INTERVIEW GUIDE TO A PHARMACEUTICAL SALES CAREER
HOW TO INTERVIEW FOR A PHARMACEUTICAL SALES CAREER

INTRODUCTION

This publication is based on my 34 years of experience in the pharmaceutical industry. I have gathered this information from personal experience as a Sales Representative, Sales Trainer, District Manager, Regional Manager and as a Recruiter. I am presenting this information to you in an easy to read outline and bullet point format. Read and use it as reference material. Although this information is primarily directed toward those individuals who are seeking pharmaceutical careers, many of these tips are transferable and they can be used during any interview regardless of the industry.

My suggestions will improve your abilities to respond effectively during an interview process. They should also expand your insight and enhance your possibilities in becoming a viable pharmaceutical sales candidate.

Do not expect to find short cuts in securing a sales position. Companies are striving to become more efficient in interviewing and they are hiring to reduce cost and sales representative turnover. Therefore, an accurate selection process is essential to a company’s success. If selection techniques are not fine tuned, it could result in the hiring of a representative who has an inability to learn or do the job. Proper employee selection contributes to the company’s future success.

TIP: First of all, before attending an interview, research the company and position for which you are applying. You should be prepared to discuss your knowledge of the company based on your research and knowledge of the position. Research the company by using library facilities, the Internet and by reading the company’s annual report.

Good Luck and Good Interviewing!

R. Williams

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IMPORTANCE OF GOOD EMPLOYEE SELECTION

- Good employee selection is vital to a company's future success and growth

- Selecting the right employee is an opportunity for companies to improve their sales team overall

- Good employee selection presents opportunities to increase productivity

- Good employee selection decreases turnover rates

- Selecting the right candidate will free up time for managers to perform other duties and responsibilities
TYPICAL INTERVIEW PROCESS

1. Telephone Screen
2. Face to Face interviews with District Managers
3. Face to Face interviews with Regional Managers

TIP: *The Telephone Screening Interview* establishes the minimum qualifications, focuses on education, work history and on job related behaviors and personality where possible. Telephone screening is generally conducted by District Managers and/or Sales Recruiters.

TIP: *The Face to Face Interviews* are thorough. During these interviews, District and Regional Managers will target all important skill requirements as well as focus on job related behaviors and characteristics.

- *The first* face-to-face interview will be conducted by the District Manager.
- *The second* face-to-face interview, will be conducted by the District and the Regional Manager.

After the face-to-face interviews, some companies will require you to spend one day in the field with a district’s local sales representative.

TIP: You might be required to complete a *Sales Simulation Exercise*. Some companies will conduct a sales simulation exercise. You should be prepared to handle the exercise if it happens. Usually, sales simulations are conducted during the second interview. During a sales simulation, you will be required to focus on uncovering needs, promoting features and benefits of a product. Although you may not have an opportunity to discuss each topic, you should have a good grasp of each of the following categories. If the hiring manager is focusing on specific dimensions, you should be prepared to give examples of your experiences with the following dimensions.
**Concepts of a Sales Simulation Exercise:** The following bullet points briefly define and support the Simulation dimension goals. You must be able to discuss each bullet point in comfortable and confident manner. You must demonstrate or verbally convince the interviewer that you posses skills with each dimension that precede the bullet point.

*Denotes Key Dimension

1. **Planning and Organization**
   - Describe a typical day
   - Show examples or be able to discuss your record keeping
   - Describe how you schedule your time
   - Give examples of how you prioritize tasks

2. **Oral communications**
   - Give examples of how you deal with people
   - Give examples of presentations that you might have given
   - Describe how you prepared for a meeting

3. **Persuasiveness**
   - Be able to discuss selling ideas, if you have sales experience
   - Discuss your best sale
   - Discuss your worst sale, if asked

4. **Your motivation to sell**
   - Understanding advantages of sales
   - Discuss your desire to succeed
   - Discuss your competitiveness

5. **Initiative (definitions)**
   - Assuming responsibilities not assigned to you
   - Acting without being told
   - Anticipating problems and taking action
6. Interpersonal Skills (definitions)
   - Your People skills
   - Rapport building skills

7. Teamwork (definitions)
   - Group activity
   - Attaining group goals

8. Leadership (definitions)
   - Taking charge
   - Being chosen to head up group discussions

9. Personal commitment
   - Setting business and personal goals

10. Ability to learn
    - GPA
    - Difficult courses taken while in school
    - Easy courses
    - How quickly did you learn duties and responsibilities of a difficult job or an assignment
TIP: During the 'Face to Face' interview, be aware of your non-verbal language characteristics. Facial expressions, postures and gestures can either confirm or contradict your verbal message.

EFFECTIVE NON-VERBALS
(Remember, a non-verbal evaluation is not an exact science)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EFFECTIVE</th>
<th>Eye Contact</th>
<th>Body Posture</th>
<th>Hand Gestures</th>
<th>Facial</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
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<td>Subtle</td>
<td></td>
<td>Consistent</td>
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<td>Direct</td>
<td>Relaxed</td>
<td>Natural</td>
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<td>Genuine</td>
<td>Open</td>
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<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Hesitant</th>
<th>Rigid</th>
<th>Random</th>
<th>Inconsistent with verbal message</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Tense</td>
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<td>Fidgety</td>
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<tr>
<td>Darting</td>
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<td>Mechanical</td>
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TWO KEY QUESTIONS

During the course of an interview, you will probably be faced with two important questions.

Question # 1: Why are you seeking a career in the pharmaceutical industry?

Question # 2: What do you have to offer?

Answer to both questions: Your response should be natural and it should be expressed without a hint of a rehearsed response.

Good Responses

A Pharmaceutical Career Offers:

- Opportunities for personal growth and development
- An opportunity to expand my knowledge of ethical pharmaceuticals and their therapeutic applications.
- A professional career in a professional environment
- Financial rewards
- An opportunity to become a part of a humanitarian industry

Weak Responses

Although the following information is good for the hiring manager to know, it will not enhance your acceptance as a prospective hire. The hiring manager is interested in your personal abilities to meet the job requirements. Knowing others in the field is not a measure of your abilities to perform the job.

The following are typical responses that would be of little benefit to you as a candidate.

- My spouse (or other relatives and friends) is in the medical field, therefore, I should do well because they have shared their experiences with me.
- I have heard that lots of money can be made in pharmaceuticals, I want to try it.”
IMPORTANT SKILLS TO OFFER

- Good organizational skills

- Hard worker and a willingness to go beyond the call of duty

- Good communication skills

- Able to follow directions

- Manageable

- A team player

- Competitive
Ideal Specifications for Pharmaceutical Sales Representatives

1. Ability to read and comprehend technical material and medical information.

2. Ability to effectively communicate technical materials.

3. Ability to work with a minimum amount of supervision.

4. Exhibit self confidence

5. Show evidence of an understanding of how sales work.

6. Must have a willingness to travel as necessary

7. Ability to sell and meet sales goals

8. Must have a willingness to invest time necessary to succeed in a competitive environment.
Suggested Questions to ask when invited to by the interviewer

Many times, at the end of an interview, a hiring manager will ask if you have questions. The following questions could add credence to your insightfulness. The information is also good for you to know.

1. What will be expected of me during my first year in order to receive a satisfactory evaluation from my manager?

2. How soon can I expect to earn commissions?

3. Can you describe a typical workday for a sales representative?

4. How soon can I expect an offer for this position?
District Managers (Hiring Managers)

Hiring managers gather information during interviews based on a candidate's past behaviors, which will help to predict future results. Remember, recruiting and hiring is an ongoing process for hiring managers. Managers keep sources open and they are very familiar with the market.

Hiring managers 'carry the ball' during the interview process. It is up to you to react effectively to be considered for one of their positions. Be positive and upbeat. Hiring managers are hoping that you fit!

It is your responsibility to give the hiring manager enough important information regarding your ability to perform the job. Volunteer information to the hiring manager, with emphasis on key characteristics and explain why you will make a suitable fit. (Examples, good work ethic, hard worker, team player and people oriented) If your job experiences are limited due to age, time taken off for family etc., focus on life experiences that indicate key characteristics. Recent college grads can focus on classroom projects and other assignments.

TIP: Most interview questions can be answered by using the following format.

1. Identify the situation or circumstance.
2. Describe the actions taken by you.
3. What were the results?

This response format will enable you to describe and expand on your sales experiences and display your ability to communicate orally.
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EXAMPLES OF OUTSIDE SALES JOBS THAT WILL IMPROVE YOUR RESUME

Many pharmaceutical companies will consider candidates who have the following outside sales experience. Many of these jobs teach representatives good selling skills. A retail selling experience in your background is not as impressive. In a retail environment, customers approach sales people to buy merchandise. Many times the sales person(s) are not required to close the sale in order for the customer to buy.

- Selling Office Equipment
- Selling Telecommunication Equipment
- Selling Medical Equipment
- Selling Advertisements
- Selling Life Insurance
- Selling Real Estate

Employment Sources

The following is a list of sources for seeking pharmaceutical sales positions.

- Newspaper
- Recruiters or Head Hunters
- Word of Mouth
- Networking
- Internet
- College Placement Offices
- Pharmaceutical Magazines and Journals
- Drug Fairs
- Physician’s Desk Reference
KEY REMINDERS

DO’S

• Be professional at all times
• Arrive 10 minutes early
• Keep small talk to minimum
• Learn about the company
• Project a positive attitude not cockiness
• Give a firm handshake and show a friendly smile
• Wear conservative clothes. Dress to impress.
• Bring a clean and appropriate resume
• Ask if it is O.K. to take notes (the interviewer will be taking notes throughout the interview)
• Give direct answers
• Demonstrate your abilities to do the job by documenting your past successes. Bring letters of recommendation, certificates, sales rankings and sales performance bulletins to the interview.
• Bring extra copies of your resume and references
• Illustrate you stability and dependability
• Demonstrate your motivation for the particular job by showing related activity of past job performance and education.
• Send a thank you letter after each interview step. Mail or deliver the note within 24 hours.
• Notify people listed as references
• Erase silly or unprofessional messages on your answering machine.

DON’TS

• Do not give yes and no responses
• Do not talk around questions
• Do not wear casual clothes or loud colors
• Do not show up late
• Do not wear strong smelling perfumes or after shave lotions.
• Do not wear excessive jewelry
• Do not forget to ask for the job!!

“Be persistent because persistence pays!”
THE RESUME

RESUME: Although you are taking your resume to the interview to refresh the interviewer's memory, the resume should not take precedence over your opportunity to expand on past experiences, qualifications, abilities and capabilities.

OBJECTIVE: The objective should be clear and specifically related to the job that you are seeking.

EXPERIENCES: List companies that you have worked for, your titles, duties and responsibilities. The final sentence can focus on accomplishments such as rankings, sales performances etc.

DATES: fill the gaps or be able to explain them during the interview. Do not leave the interview with the hiring manager questioning unexplained gaps on your resume. Many questions and concerns will be eliminated if you list the month and year you started a job and also list the month and the year you left.

EDUCATION: List Colleges and degrees received

REFERENCES: References can be listed on a separate sheet. Or you can state on the resume, references furnished upon request.