



## Conducting an Interview

Interviewing is a small art form unto itself. As an interviewer, your primary job is to extract really interesting information and stories from the interviewee. To do this you need to:

1. Make the interviewee very comfortable with you;
2. Ask thoughtful questions; and
3. Listen harder – much harder -- than you do in normal conversations.

Below are some tips to help you achieve these three goals.

### **TIP 1: PREPARATION**

#### *Research*

- Know what you are interviewing about. You need to have a solid understanding of the topic about which you will be interviewing. Or, you need to have a clear idea about what you want to learn from the interviewee. If the interviewee senses that you don't know or care much about the topic, he or she might assume that you are not interested. This is not good.
- Know who you are interviewing -- what they do, what they have achieved, why they know something about this topic. Interviewees like to know that you have taken some time to research them. It's good for the interview. But it's also flattering, and flattery will help to make the subject more comfortable.

#### *Drafting Questions*

- Use your research to create thoughtful and informative questions that will help illustrate your knowledge of the topic.
  - Avoid simple yes/no questions; they don't further the dialogue of the interview. Instead, think of questions that will allow your interviewee to give full answers.

## **TIP 2: DURING THE INTERVIEW**

### *Asking Questions*

- Be aware that you will set the tone of the interview with your voice, your body language, and the questions you choose to ask. If you barely shake their hand, avoid eye contact and start right in with the questions the moment you sit down, ...chances are the interview won't go so well. So, be sure to greet warmly, make eye contact and ask a few easy questions -- like about the weather or about people you may know in common -- to start the flow of information.
- Listen to the interviewees answers carefully so you can ask follow up questions to something they said specifically. This is critically important. Often their answers will open doors to new information that you haven't anticipated in your set of questions.
- Use your prepared questions as a guideline instead of a rigid framework. Flexibility allows you to use your listening skills to take the conversation in new and unpredictable directions.
- On Silence: Silence is not always a bad thing in an interview. Why? Here's how that works. If you linger for a second or two after they have finished their answer, there is a silence. Your instinct is to fill that silence with the next question. But give the interviewee the first shot at filling that silence...this may lead to the most interesting information you may get.