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**Have Some PASTA with Your Interview**

**By Barbara Snyder**

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When cyclists prepare for a big race, they always make sure they load up on the carbs. It is not uncommon to have a pasta feed the night before an important event so that the athletes can store up some of the carbohydrates they will be burning up the next day. The same goes for preparing for an interview. A candidate for a job, preparing for that all-important interview, needs to take in some PASTA. However, it isn't the same kind of pasta, but it is something that will energize, fortify and maximize a person's chances in having a successful interview.

Here is the PASTA that is being suggested: P, prepare thoroughly; A, attitude adjustment; S, start the interview off smartly; T, tips to be followed; and A, after-the-interview follow-up. These five steps can provide a level of preparation, comfort, and professionalism that should impress the decision makers with your performance under pressure and to demonstrate your abilities and attributes in the best light.

How does one prepare (P) for an interview? You would be surprised how many people do absolutely nothing or very little in this realm. However, this is the one thing that you have completely in your control. Consider the following tasks that can be done in order to be more prepared than your competition: anticipate a question as an opener about qualifications and background ; anticipate a closing that will allow for you to wrap up and review your qualifications; write out the answers to the anticipated questions; practice or rehearse how you will deliver those answers; re-read your application; and visualize how you will present yourself verbally and non-verbally. Spending time on this first step will give you confidence and practice that will help you relax, or at least curb some of the nervousness during the actual interview.

Attitude (A) or your overall demeanor is a dominant factor that will influence how the interviewer or panel perceives you and your personality. It is important to be positive in all ways that you express yourself and to always be courteous to everyone with which you come into contact. It is a good thing to be mildly assertive, but not aggressive or arrogant. Show that you believe in yourself and know that you are being judged on your attitude, work ethic, intelligence and honesty. In establishing your positive attitude think about what the employer wants in their employees, which will most likely include all or some of the following: self starter, dependable, easy to work with, works well under pressure,

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manages time effectively, could handle a crisis situation successfully, could handle constructive criticism, and concentrates on the needs of the company over personal needs.

Starting the interview (S) is the precise point where a first impression will be made. Many times a candidate thinks that the first question of the interview is the actual beginning of the interview. In reality it begins when the candidate enters the room and is introduced. It is important to be on time, even early, to mentally prepare to be called into the interview room. Remember that there will be small talk that the interviewer(s) will remember. The handshake, which should be firm, and the smile, which should be sincere, go a long way in establishing a rapport with the decision makers. In addition, grooming and appearance will be two areas in which to take extra care and time. It will pay off big dividends. Make your first impression a positive and pleasant experience.

The tips (T) that can put professionalism into actual responses to questions are cloaked in many details. They are small, but extremely significant, elements in the overall interview process. Realize that your articulation and vocabulary is being scrutinized thoroughly. Using "kinda, yeah, and gonna" are some words to avoid. Make sure your responses are concise, specific, and not rambling. Your responses, as a rule, should be no longer than 2 minutes. You need to make sure that you are honest and focused. It is important that abilities and accomplishments not be exaggerated. Your demeanor should be one of openness, confidence and enthusiasm. Eye contact is a must, along with natural gestures that help you establish a connection or rapport with the interviewer(s). If you are asked to tell about what a former employer would say about you, put it in quote form to specifically provide details of their assessment of you. Above all, do not ever use the phrases, "To be honest or in all honesty." It could give the impression that you aren't honest in other areas. Picture yourself confident, leaning forward, chin up, not fidgeting. Visualize success.

After the interview (A), a follow up routine can be most impressive to the interviewer(s). Besides thanking them at the interview when you stand up to leave, following up with a personalized letter is a very appropriate thing to do. If you do not get the position, it is also appropriate to ask for feedback on how your interview could have been improved. Many human resources administrators will willingly schedule an appointment to review the strengths and weaknesses of the interview.

If you didn't get the position, don't burn any bridges with the company or organization. Just because you did not get the first one for which you applied, does not mean that you won't get another position that opens up. A lot has to do with whether you are perceived as "a fit for the particular position." Always try to understand whether your particular qualifications and experiences are a good match with the expectations of a specific position. Staying with the five steps (PASTA) will help you prepare and help you get an edge on those who are just relying on luck. Get prepared and remember the fundamentals.

Barbara Snyder is a retired California Distinguished School Principal and Coordinator For Human Resources. She has a master's degree in Curriculum and Instruction. She holds elementary education, secondary, community college, and administrative credentials. She is currently the publisher of <http://EducationResourcesNetwork.com>, co-publisher of Strictly Business Magazine, <http://www.sbmag.org>.

## **Save Time in the Kitchen. Cook Pasta the way Restaurant Chefs Do**

**By Skip Lombardi**

Have you ever wondered how a restaurant can get a dish of pasta to your table in about four minutes when you know it takes ten minutes just to cook the pasta? Does the water on their stoves boil at a higher temperature than the water on yours? Do they know a trick that you don't? As a matter of fact, they do.

They parboil, or partially pre-cook their pasta; so when an order comes in to the kitchen, a cook can turn out a dish of perfectly 'al dente' pasta in a minute or two. Pre-cooking is a worthwhile technique for home cooks, because it enables them to pull together a great sit-down meal in practically no time, no matter how busy their day may have been.

It's also a great method to use when you plan to serve pasta for a crowd. I once catered a party for fifty, where I had a "pasta bar." With the assistance of one helper, and two propane burners, I served fifty portions of freshly cooked pasta (al dente) without holding anyone up in the buffet line.

To parboil pasta at home, bring a large pot of salted water (at least six quarts) to the boil. Add one pound of pasta and stir until the pasta wilts (in the case of spaghetti or linguine) and becomes submerged. When the water returns to a full, rolling boil, cook the pasta for exactly two minutes, then drain, shock in ice water, and drain again. Note: Strand pasta like spaghetti or linguine will be brittle, so handle them with care.

Place the pasta in a container large enough to hold it, then add enough olive oil to just coat each strand. Cover and refrigerate until needed. Parboiled pasta will keep, refrigerated, for four to six hours.

Note: Coating pasta with olive oil flies in the face of conventional wisdom that says, "Never coat pasta with olive oil. The sauce won't adhere to the pasta." Well, conventional wisdom aside, sauce sticks to parboiled pasta like glue. What else can I say?

When it's time to cook dinner, bring a large pot of salted water to the boil, add the pasta (You'll note that the pasta has softened over the time you've had it refrigerated. This is perfectly fine.), cook for one or two minutes, then drain in a colander. Be sure to taste after a minute or so. The pasta cooks quickly. Serve as you would any pasta that you had cooked for eight to ten minutes.

Again, this is a great, worthwhile technique to use at home, because you can parboil the pasta at a time of day when you're not juggling three or four other tasks, like preparing a sauce, or a salad. And when it's time to prepare the rest of dinner, you'll feel more confident in the outcome, because you can focus more of your attention on the other parts of the meal.

Try this technique once, and you could be hooked. You may not be serving fifty or sixty people per night, but you'll be cooking just like a chef in a neighborhood Italian restaurant.

Skip Lombardi is the author of two cookbooks: "La Cucina dei Poveri: Recipes from my Sicilian

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Grandparents," and "Almost Italian: Recipes from America's Little Italys." He has been a Broadway musician, high-school math teacher, software engineer, and a fledgeling blogger. But he has never let any of those pursuits get in the way of his passion for cooking and eating. Visit his Web site to learn more about his cookbooks.

or

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