Interviewing for success
Mhari Coxon provides some top tips for interviews

We have been interviewing for a hygienist to join our team as our clinic is so busy just now. We don’t want our patients to have to wait weeks for an appointment and we need someone to build up a list with the new patients that come in as well. Hopefully we will have our new team member by the time you read this.

What I have noticed is how inconsistent we have been at interviewing and how seemingly unprepared a lot of the interviewees were when they came to visit. It has made choosing difficult as a team and we are doing a round of second interviews this week.

I believe that first impressions last and how we handle ourselves when conducting and attending interviews can make a real difference.

For the interviewee
Do your homework - As an interviewee, it is so easy now to do some homework on the company you are going to visit. Google is most definitely your friend. Look at the website, what services they provide, what their opening hours are, and who is working with them just now.

Do a dry run - Visualise yourself in the interview and either use a friend or talk it through to yourself, using the questions you believe most likely to be asked.

Have questions for them - Remember, this is an interview for both parties and you want to ask things that can help you decide if this is the right environment for you too. Have a prepared list and note the answers.

Stay calm - Try not to get nervous or flustered and if you need a moment to think, take one. Try to show your personality as being yourself is important too.

If you get a job offer - In some cases, you may be offered a job on the spot. You don’t have to say yes, or no, immediately. It actually makes sense not to say yes right away, unless you are 110 per cent sure that you want the job.

Everything may seem perfect while you’re there, but,
For the interviewer:
There is no cut and paste set of questions that suit every job. But, as most of our job is service providing, communication and personality are equally important to someone’s qualifications.

You can get someone highly academically qualified with poor people skills, and equally a fantastic communicator who struggles with academic development. Finding a good balance is tricky.

Have a question list
It makes sense to have a set of questions and ask each interviewee the same set. This gives an opportunity for comparison. Below are some examples of good general questions to ask.

- What is your greatest weakness?
- What is your greatest strength?
- How will your greatest strength help you perform here?
- How would you describe yourself?
- Describe a typical work week for you just now.
- Describe your work style.
- How many hours do you normally work?
- How do you handle stress and pressure?
- What motivates you?
- Are you a self motivator?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Tell me about yourself.
- What are you passionate about?
- What are your pet peeves?
- If the people who know you were asked why you should be hired, what would they say?
- Do you prefer to work independently or on a team?
- Give some examples of teamwork
- What type of work environment do you prefer?
- If you know your boss is 100 per cent wrong about something how would you handle it?
- Describe a difficult work situation / project and how you overcame it.
- Describe a time when your workload was heavy and how you handled it.

Using a crib sheet of questions will give you some order to the interview. It can be a good idea to split up the interview and share questions between the team to make it less intimidating for the interviewee and get more people’s opinion on the potential new team member.

The second interview stage
You should discuss the candidates as a team and narrow down the field for the second interview. At this stage you will both have more questions and be looking to have the whole team together for these. Unless you work in a huge corporate, it is important that everyone has a voice so you can see interaction in action.

As an interviewee, the second interview gives you a chance to show how you and your personality and work type will fit in with the practice.

It is never easy but everyone has to do it so chin up, deep breath and smile.

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Mhari Coxon is a dental hygienist practising in Central London. She is chairman of the London British Society of Dental Hygiene and Therapy (BDSHT) regional group and is on the publications committee of its journal, Dental Health. She is also clinical director of CPD-SoftDCP, which provides CPD courses for all DCPs. To contact her, email mhari.coxon@cpdfordcp.co.uk.