thinking about whether this is the right business for you)
- Look at and research competitor websites. Get a real feel for USP's, Market Share, Opportunities, etc.
- There is no such thing as a 'rubber stamping exercise'. Managing Director's don't become Managing Director's by 'rubber stamping' potential employees. If it is a third stage interview that is described as a 'rubber stamping' you must approach it with the same vigour, energy, planning and enthusiasm as the first interview.
- Don't change your appearance at a second interview to 'blend in' (unless asked to do so). i.e. if at the first interview the interviewer isn't wearing a tie then still wear your tie to the next interview. You can lose the tie when you're also a proven employee!
- Always spend at least an hour preparing your strengths, skills and experience against the job requirements. You can never plan enough!
- If given a formal job spec, think of an example of your skills, experience and successes to corroborate against each required competency. Then if it is going to be competency based you will really shine.
- Prepare an appendix to your CV detailing the projects that you have worked on, accounts that you have won, professional memberships, affiliations, etc. that may be pertinent to the company
- Prepare a second interview presentation (even if you haven't been asked!)



## Second Interview Presentations

It is the norm to be asked to prepare a presentation at the second stage for a sales vacancy. Often a topic is already requested but more often than not the topic is 'Why are you right for the job?'

I would go so far as to say that a good discipline is to prepare a second interview presentation along these lines, even if you haven't been asked to prepare one. The effort in putting together a presentation that matches your quality, skills and experience against the job requirements will give you the edge on the day and will really make you think that you are making the right decision in joining this organisation.

It shouldn't take any more than two hours to put together and will be there to turn to if the meeting really isn't going in the direction that you had planned.

**GOLDEN RULE:** However, an absolute DON'T is to use your presentation as a 'safety blanket' when you haven't been asked to prepare one, i.e. Interviewer: 'How do you expect to penetrate into the following markets...?' You (tucking into your briefcase) 'well I have a presentation here, that.....' ONLY use the presentation during the meeting as a last resort.

What the presentation should be short (no more than ten minutes if you have to deliver it) and no more than ten sheets or slides). It should contain

- Why you want to work for the company – key facts, direction, etc.
- Why you want this particular job – the opportunity, etc.
- What benefits you can bring to the company – experience, strengths, values, etc.
- Your training and development requirements to succeed
- Why you are the right person for the role

You may also want to include how you would plan, your approach, how you would structure your working day/week/month/quarter

How you would impose key performance indicators upon yourself to attain and exceed targets

**GOLDEN RULE 2:** The employer knows their business better than you. Keep it general, don't quote specific accounts that you could bring to the company, the account values, etc.

**GOLDEN RULE 3:** Always take at least three printed copies of your presentation to the meeting and hand them out at the end. The adage of remembering just 25% of what you've heard after 24 hours is true and most hiring decisions are made after a period of deliberation that is typically 24-48 hours. Your presentation document just might have the memory triggering tags to make the decision swing your way!

## Obscure and Tricky Second Interview Presentations

You may be asked to prepare a presentation with a title such as '*The features and benefits of a ping pong ball*' or '*Nature or Nurture, what is more important?*' or '*You work for a paperclip manufacturer and you have to sell the features and benefits of a paperclip*' (all of the three detailed here are factual cases!)

Why do employers do this? It may appear churlish but it's a demonstration of lateral thinking, willingness to go the extra mile, creative thinking, negotiation, commercial flair and above all salesmanship. It's also a test of commitment to the job - how much effort will you put in to 'land the deal', are you prepared to 'jump through the hoops'!





### The Paperclip Presentation

As an example I'm going to use 'You work for a paperclip manufacturer and you have to sell the features and benefits of a paperclip' (which incidentally, is the standard second interview presentation for a *major* household FMCG brand)

Many treat the presentation as a game and present it as a game and make it fun and light hearted - they invariably don't get offered the job. Others put together a jazzy presentation on paper clips, their variety of uses and pitch accordingly. Where they fail is that unless you understand the need you can't sell anything – the adage of 'diagnosing the illness before prescribing the medicine!'

A perfect way of executing this exercise is as follows and please tune it accordingly to the 'obscure presentation' that you may have been asked to prepare!

1. First off. Enter the meeting. 'Thank you very much for inviting me here today to discuss your urgent paperclip requirements. I understand from our discussions last week that today you are looking to agree a preferred supplier of paperclips and I understand that Ben, you are the Group Purchasing Director and Fred you are the, Group Finance Director. I also understand that you are looking to make a decision on a supplier today – is that correct?' (by doing this they cannot use the objection of - we're not the right person, we're not in a position to make a decision today, etc'.)
2. Start the presentation with an overview of 'Paperclips 'R' Us' (or whatever) - history, services - holding stock, 3 day delivery, ability to supply volume, quality of product, ability to bespoke to need, etc.
3. It's imperative that YOU ask THEM early on 'what is your budget' - then you might find that you can easily sell to them on price.
4. Collect a handful of different types of paper clips (shapes, styles, colours), etc.
5. Ask them to touch the product (you can't beat a kinaesthetic sale!)
6. Paint a couple, put tippex on a couple, wrap some coloured tape around some – whatever – I know it sounds somewhat strange but going this extra mile will make the difference!
7. Then probe to understand their needs - prepare 15 or so questions around the type of paperclip that they require, the volume, added value services, etc.
8. Prepare a slide per type of paperclip so that you can go into the detail of their preferred clip and skip past the ones that aren't right for their need and explain why
9. If asked price answer something like - 'I know that price is important to both of us but can we park this just for a moment until I fully understand your needs. I am confident that I will be able to propose a price that is both attractive and works for both of us'
10. Then pitch the product - the features, examples, benefits of the paperclip that is the solution to their need (have a brainstorm with yourself about exactly what benefits there could be – the amount of paper it can hold, flexibility, uniqueness of the colour, etc. think of every imaginable feature and benefit!)
11. Then 'semi close' - Do you agree that this is the right paperclip for you? Are there any further features that they would like you me to detail? What do we have to do to make the deal today?



12. Prepare bartering chips other than price - stock holding, delivery time, volumes, payment terms, etc - if you negotiate down on price ensure you give nothing away and always get something in return. Remember, negotiation is where both parties leave happy and it's a win-win - not where one is battered on price, that's called discounting!
13. If you are getting nothing but positives then close it down
14. Get agreement to product, volume, additional required services, total cost, etc.
15. Go one step further and pre-prepare an order form - get it out of your briefcase and get them to sign it on the spot!
16. If they don't agree to this as a minimum get agreement to the next meeting and an agenda for what you will propose - i.e. you'll go back to your R&D department to bespoke accordingly, you'll look at cheaper raw materials to get the price down, etc.
17. Pre-prepare a price list so that when you get their signature on the dotted line you can detail how well you negotiated to secure the deal!
18. Remember never give anything away for nothing - everything is tradable and barter accordingly to secure a price and service that is right for both parties!
19. Go the 'extra mile and a half' by creating a logo for the paperclip business, an order form, business card, price list - it'll only take an hour or two but could really make the difference between you and the other interviewees.
20. Thank them for their time (and their business); close the meeting and job done!

As you can see we have now taken a somewhat trite and childish presentation title into a 'full on' business pitch. This approach will demonstrate how you will succeed in their organisation by questioning, understanding needs, pitching product, negotiating, closing, etc.



### And finally....Closing a Second Interview

You've got this far and put in so much effort, don't let it slip through your hands.....

- Remember to close at the end of the second interview. It's going over the same ground as closing an interview that was covered in 'How to WOW at a first interview', but ask questions about how they feel the meeting has gone, how they feel you'd fit into the team, etc. and close it down! You are a sales professional at a sales meeting. There are no excuses and you will not get a second chance.
- Close for when you're likely to hear about whether you've been successful.
- Ask if there's any more information that you can provide that can help them come to a decision.
- Reiterate your interest and keenness in the role.

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- Upon your return home email them thanking them for their time and reiterate your interest.
- If you haven't heard after 48 hours (and the interview wasn't arranged through an intermediary like Aaron Wallis) call them to ascertain if they need any further information and use it as an opportunity to close down the deal.