

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

RJUK INTERVIEW ADVICE

No matter what stage you are in your career, interviews can be daunting. Here, you will find interview guidelines to help you throughout the process, from preparation to actual interview. Naturally I am also here to offer you continued support and advice, but the purpose of this advice pack is so you can brush up on your interview technique if you are rusty, prepare for your first management interview, or just cement your existing interview skills. This advice pack will help you see what recruiters are looking for, and in turn, how to ace any future interviews you may have.

PREPARATION

Preparation is key: If you had an exam, you wouldn't attend without revising.....an interview is the same.

If you have been unsuccessful in previous interviews, you can learn from your mistakes and ask yourself where you got stuck, what could you have done better, which questions were difficult to answer, were you prepared enough?

An employer will ask you to visit a store, preferably the store or concession that you are applying to work in, and also another store to get an idea of the different layouts, visual merchandising, customer service, product placement, store standards and ambience. You should look at the company website so that you can talk articulately about the company with whom you want to work. If you are applying for a store management role, I would suggest that you do a Mystery Shop in the store and a SWOT analysis.

SWOT ANALYSIS

A SWOT analysis is a recognised format of studying a business. The reasons for preparing a SWOT analysis is firstly to show the interviewer that you have prepared, the second reason it is professional and the third it shows that you are prepared to go the extra mile and will make you stand out to the interviewer.

The work SWOT stands for:

S: Strengths

W: Weaknesses

O: Opportunities

T: Threats

S - Strengths - Write down all the strengths of the business you are applying to. Try to think of all the aspects of the business e.g. customer service, staff recruitment methods and training, brand image, product quality, store location, what's currently happening in the retail market - have you heard any relevant facts in the news lately about the ups and downs in retail business? Is the company expanding?

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

W - Weaknesses - Ensure that you have thought about the weaknesses carefully and be careful not to be too negative. No employer will want to see his or her business ripped apart. Be constructive and always offer solutions to any weaknesses in the opportunities section.

O - Opportunities - In addition to the opportunities listed from the weaknesses column, try to think of some more. If you know the location of the store well, are there any development plans that would positively impact the business? Is something happening in the retail market that you are aware of which could benefit the company? Is there anything that you are great at which you could incorporate into the business.

T- Threats - This is anything that could pose a threat to the business in the future. Has there been a downturn in their part of the retail market? Is there new competition opening up nearby? Is there a rival store or a new shopping centre opening that could divert customers away?

Wherever possible, type up your SWOT analysis or at least make it clear and legible with no spelling mistakes. Remember a SWOT is about making the extra effort, if you prepare a bad SWOT analysis it will not look good so make sure it is thorough and professional looking. Any potential employer will be happy with your obvious understanding of their business and the lengths that you have gone to, to prepare.

Interview Questions & Preparation

There are certain questions guaranteed to come up at interview, they may be worded slightly differently but if you are prepared, you will be able to adapt your answer to the specific question. These are called competency based questions and although they may come in slightly different formats - The point of asking them is to assess your management capabilities. Below are some examples:

- Can you give me an example of a time you have significantly increased sales in store?
- Give me a time when you have exceeded sales targets under difficult circumstances?
- Can you give me an example of a time when you trained and developed an individual in your business?
- Tell me a time when achieving a particular goal was dependent on working effectively as a team, and how did you achieve your goal?
- Can you tell me about a time when you had to persuade colleagues to follow a course of action how did you approach it, what was the outcome?
- What KPI's do you work to and how do you ensure you reach targets?
- Tell me about a time you or a team had to deal with an extremely heavy workload, and how did you manage this?
- Have you ever had an issue with security? How did you minimise that, what was the outcome?
- Give me an example of a time you've had to deal with a very difficult customer, what was the outcome?
- How do you ensure that your customers have an unforgettable experience in your store?

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

These questions are designed to test your ability as a manager and the best way to answer them is to offer a....

SITUATION: That is relevant to the question

ACTION: What you did-remember, the interviewer does not want to hear about your colleagues, this is your opportunity to say how great you are, and how your actions are essential to the business.

RESULT: This is a fantastic opportunity to deliver any facts and figures that support your claims

For example: **Have you ever had an issue with stockloss/security? How did you minimise that, what was the outcome?**

Think of a specific example where security issues were a problem, and think of every single thing that you did to reduce stockloss and increase security. Give examples and don't be afraid to give a lengthy response. If they have to prise the answer out of you, you are not telling them enough. When it comes to the result, always back it up with some facts or figures.

If you were an interviewer and had to ask the question 3 or 4 times today, what would you remember? Make sure that the answer you give is so solid leaves them thinking.....I wish they could do the same in my store /region/company!!!!

Another question that is often asked at interview is **'What kind of manager are you?'**

This is not an opportunity to tell the interviewer what a sweet person you are. Answer this question concisely and with a business mind. As a manager your main focus should be **PEOPLE, PRODUCT & PROFIT.**

PEOPLE: You work with your staff/head office colleagues and of-course customers. Think of all the things you do with people-recruit, train, develop, mentor, motivate, assess, communicate, delegate, enthuse, lead, direct, organise, praise, resolve issues etc

PRODUCT - How do you manage your product? A commercial manager knows how important product awareness is to a successful business. Think about stock presentation, stock levels and how they can be maintained and replenished, analysis of best sellers, product placement in store, how you ensure deliveries are processed efficiently and that new lines are prioritised on to the shop floor. Think about display, your window, visual merchandising and how they impact sales, any store promotions, how you monitor their effectiveness, and any competitor activity.

PROFIT - Talk about your KPI's and targets that you work to. Sales figures compared to last year, or budget. How do you improve or maintain sales figures? I.e. UPT'S, ATV'S, and customer loyalty cards. Have you been able to reduce your costs? Think about payroll, even small things like stationary orders can impact cost. Bear in mind that people and product will directly impact on your profit so you can structure your answer accordingly.

Obviously you will not be able to discuss all these things; otherwise you may be there for some time!!! But pick one subject from Profit, Product, and People and talk about your strengths and motivations. It helps if it is something that you feel quite strongly about as talking passionately will inspire your interviewer and make them believe in your ability.

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

I understand that this is a lot of preparation and you may feel that you do not have the time. I can only assure you that it is worth it. To prepare in this way will make you feel so confident and unfazed by the interview process, you will start to enjoy the opportunity to sell yourself and even, dare I say it ... show off a little bit! You will be successful in your interview but also in your understanding of your

role. It is one thing to do something and quite another to see what you do on the daily written out in front of you. You may find that moving forward in your career you feel more confident of your impact as a manager on the business. Or you may discover that there is more that you can be doing in your role to grow as a manager. This can only be a good thing.

THE INTERVIEW ITSELF

First impressions count.

Don't be late; leave yourself plenty of time to arrive so you're not flying through the door with moments to spare looking hot and flustered. That will not make a good first impression! Make sure you have the name of the person you are meeting for your interview and their role in the company.

Wear appropriate clothes. Obviously you should always be well presented, but if you were going for an interview with a street/surf brand, I would not recommend turning up in a suit. They may feel that you do not understand the company and its ethos. Do a bit of investigation into the brand and its current collection. They will bury in to you more if you show an understanding of the company image.

Basis rules, but so often people are let down by things that could have made such a good impression, if a little thought and care had been taken.

BODY LANGUAGE

Says more than you know!

Do you know that your manner, posture and self-presentation play a major part in people's perception of you?

If you are attending an interview for a luxury brand, be aware that they may have very high expectations when it comes to your speech and how you hold yourself. If you are applying for a role on Bond St, they will expect you to be comfortable working with very wealthy and educated clients. You must be able to hold your own in that environment, so do take that in to account.

Often it is not what we say but how we say it that makes such an impact. If you are making a positive statement make sure your body language is saying the same. If you are feeling happy about something you are saying then smile. If you feel passionate about a particular subject, let it show.

- Always face the interviewer.
- Nod or acknowledge a comment that you agree with.

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

- Sit up straight, slouch on your couch but never in an interview!
- Have a positive, firm handshake.
- Make eye contact and show your interest.

BE POSITIVE

I cannot stress this enough - be extremely positive at any interview. If you are not feeling positive about a role you have been put forward for, you must speak to your RJUK Consultant because you really should not be going to that interview.

If you are positive and enthusiastic it has 3 effects:-

Firstly - the interviewer can see how you will enthuse and motivate your team.

Secondly - how you positively sell yourself will indicate your selling skills, and show the interviewer how you will encourage and inspire customers.

Thirdly - people cannot help but like happy, enthusiastic people and whether it's good practice or not, an interviewer is much more likely to recruit someone they like.

It is also very important at this point to say that being positive means not being negative. You would be surprised how many candidates are negative about themselves or their previous employer during an interview. Never say anything negative about yourself. Even when asked what your negatives are (which some interviewers may do to catch you out), always turn it into a positive or an area that you would like to develop. However it should not be something that is instrumental to the role. For example, saying that you need to develop your organisational skills when you are applying for a stock controller role would not be a great idea!

Equally, don't be negative about your previous employer. Even if things have gone sour - and I do appreciate that sometimes that happens to the best of us, maintain a dignified silence. If you are concerned about how to explain why you want to leave your current employer, please ask your consultant. We can help you formulate an answer that is concise, truthful, explanatory and in no way derogatory.

CUSTOMER SERVICE

At some point in the interview process you will probably be asked about customer service. It is one of the most important aspects of retail work and something that your prospective employer will take very seriously. They will be interested to hear your views on customer service and how you ensure customers receive great service in your store.

My advice to you is to think about your experiences. The great news is, we have all been a customer. We have all received fabulous customer service and possibly even recommended a store or particular sales person to a friend. Equally I am sure we have all received service that made us want to pull our hair out. Draw on your own experiences to explain what customer service means to you.

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

Remember if you are applying for a role with a luxury brand, the customer service expectations will be different to that of a supermarket. Each will have their own priorities and customer service values so tailor your answer to the company that you are applying for, but remember, customer service no matter where you work in retail, is always a priority.

ACHIEVEMENTS

Another question that you will probably be asked is “What are your achievements”?

This is not the time to mention that you got to the second audition stage of X-Factor! Think of times in your retail career when you have exceeded expectations, been promoted, turned a difficult situation around, problem solved, opened a new store, fed an idea up to management etc. I would suggest that you think about this before your interview so you have an answer to hand. If you think about it too long in the interview, it will look like you are at pains to remember an achievement and that will not fill your interviewer with confidence.

Be proud of your achievements and always state how you have achieved them. Don't be embarrassed to talk about your achievements; this is your opportunity to shine.

TRICKY QUESTIONS

At some point in the interview, you may be asked a question you couldn't prepare for. Bear in mind that if you are having a great interview, the interviewer may ask you a difficult question just to see how you react to something you were unprepared for. My advice is never show you are under pressure. Take a moment to think about it and then respond in a professional manner and with a smile. Once you have answered the question, stop. Do not waffle to fill the pause.

One question that many people find very difficult is regarding salary. You should have discussed your minimum and ideal salary requirements with your consultant and they will have been conveyed to your interviewer. Don't be tempted to add on to these, as it will not look good. Stick to what has been agreed with your consultant and answer with confidence and assurance. If you are in the interview then you are suitable for the role and as they sayyou're worth it!

ALMOST OVER!

Don't relax just yet.

You will begin to relax as the interview progresses but keep on your toes until you are out of the building and in safe celebrating distance!

Every part of the interview process is an opportunity to impress, the end of the interview is as important because it's the final and lasting impression they will have of you.

It is always a good idea to have a few questions to ask the interviewer. My personal favourite if your direct employer is interviewing you is, “What are your expectations of a great store manager?”

This is a good question as it gives them the opportunity to explain exactly what they are looking for. Show your understanding and interest and they will feel that you are reading from the same page.

Retail Jobs

Retail Jobs UK

Other questions that can be asked (if these have already been discussed do not ask again - it will look like you have not been listening)

- What training and development do you offer?
- Is this a company that promotes internal progression?
- Is the store that I will be working in performing to target?
- What would you like the turnover to be?
- Are there any particular areas for development or improvement in this store?
- What is the company like to work for?
- How long have you been with the company?
- Do you enjoy your work?

All in all, a great way to end the interview, you have expressed an interest in the role, the company and your interviewer. Now all that remains is for you to thank the interviewer, and leave filled with the knowledge you have done all you can to secure that job.

Get a safe distance away, sigh with relief, do a victory dance, woop or whatever you need to do.... and then call your RJUK consultant and let us know how it went.

Good Luck with all your interviews!