

AMERICAN BANKER®

CONSUMER BANKING

BankThink How to nail your interview at a financial services firm.

By Darlene Pasquill, Managing Director and Head of Equity Division, Mizuho Americas | July 4, 2023

Millions of smart, driven students are graduating from college this year, and many are heading to Wall Street to land their dream job. First, though, they have to make it through the job interview.

The stakes feel high for jobseekers — because they are. With so many recent graduates vying for highly competitive positions, it's critical that your interview helps you stand out and demonstrates that you are the right fit for these performance-driven companies.

I've interviewed more than 1,000 job candidates over my 25-year career, which means I've pretty much seen it all. There have been a few stumbles that immediately sent a candidate's resume to the bottom of the pile after an interview, but more often I see good candidates who just needed a little extra something to make a lasting, positive impression.

Whether you're a new college graduate or an experienced professional making a career transition, there are key things that stick out to me during the interview process. Candidates who display these traits aren't just what Wall Street banks are looking for. I believe they are key to success in just about any job.

In a competitive environment like finance, you need to demonstrate how you are a difference maker. For example, at Mizuho we're looking for



Preparation is key to acing a job interview, writes Darlene Pasquill. You should demonstrate your knowledge of the firm and express why you're the right fit for the position.

entrepreneurial candidates who have a growth mindset and are focused on making positive changes in their companies. Prepare in advance for questions like these: What do you bring to the table, and why should a firm want to hire you? What distinguishes your candidacy? What will you do differently than other candidates to create value for the firm?

Keeping up in a fast-paced, change-making culture requires excellent communication skills, and an interview is a great chance to put those skills

on display. The candidates that make a lasting impression on me are ones who can clearly articulate their work ethic and accomplishments, and can back those up with specific examples. It also helps when candidates let their personalities shine through during an interview and are able to share with me what past work has made them passionate.

Don't let the formal interview setting make you stiff and self-conscious, but rather let your passion and personality shine. Interviewers look for candidates with a passion for the work they're pur-

suing and the energy to achieve their goals. Make sure your best personality traits are on display and describe how those traits align with the company's culture. For example, at Mizuho, I look for high-energy candidates who are collaborative and growth motivated. These qualities are just as important to establishing the right cultural fit as the background on their resume.

It's important to highlight your unique perspective. It's been said that "great minds think alike," but I would rather have a team of great minds that think differently. Groupthink can stifle creativity and prevent individuals from sharing different perspectives that are often sorely needed. We want hires who can enhance our growth culture by bringing in diverse life experiences, viewpoints and expertise.

To highlight these traits in an interview, point to a time when you held a contrarian view that shifted a team's approach to addressing a problem. Even if your interviewer doesn't frame a question this way, try to pivot to an example in your answers when possible. You can also use your resume to emphasize experiences that show your commitment to continual growth and learning. These could include life experiences, how you've invested in yourself and how you've been thoughtful in your approach to schoolwork, in-

ternships and networking. Prior to your interview, you should be brainstorming these examples so you're ready with several options when your interviewer poses a question.

Preparation is key to acing a job interview. You should demonstrate your knowledge of the firm and express why you're the right fit for the position. It shows that you're serious about the role and the company and that you'll be a conscientious employee. Even better, it can help keep you calm and confident during the conversation.

With so much information at your fingertips, there's no excuse for a lack of preparation. Speak to others who work at the firm, check LinkedIn to see whom you might know that works there and review the company's mission statement, social feeds, latest news coverage and press releases.

You need to be ready to answer the "why here?" question. Nothing disappoints me more in an interview than when I ask a candidate why they want to work at Mizuho, and they tell me the job description sounds like a great fit. That, to me, says "I don't want this job, I want any job that fits this description." What I'm really looking for are candidates who understand and are enthusiastic about our firm's mission and what they can bring to the table. I also appreciate candidates that take the time

to reflect on our interview and send a meaningful follow-up highlighting what was discussed.

Your work doesn't end when the job interview is over. Sending a thoughtful, strategic thank-you note or email is your chance to remind the interviewer that you're the right person for the job and to reiterate your interest in the company.

Generic notes that could apply to any interview won't stand out. Instead, bring up specific points raised by the interviewer. For example, "I was especially interested in [the project] you spoke about and believe my experience in [this internship] and [these skills] would be a great contribution." Also look for opportunities to take another swing at any questions that you feel you could have answered better, such as adding more examples of your experience in a certain area.

I wish success and happiness to all the new college graduates and current professionals looking for the next step in their careers. Remember that the biggest factor in reaching your potential is you. Companies are looking for your passion, enthusiasm and perspective. It's up to you to showcase those traits and demonstrate how they make you the right candidate. Finding a company that appreciates your talent and allows you to grow can start a great career trajectory. Enjoy the journey.