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### **24-hour Countdown to the Interview. Exactly what you need to do in the day before the interview to ensure top performance**

By Katharine Hansen, PhD

Imagine you are Jack Bauer in Fox's popular TV series 24. In 24 hours, something momentous will happen. In this case, the anticipated event is not terrorists destroying the US, but your job interview. And instead of 24 hours that unfold chaotically prior to the event, you know exactly what you'll be doing in each of those hours. This kind of planning can help you perform at your best at your interview. The scenario below assumes you can spend a large part of the day before your interview preparing. If you have other work or family obligations that keep you from following this preparation plan, do your best with it. You may need to spread the prep plan over several days rather than implementing it all the day before.

Let's assume it's 9 a.m., and your interview is in 24 hours. First, let's cheat a bit and begin our countdown 25 hours before the interview. The interview will be in your city but in an unfamiliar location. You believe the site to be about 45 minutes away.

8 a.m., 25 hours before your interview: Get in your car and do a dry run to the interview location. By driving the route at exactly the same time as you'll be doing the next day, you'll simulate the same traffic and road conditions. You will previously have obtained a map and/or directions to the site by calling the employer's office or getting a map from an Internet map site, such as Google Maps (the fact that these maps are not always reliable is another good reason for your dry run). Doing the dry run enables you to make sure you know how to get to the site, assures you you've estimated the timing correctly, familiarizes you with traffic and other issues – such as road construction or unexpected toll booths – that could be obstacles, and allows you to check out the scene at the interview site. Is it easy to park? Is there a security checkpoint that will take time to pass through?

9 a.m.: Ideally, you will have arrived at the site at 8:45. You may want to go through the same parking routine you will do the next day, as well as enter the building to see how easy it will be to find the interviewer's office. If the timing of your dry run reveals problems with timing your drive to the site, plan to make adjustments tomorrow on interview day. You may need to leave the house earlier than planned.

Spend the drive home doing a visualization exercise that will help psych you up for the interview. Imagine it's 24 hours later, and you're on your way home from the interview. Imagine that it was a fantastic interview, and spend your drive home basking in how well you performed. If you have any lingering questions about interview logistics, calling the company as soon as you get home is a good idea. Perhaps you have a question

about directions, parking, office location, paperwork, attire, the type of interview that will be conducted, or other issues. Now is the time to ask. It also doesn't hurt to simply call and confirm the interview time at this point.

10 a.m.: Back home, take out the outfit you plan to wear to the interview. Get out every element of the outfit, including shoes, jewelry, hose, tie, accessories. Inspect each element carefully. Ensure that your outfit is clean and neatly pressed. Check for spots and remove them. Check for rips or tears; sew them up or choose another outfit. Check for runs in your hose. Ensure that shoes are clean and polished. Be sure to have a Plan B for attire if you come across any disasters.

11:00 a.m.: Begin reviewing all the research you've gathered about the organization you're interviewing with, the industry, your interviewer, and the job itself. You will have previously collected this material, and this won't be the first time you're reviewing it. As you're reviewing again, keep in mind the questions you may be asked that will require you to know this material:

- What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
- Do you enjoy doing independent research?
- Do you have any plans for further education?
- Why do you want to work in the \_\_\_\_\_ industry
- What do you know about our company?
- Why are you interested in our company?

Noon: Relax over lunch. Even in the important hours before the interview, you need downtime so you don't get yourself too worked up over the interview.

1 p.m.: Review the questions you think you may be asked in the interview, as well as your planned responses to them. Ideally, you have previously composed your responses in writing. Your goal now is not to memorize your responses but simply to review them and be familiar and comfortable with them.

2 p.m.: With the questions fresh in your mind, enlist a friend or family member to do a mock interview with you. You may want to make this trial run a full-blown dress rehearsal in your interview attire. Have your "interviewer" critique not only the content of your responses but your nonverbal demeanor: eye contact, voice, posture, hand gestures, facial expressions, nervous habits, use of "pause" words (such as "um," "uh"), and handshake.

3 p.m.: Take another hour of downtime to do something you enjoy, preferably a relaxing activity, such as reading, running, bicycling, yoga, meditation, listening to music, taking a hot bath, or the like.

4 p.m. to 6 p.m.: Make this your time for taking care of business – the activities you'd normally be doing if not preparing for an interview. Return phone calls, check e-mail, do household chores, spend time with family.

6 p.m.: Relax over dinner, remembering to eat a filling and nutritious meal and not something that will sit heavily on your stomach, give you indigestion, or keep you awake.

7 p.m.: Do a final review of your company-research notes and your responses to interview questions.

8 p.m.: Do a visualization exercise in which you see yourself going through the full interview experience and performing magnificently. Imagine yourself confidently sailing through the interview.

9 p.m. to 11 p.m.: Indulge in a bit of brain candy, such as watching TV or playing a board game, to take your mind off the interview.

11 p.m.: Head to bed. You'll need a good night's sleep. If 11 is early for you, you'll still want to go to bed now in case you're anxious and have trouble sleeping (try reading if that's the case). Of course, if you normally go to bed earlier than 11, adjust the plan accordingly.

6 a.m.: Wake up. Brush your teeth and use mouthwash. Bathe or shower. Use deodorant soap. Put on deodorant. For confidence, spritz on a tiny bit of cologne if you wish, but don't overdo it! For men, shave and trim your beard or mustache. Style your hair. Women, wear your hair up or back so it's out of your face. Put on makeup conservatively.

7 a.m.: Breakfast in your bathrobe. You may have too many butterflies to eat breakfast, but give yourself a little something for energy and mental acuity, perhaps a piece of fruit, a protein bar, coffee if you can't function without it.

Now, get dressed. Take your time. Make sure your outfit is perfect. Check your briefcase for emergency-repair items you might need: small sewing kit, extra pair of pantyhose, spot-remover wipes, tissues, comb and brush, hairspray or gel, makeup for touchups, breath mints. Be sure you have extra copies of your resume in case you have more than one interviewer. And if you have one, bring your career portfolio as well. Pack an umbrella, too.

8 a.m.: As you did 24 hours ago, head to the interview site. Leave a little earlier or later, depending on what you learned from your dry run. Be sure you have your cell phone so that if something totally unexpected happens on the way (such as a bad accident closing the road), you can call the employer to see if rescheduling is indicated.

8:45 a.m.: Arrive at the site. Once in the building, head directly to the restroom for one final inspection of your outfit. Employ your emergency-repair kit if needed. Then, head to the interviewer's office. Pleasantly announce yourself to the gatekeeper – receptionist, secretary, assistant – and make friendly conversation with him or her; the interviewer will often ask this person's impression of you. Then, wait calmly for the interviewer to be ready for you.

9 a.m.: Perform spectacularly in the interview.

10 a.m.: Spend your drive home basking in how well you performed.

## **Final thoughts**

Well, if Jack Bauer's day went as smoothly as these 24 hours, his show would be cancelled quickly for lack of drama. In your case, though, this smooth 24 hours of preparation should ensure a long run when you get that job offer.