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getting the job

How do you separate yourself from the pack and land the job you've been working toward? Pam N. Woods, an executive, business and personal coach and founder of Des Moines-based Smart WorkLife Solutions, offers these tips to put a "wow" in your interview:

- **Research the company.** Visit the company's Web site. If the company doesn't have a Web site, research it at the library, call the Better Business Bureau or the local chamber of commerce to find out more.

- **Prepare your "elevator speech."** It's your two-minute opportunity to enlighten the interviewer about your chief accomplishments. Employers want to know what you did, not what you were charged with doing.

- **Prepare your talking points.** List your four greatest strengths and the four things you're working on for professional growth. Be prepared to give examples.

- **Identify innovations and process improvements** you made in your most recent employment. That gives employers confidence that you will help strengthen their organization and contribute to the execution of their strategy. If you haven't been employed before, doing your homework on the company before the interview will allow you to offer examples of innovations or cost-savings ideas that will be of interest to the potential employer.

- **Dress for success.** Regardless of the job you're seeking, it's a good idea to wear a freshly cleaned suit, even in a casual business environment.

- **Arrive 15 minutes early.** You won't be rushed, and time alone in the lobby will allow you to observe the company's employees. Do they greet one another and say hello to you? Are they smiling and happy or frazzled and frustrated?

- **Engage in conversation.** Be curious. Ask lots of questions to increase your understanding of how the company, department and management operate. Ask about job responsibilities, company culture, employee recognition programs, opportunities for personal and professional development, and current and future challenges of the position.

- **Tell the truth.** If you've made a mistake in the past, admit it in a positive way, accept responsibility for it and tell the potential employer what you've learned and how you have benefited from the experience.

- **Don't ask about salary and benefits.** If you talk about compensation too early in the game, it can be a knockout factor. Sell the interviewers on why you're perfect for the job and if they're interested, they'll make an offer and you can negotiate from there.

- **Fifty percent of the responsibility for the right job match is yours.** Remember, you're interviewing the employer, too.

Avoid these common interview mistakes:

- **Don't submit your cover letter and resume to the employer by fax, e-mail and hard copy.** Choose one method.

- **Don't "stalk" the employer.** Calling and e-mailing daily to see if you've been selected for an interview looks needy and is a turn-off for employers.

- **Don't say in your cover letter that you'll call the employer and then not call.** Better yet, don't say you intend to call. Employers don't have time to field calls from every applicant.

- **Don't ignore the employer's directions regarding the submission of your qualifications.** For example, if an employer seeking a technical writer asks for three writing samples, send three.

- **Don't call the employer and ask for more information about the job before submitting your resume.** You can get the details later.

- **Don't email and forget to provide the attachments or provide attachments that are blank.**

- **Don't inquire if the job is still open within a week or two of an advertisement.** It's important to give yourself as many options as possible, and getting your resume on file can be important, especially if the employer's initial offer isn't accepted or an additional candidate is needed.

- **Don't expect the employer to do your homework.**

- **Don't send a resume without a cover letter.**

- **Don't make it hard for the employer to consider you.** It's important that you specify the position for which you are applying.

