

Interviewer Quick Tips #1

Executive interviews are a critical component of most existing business programs. The following tips will help the Interviewer create a positive experience for both the interviewee and the interviewer while maximizing the quality of the information gathered.

The interviewer plays a critical role... the eyes, ears, and mouthpiece for economic development in the community.

Poor quality, incomplete, or unreadable information will reduce the value of the information to leadership.

Background Information

Compiling background information on the company is a prerequisite of an executive interview. **Compiling background information demonstrates professionalism.** It provides a level of credibility to the interviewer and the program. Furthermore, executives expect and appreciate preparation. To do less is a signal that we really don't care enough to do our homework.

Appointment Call

During the appointment call, **it is essential to SELL the visit.** It is important for the economic development group to establish a personal contact with area executives.

Before the Interview

Prior to the first interview, the interviewer and the recorder, if different people, should **read the questionnaire at least two times, out loud.** Note any questions that are confusing, then check the Synchronist Interviewer's Guide or ask the program administrator for clarification.

Opening the Interview

During the opening, small talk off the subject of the business should be **limited to two or three minutes** to avoid wasting the executive's time.

The Interview

Watch the clock. Stay focused. Try to **maintain a conversational tone** to put the interviewee at ease. Move through the questions at pace, but don't rush, especially when the executive is responding to an open-ended question. Listen. If there are follow-

3

Rules of Interviewing

1. **What you hear in the room – stays in the room.** Do not share information collected with others outside the program.
2. It is customary for an executive to offer a beverage. **Do not under any circumstances accept beverages during an interview.** A beverage can:
 - Become a major distraction (where to put it).
 - Limit your ability to take notes.
 - Cause a significant interruption (if spilled).
3. **Be cautious when asking about family pictures.** Photos can be old and family circumstances could have changed, creating a potentially awkward situation.

up questions that will help you understand the response, ask them. Do not ask “Why questions. “Why questions can turn a conversation into an interrogation.

Encourage the executives to share their stories about the company and issues. **Don’t overreact to something said when you know or believe the facts to be different.**

Listen, listen, listen carefully.

Make notes, lots of notes. **Memory is not nearly as accurate as a note.** Even an incomplete note is valuable if reviewed and elaborated after the interview.

Assistance

Economic development organizations are limited in the types of assistance they can provide; therefore,

- **Don’t try to solve a problem on the spot.**
- **Don’t make any promises.**

Confidentiality

Confidentiality is critical to the success of the executive contact program; therefore,

- Discussion and notes from the interview are confidential.
- Don’t discuss what you learn with anyone outside the program.
- Reports provide only aggregated information, not company-specific information.

After the Interview

After the interview, once off of the company’s premises:

- Add clarifying detail to interview notes.
- Make adjustments as needed.
- **Describe any follow-up required.**
- Return the forms (Company Background, On-Site Visit, and Post Visit) to the designated contact for data entry if you aren’t entering the data.

Returning Completed Forms

If you are responsible for returning the completed survey forms and notes for data entry, ALWAYS make a photocopy before mailing or handing it off for delivery. Destroy your copy once you have confirmed receipt by the person responsible for data entry.

If forms will be faxed to the recorder, remember pencil notes *do not* fax clearly. Always use a pen.

For more information on these and other executive contact issues, see “Synchronist Business Information System® Interviewer’s Guide.”

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Interview Supplies

Always bring along a good writing surface so notes can comfortably be taken when balanced on one leg. Carry extra pens and paper.

Carry extra business cards in case other company executives are invited to join the interview.

Carry extra copies of the On-Site Visit Form in case the executive asks to see it.

Selling

An executive interview is not the time to “sell” other services. Staff, partners, and volunteers making calls should not sell. Discussing an array of programs and or available services only confuses the client. Selling is best handled through follow-up.