PROJECT MANAGER

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Sandra Arps
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I. Acing the Interview

Welcome! My name is Sandra and I will walk you through these guidelines, which will provide you all the knowledge and skills you require in order to successfully ace your interview and get the job as a Project Manager.

If you would like to read more about me, please access the following link, which will direct you to my LinkedIn profile: http://www.linkedin.com/in/sandraarps

The success of your interview will depend on how well you prepare. Once, you’ve worked through this guide you will learn the fundamentals of preparation – to make a lasting impression on the interviewer and to get that all-important job offer.
I’m looking forward to going through this guide with you!

Best Regards,
Sandra Arps
II. The Process

Background

In today’s competitive business climate, there are many Project Managers applying for a limited number of project management jobs. It is essential for you to prepare for the job interview in order to get a competitive advantage over your peers.

I cannot lay enough emphasis on how much good interview practice and the investment of time in preparation will help in securing the project management position you have applied for. If you understand the reason why some of the questions are being asked, you will have the opportunity to influence the conversation to your advantage.

Please read, absorb and work carefully through this guide and you will definitely be rewarded with success.

The Interview Process

The interview process can be lengthy and stressful. Only a few years ago, a single interview may have been all that was required in order to get the job as a Project Manager. Nowadays, it is quite common to have several interviews – up to three or four for a single job. Don't be surprised to find yourself in a situation where you have several interview sessions with your future employer to evaluate your “fit” to the company.

Please note, that at the end of an interview, you will get the opportunity to ask questions. This is a most valuable opening, not to be wasted! Most interviewees don't use this chance, or they ask questions to which you can easily find the answer on the Internet. This does not resonate well with the person interviewing you. It might be perceived as disinterest in the company, and give the impression that you would apply for any job advertised on the market. With a little preparation, you
can use this opportunity for questions to your benefit! Therefore, always have pertinent questions prepared, which you want to ask your future employer and to which you can’t find out the answer easily. You will find some example questions later on.

Last, but not least, you need to follow up after the interview via email by thanking the interviewer for their time and re-iterate your interest in this position. Imagine the interviewer has interviewed 20 Project Managers for one vacant position. By sending a follow up email, you will remind him of your interest in the company and this position. This will give you a definite competitive edge!

Finally, remember the person interviewing you will often be just as stressed and nervous as you are. Your future employer will only have a couple of hours in order to make a decision whether you are the right person for the job. If he / she hires the wrong person, this might have negative consequences for his or her career! Keep this in mind during the interview process and you can keep your own nervousness at bay.
III. Interview Preparation

How to get ready for an interview

It is vital that you prepare in advance for the interview. There should be no last minute, hurried prep on the day. Start with the activities listed below at least a couple of days before the interview. This will help you to prepare for the meeting, give you confidence and calm your nerves when the real interview is taking place. Here you go:

First of all, you need to analyse the job description:

1. Review the job description from the newspaper or from an online website. If you don't have the description, ask the recruiter for the details of the role and the details of the person who is likely to interview you.

2. Analyse paragraph by paragraph, what your future employer is seeking in a candidate

Create a table

Create a table with one row for each of the paragraphs in the job description. For each paragraph, tabulate:

3. The skills being expressed or implied as a requirement
4. How your current skills match to these requirements
5. An example of a project where you have demonstrated these skills

At the end of the table list your skills, professional and personal qualities.
Example: advertised project management role – matching your skills, backed up by examples of your experience:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role description – by paragraph</th>
<th>Match your skills</th>
<th>Your experience – detailed example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>My client is a Financial Services organisation with a strong standing within the industry.</td>
<td>I've been working in the financial industry for more than 4 years. I'm familiar with their processes and can speak their language. I can apply and transfer my experience to a new environment and assist my future employer in improving their business.</td>
<td>Retail Bank X: I led the following projects: a) Several legacy migration projects of different forms and sizes. Main benefits achieved: reduction in cost due to simplified environment: $8m. b) Recent Project X: size $8m, team of 30, distributed teams. This was a new product development, which increased company’s market share by 3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Excellent verbal and written communication skills and the ability to interact professionally with a diverse group of executives, managers, subject matter experts, technical and business staff. | I have excellent communication skills with all stakeholders and on all levels | On a daily basis I’m involved with the project team discussing and managing project matters. This includes business owners and developers. Currently, I’m preparing and presenting monthly status updates for the Steering Committee members and the Executive Team. |
Role description – by paragraph | Match your skills | Your experience – detailed example
---|---|---
Strong experience with project management methodologies like PRINCE 2. | I am PMP certified and have used PRINCE 2 methodology on several projects. | I have implemented PRINCE 2 on several government-led projects. In addition, I’m familiar with the agile method which I used on smaller projects for Company X. 

Extensive experience in vendor management. | I have extensive knowledge in vendor management including: vendor selection processes, contract negotiations and relationship management. I also have experience with outsourcing work to India and China. | The largest outsourced project I led was Project X: It had a budget of $14m, a project team of 45 people to develop a new Online Banking System. A Partner X in China provided the service. 

To continue… | … | …

Exercise: Match your experience and skills to the advertised role you are applying for:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role description – by paragraph</th>
<th>Match your skills</th>
<th>Your experience – detailed example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What is required for the role you apply for?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Requirement 1</td>
<td>Your matching skill 1</td>
<td>Your experience example 1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Requirement 2</td>
<td>Your matching skill 2</td>
<td>Your experience example 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
<td>…</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TIP

If you notice that you have a gap in a certain requirement area, do not try to hide or ignore this fact in the hope that the interviewer will not ask you a question about this. All the requirements posted in a job description are important and the interviewer will definitely ask pointed questions about your proficiency in these areas. My best advice here is to do as much research on the Internet as you can until your interview date arrives. If you can demonstrate, during the interview that you are knowledgeable in this area and that you are familiar with the topic, then this will usually get you “over the hurdle”. Otherwise, please openly acknowledge your gap along with an assurance of your willingness and aptitude to learn the necessary skills. This will increase your chances, as honest self-assessment and communication are highly valued.
Research the company

Start your research by looking for the company on the Internet. Google the name of the company on the Internet. You can generally find information on the company’s website in the “About Us” menu section. Make a particular note of information about the organisational structure of the company, the annual report and any recent news or reports regarding the company. Incorporate this information in your conversation with the interviewer. By including this information during the interview, you demonstrate that you have done your research and that you are “really interested” in working for this company.

Research your interview partner

Find out the name of the person who will interview you. Generally you can find this person on the business networks such as LinkedIn (www.linkedin.com). Here, you can find out how long the person has worked for the company and what responsibilities this person has. You can also check out personal details at social networks such as Facebook. Note all his or her professional / personal characteristics and achievements to get an idea of preferences. Is he / she a modern manager an advocate of an open style of management - with open teamwork? Or is he / she traditional and prefers the old school structure of a fixed hierarchy of accountability? It is likely the person who will interview you will become your new manager, and knowing his views and opinions will help in answering his or her questions better.

You can also search in your personal network for people who have worked or are working at the company and who can provide you with insight on the company and its culture.

Practice interviewing

The best preparation for your interview is to work through the questions provided in Chapter–“Example Interview Questions and Answers” and to enact a practice interview with someone you know. Ask your friend, partner or family member to interview you. Believe me, it is a totally different experience and it will greatly improve your confidence during the real interview.
Appearance and Tips

Wear appropriate clothing suited to the interview you have applied for. For a Project Management job, you can’t go wrong by dressing in conservative business attire. Make sure you have the right clothes dry-cleaned and ready ahead of time.

Avoid smoking prior to the interview – have fresh breath! Have your shoes polished and your fingernails clean.

Interview Times are important

Always try to get an interview time midweek and in the morning hours. Research has shown that interviews conducted on Monday mornings or Friday evenings are usually unsuccessful, dramatically reducing the chances of getting a job!

What to bring to an interview

It’s important to know what to bring to an interview. Keep the following with you:

- A small folder which includes
- Copies of your resume
- A list of references
- Questions you have for the interviewer
- Blank paper where you can write notes
- A working pen

Examples of things to take note of during the interview include:

- Details of the upcoming project
- Size of the project team
- Reporting structure of the Project Management team etc.
**Get Directions – Where will the interview take place?**

It's important to know where you need to go for your job interview - ahead of time. Use Google Maps (http://maps.google.com/) to get directions if you are not sure where to go. Make sure you arrive at the reception of the building 15 minutes before the interview. Never ever arrive late – it is not respectful to the person you will meet and will have a negative impact on their assessment of you.
IV. The Interview Itself

How to act during the interview

Below you will find some tips on how to behave during the interview. Further details on how best to answer the interview questions will be provided in Chapter VII.

• Smile and greet everyone you meet politely, pleasantly and enthusiastically, including the receptionist
• Watch your body language - shake hands firmly and make eye contact as you articulate your points
• It’s a good idea to place your hands in your lap, or one hand on the table. Make sure your body is facing towards the interviewer
• Don’t use the words “OK” or “yeah” throughout the conversation - don’t use any slang
• Relax and lean forward a little towards the interviewer, so that you appear interested and engaged. Pay attention and look interested
• Listen and ask questions (see Chapter VII). Make sure you have a good conversation with the interviewer. Don’t let this be a pure question and answer session
• Apply the 50/50 rule on how much you should speak
• Never speak ill of your former or current employer
• Never ever come across that you are begging for this job.

Think of this interview as a research activity – where you want to find out more about the company and their future projects.
Avoid salary discussions

Try to avoid the question of salary until the end of the interview process—when they have decided that they really want you. This will increase your bargaining power. During the negotiations for salary, try not to be first to mention a fixed figure. Instead, ask the interviewer what the company is willing to pay for such a role. If you can’t avoid it—give a range rather than a set figure. Keep in mind that the Salary is not the total compensation package. While negotiating the remuneration package always take the following (if offered) into account:

• Bonuses
• Flexible working conditions
• Car parking
• Health insurance
• Memberships etc.

Closing the Interview

If the interview goes well, you can ask for the job at the end of the interview. For example, “Given my skills and experience is there an opportunity for me to start at your company?” or “Can I ask when is the latest that I can expect to hear from you?”
V. After the Interview

Debrief

Please take notes after the meeting – what went well and what didn’t. Gather your thoughts and impressions and assess on how you performed in the interview. Write down the questions that were asked and the answers you provided. Also note how long the interview took and with whom you had the interview. Make notes about the company, culture and your level of interest in the position. You can use these notes to improve your interview skills.

Update the recruitment agency

After the interview, let the recruiter know whether or not you believe the job is an excellent fit and whether you are interested in the position.

“Thank you” note

Follow up with a “Thank You” note via email reiterating your interest in the job and working for this company. Include some marketing on your side – stating the experience and skills you have and the contribution you would make to this company. This will help you to stand out amongst the crowd. Your name will stay longer in the interviewer’s memory due to the repetition of your name and skills. If other candidates have provided a similar performance, then this “Thank You” note will get you the job! Below you will find an example of a “Thank You” note:

Dear Mr Smith, / Hi John,

I would like to thank you for your time, talking to me about the Project Management position in your organisation yesterday.

Based on the conversation we had, I do believe that I can help you with your Project X. I’ve managed and delivered a similar project in the past and would be able to apply my experience and knowledge to implement your project successfully.

Please let me know if you need further information about my background and qualifications.
Again, thank you for your time. I'm looking forward to hearing from you soon regarding your hiring decision.

Kind Regards,
Your Typed Name