

# The art of the interview

BY METTE STEFFENSEN

In the last issue of *Insight*, Henriette Rendbæk Jønsson and Niels Berthelsen of First Job in Denmark offered advice on how to apply for jobs – from writing your CV to finding job announcements. This time around, we'll focus on the interview. As much a process of elimination as anything else, success here requires knowing the unwritten rules of the interview process.

These tips are designed for expatriates searching for a job in Denmark and to help prepare candidates for this crucial part of the job search.

## Purpose of the job interview

Since you are probably among only a select few invited for an interview, you can expect that your professional qualifications must match the job to a large degree. The purpose of the interview is to have this confirmed as well as to evaluate your personal skills and values. In Denmark, there is a strong focus on personal attributes like motivation, teamwork, integrity and commitment. These attributes are just as important as your professional/technical competencies.

## Interview structure

The structure of the interview varies greatly from company to company and from one interviewer to the next. Professional interviewers typically use a set structure with well-defined questions, whereas others tend to be more unstructured. The unstructured interview may create a more informal and cosy atmosphere than the structured, which keeps more focus on comparativeness with other interviewees.

Make sure you manage the interview by not allowing either yourself or the interviewer to conduct a monologue. An interview should have an exchange of information, and both interviewer and interviewee should equally contribute.

The Danish concept of equality – which is evident in the flat hierarchies and limited respect for those in positions of authority – makes it important to listen and talk to everyone on the interview panel. It is considered a mistake in Denmark to only address the most senior manager, as this shows a lack of respect for the entire (flat-structured) organisation.

## The benefits of being international

Some Danish employers might need to hear a good argument for employing an expatriate rather than a Dane – they may feel more comfortable with people who are from the same culture and speak Danish fluently. In order to overcome this barrier, you can benefit from presenting the advantages of a diverse workforce.

## Your own questions

Don't be afraid to ask questions when there is something you need to know, or if you are in doubt about something that has been said. To a certain extent, it is seen as a positive aspect of your personality and proof of your interest in the position and the company. Write your questions on a piece of paper and bring them with you to the interview to show that you're well-prepared.

## References

It's always a good idea to bring along a copy of your references and any relevant certificates. An employer may not be interested in reading everything during the interview, but you should mention that you have these documents with you.

## Salary

During the last third of the interview, you will probably be asked about your salary expectations. This is usually negotiated 'gross' = before tax and pension. A salary package can be negotiated with, for example, extra holidays or at-home leaves, pension, additional health insurance, car, newspapers and public transportation, among other perks. But almost all fringe benefits are taxed, so be careful – especially with a company car. What you may see as a great benefit could turn out to be more expensive than if you bought it yourself.

Make sure to establish win-win situations so that both negotiating parties feel that they have accomplished something positive. Be realistic in your opening move. A Dane will lose respect for you if you start off with a blatantly expensive or unrealistic proposal. However, you also need to demonstrate your value by demanding a salary that reflects your qualifications and experience. An employer will also lose respect if you go too low. Salaries in the public sector are generally lower than in the private sector, and also more fixed to collectively bargained agreements.

## Nerves

If you feel like your nerves are preventing you from performing at your best, apologise and explain that this is your first (or one of your first) job interviews in Denmark – and that you're really excited about continuing your career here. It also helps to talk about specific situations you have experienced, rather than trying to present your competencies in more general terms.

*The author is founder and director of Supporting People, a company that specialises in assisting expat partners to find employment in Denmark.*

## OFF TO WORK WE GO

Whether it's finding your first job, fitting in at the workplace or moving on to something else, foreigners face their share of challenges when it comes to working in Denmark. We can't find a job for you, but what we can do is share the advice of those who specialise in helping foreigners find work.

Our 'Off to work we go' section seeks to give readers a look at the ins, outs and unspoken rules of the Danish job market. In our first column, two job consultants from Copenhagen's First Job in Denmark programme offer some practical tips to those looking to get a foot in the door of the Danish job market.

