

The Untold Caregiver & CNA Interview Guide

Behind-The-Scenes Perspectives
From Industry Experts



Using This E-Book

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When applying for a position as a professional caregiver or certified nurse assistant, the job interview is your time to shine and show a potential employer why they should hire you. As the most integral part of the hiring process, it's important to adequately prepare.

We gathered tips and insight directly from the professionals who know the industry best—hiring managers in the senior care industry. This e-book, written specifically for CNAs and caregivers, preps you for all stages of the interview process, allowing you to put your best foot forward and land the job!

Use this e-book as a guide to go from a mediocre interview to acing the interview, while making a lasting first impression.

Keep in mind: This guide is written ONLY for caregivers and CNAs that are ethical and abide by all laws and regulations.

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Before the Interview

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The interview begins long before a face-to-face meeting. Prepare an application packet before the actual interview. Your application packet should include the following:

RESUME Be sure to bring at least two copies of your resume. Don't have a resume? Write one! Many times, caregiver applicants don't bring resumes. Having a resume showcases your work and immediately puts you ahead of the pack.

Pro tip: Don't just bring any resume. Make sure it looks professional, is properly formatted, and is free of grammatical errors and misspellings. Ask a friend to proofread it or hire a professional service to review it for you.

COVER LETTER If you want to stand out even more, draft a brief cover letter. The cover letter should state why you want the job and why you want to be a caregiver. Again, make sure there aren't any typos or grammar mistakes. Proofread, proofread, proofread!

REFERENCES All employers will ask for references as part of the hiring process. Be one step ahead of the game and have your references typed including full name, relationship, and contact information. Include a couple former employers, as well as a few character references. The more, the merrier.

Pro tip: When interviewing, you need people who can vouch for important qualities such as punctuality and professionalism. Include testimonials from your references who can speak to your strengths.

Example:

*Ms. Sarah Smith
Former manager at
Sunrise Acres Assisted Living
123 Main St.
Chicago, IL 60602
555-555-5555
jane@emailaddress.com*

Testimonial: "Maria was an all-star part of my staff! Always on time and always smiling, she never failed to get the job done."

GAME PLAN Make sure you have all the logistics squared away before you leave for the interview. Know the address of where you're going, how to get there, how much travel time you need, the parking situation, and lastly, know whom to ask for when you arrive.

IDENTIFICATION INFORMATION

Always bring two valid forms of identification.

ONE KEY TAKEAWAY What's the one thing you want a potential employer to remember about you after you walk away from the interview? Write it down and remember it. Leverage this key takeaway as a recurring theme during the interview and weave it through your discussion points.



PRO TWEET

ComForcare Home Care @ComForcareIndy: "We like for caregivers to list specific experiences with patients, Alzheimer's experience, hospice experience, etc."

First Impressions Count... And You Only Get One!

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Did you know the first impression is made within 17 seconds of meeting someone? You don't have much time to make a great first impression, so be prepared to shine the moment you walk in the door.

BE POLITE AND FRIENDLY Keep in mind that the front desk receptionist is going to be your coworker, so be nice to him or her.

Pro tip: It's the most basic interview tip, but often forgotten: Smile!

SHOW UP ON TIME There's nothing worse than showing up late for an interview. Employers find this disrespectful and will often automatically disqualify you if you are late. Also, don't arrive more than 10 minutes early. It's important to give yourself some extra time, but if you are more than 10 minutes early, wait outside until the time is right.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS Caregivers are often blessed with a casual dress code on the job, but as a rule of thumb, you should always dress nicer than your day-to-day

attire for the interview. Also, keep jewelry to a minimum, don't wear cologne or perfume, and wear neutral-colored nail polish (no claw-like, yellow tips!).

Pro tip: Not sure what to wear? Suit up!

COVER TATTOOS AND REMOVE PIERCINGS Along with dress, be sure to cover up your tattoos and remove facial piercings. Although the times have changed, the elderly population tends to associate tattoos with prison inmates. Be respectful of your potential clients and project a professional image.

EXUDE CONFIDENCE! Confidence is displayed through both verbal and non-verbal cues. Sit up straight, speak clearly and make eye contact. Greet your potential employer with a firm handshake. You have the knowledge and skills to be a caregiver superstar, so make it known to the employer. Be articulate and share your past experience with pride. Make sure the employer knows why you would be a great fit for the job.

Ready, Set, Answer

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STATE YOUR PURPOSE This may be the single most important part of your interview. Tell the employer why you want to be a caregiver and work with their company. Caregiving is more than just a job; hiring managers want candidates who care about their clients and are in the profession for more than just a paycheck.

BODY LANGUAGE Be aware of the hidden messages you're physically sending during the interview. Sitting with your arms crossed and avoiding eye contact suggest disinterest. Avoid nervous tics and jittery motions. Be engaged and have good posture. And, smile!

EMPHASIZE YOUR SKILLS When answering interview questions, make sure you showcase desirable skills and traits. Hiring managers often look for potential CNAs and caregivers who display the following qualities:

- Patience
- Sound customer service skills
- Adaptability/flexibility
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills
- Team-orientation
- Compassion and empathy

Pro tip: No caregiving experience? No problem! Focus on transferable skills and traits—qualities you can apply to many different types of jobs—like caring for a loved one, customer service skills, conflict management, and interpersonal skills.

LEARN HOW TO ANSWER BEHAVIORAL QUESTIONS

These are open-ended questions that are designed to show how you'd handle

a situation. You're often asked to tell a story or give an example. It's easy to get sidetracked when talking, so stay focused and maintain your point.

Pro tip: Behavioral questions can be tough to answer. Model your answers around SPAR framework (detailed below) for the most organized and concise answers. By touching on each of the four categories, you will blow the interviewer away with your answer!

Don't forget to SPAR!

Situation: Define the situation. What's the background?

Problem: Explain the problem. What's the issue that needs to be resolved?

Action: What did you do to solve the problem? Cite specific examples of what you did.

Result: What good came from your actions? Be positive!

MASTER COMMON INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Most interviewers will ask CNA and caregiver candidates the same general questions to get an idea of your skills, competency, and past experience. Be prepared to talk about prior caregiving work, whether paid or family experience, the reasoning why you want to work for the hiring manager versus another company, and why you think you're the best fit for the job. Review the questions below and write out answers with specific examples from your past experience. Rehearse. And, leave the written notes at home!



PRO TWEET

Long Term Solutions @LongTermSol: "Try including a 'Purpose' section on your resume about what you're looking for in a job and why you're submitting an application."

Ready, Set, Answer—Continued

“TELL ME ABOUT YOURSELF.”

This is your opportunity to let the employer know why they should hire you. Keep your answer focused on the job and remember to mention your key takeaway.

Example: “I’m excited to apply for a job as caregiver with Happy Home Aide because I love making a difference in the lives of others. After caring for my grandmother who had Alzheimer’s, I realized this is a profession that I’m good at and passionate about. When working with my grandmother, I developed patience and empathy, qualities that will make me a great caregiver with your organization. I’m here today because I’m looking to continue growing my career in this field.”

“WHY DO YOU WANT TO BE A CAREGIVER OR CNA?”

The ideal candidate is passionate about caregiving. Focus on the qualities that draw you to caregiving and what makes you a great fit for the position.

Example: “I want to be a caregiver because I’ve always enjoyed taking care of others, even as a child when I would watch my younger siblings; These days, I’m looking for a job that is challenging, rewarding and positively impacts others’ lives, and I find all those qualities in caregiving.”

Pro tip: Never reply that you just need a job. Hiring managers consider this a deal breaker! The ideal caregiver is in it for more than just a paycheck and focuses on their passion for others.

“WHAT TYPE OF PEOPLE HAVE YOU CARED FOR IN THE PAST?”

Caregivers often work with many different types of people with various health conditions. Talk about your past experiences and ability to work with a wide range of clients.

Example: “At my last job, I worked with an elderly woman with dementia. I also cared for a diabetic man who only spoke Spanish.”

“DESCRIBE A TIME WHERE YOU HAD A CONFLICT WITH AN EMPLOYEE OR CLIENT.”

How did you resolve the problem? This is a great opportunity to tell a story using the SPAR method. Keep it short and be positive!

Example: “At my last job, I had a patient who was difficult and always wanted the RN to help him instead of me. He was often disrespectful and spoke down to me, and then after a month, I finally explained to him that I had plenty of training and it would be my pleasure to provide the best care. I let him explain his issues, and after talking we came to an understanding, and he allowed me to better care for him.”

“WHAT’S YOUR BIGGEST STRENGTH?”

This is your time to brag (but remain humble!) and show why you are a desired employee.

Example: “I’m a people person. I thrive in a job that’s social in nature. As a caregiver, I have the opportunity to work with different types of people all day, every day.”

Ready, Set, Answer—Continued

“WHAT’S YOUR BIGGEST WEAKNESS?”

This is a tricky question to answer, but be prepared: it’s one of the most common interview questions. Focus on a weakness that you have improved upon. Whatever your answer, do NOT say that you don’t have any weaknesses. No one is perfect!

Example: “In the past, I had trouble with time management and prioritizing my work. I realized these flaws were hindering my productivity, so I started using a daily planner to write down my daily objectives, which has helped me progress tremendously.”

“GIVE AN EXAMPLE OF A DIFFICULT SITUATION THAT REQUIRED PATIENCE.”

How did you handle the situation?

This is another behavior question that lends itself to the SPAR model. Give a concise answer highlighting your skills and knowledge based on your past experience, whether through caregiving or another job.

Example: “I had to be patient while working at a fast food restaurant. After a long day of being extremely busy because one of our ovens was broken, an extremely rude customer came up to the counter to order. I took a deep breath and took the customer’s order. After they sent the food back twice, I was becoming incredibly frustrated but didn’t let it show and kept giving the customer their food with a smile on my face. I would do the same in caregiving situations.”

“HAVE YOU EVER HAD TO GO ‘THE EXTRA MILE’ FOR A CLIENT?”

If so, what did you do? Below is an example highlighting your transferable skills if you don’t have a lot of caregiving experience.

Example: “I had to go the extra mile for a client when I was working in retail. Our store did not have the client’s size in a dress, and she was not happy about it. The store policy is that we don’t need to do anything, but I wanted the customer to be happy so I called a few local stores to see if they had the item. One store did and I was able to direct the customer there even though there was no benefit for me other than making the customer happy. I will always go the extra mile in a caregiving situation as well.”

“HOW WOULD YOU RESPOND IN AN EMERGENCY?”

This is a good opportunity to showcase your training and education.

Example: “In the event of an emergency, I would recall the training I have learned in both my caregiver education, first aid classes, and your emergency polices. I would immediately follow your standard protocols and call 9-1-1 if needed. I have active CPR certification, so I feel confident performing that, if required.”



INTERVIEWING IS A TWO-WAY STREET.

Employers often end with “Do you have any questions for me?” As the most ideal candidate, you better have questions prepared! Show your interest in the position by asking engaging questions about the job and company. Also, make sure you have a handful of questions for the employer, as some will probably be answered naturally during the course of your interview.

Here are some examples:

1. What shifts are you looking to fill?
2. Describe your ideal caregiver for this position. Do I fit this role?
3. What’s the most important skill or attribute required to succeed as a caregiver in this position?
4. What are the types of patients/clients your agency works with?
5. What do you see as the most challenging part of this caregiving opportunity?
6. What opportunities does the company/organization have for career advancement?
7. What are the next steps in the hiring process?

**Tell the interviewer
thank you and that
you're interested in
joining the team—
it's that simple!**

The Art of the Follow-up

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You may have said your goodbyes and walked out of the building, but the interview isn't over yet. Send a friendly and concise email within 12 hours after the interview. Not only is this proper etiquette, but it's your opportunity to remind the employer why you're a great candidate for the job!

Like other application materials, be sure to use proper grammar and proofread your letter. Not sure what to say? Here's an example:

Use a formal greeting.

Mention when you came in and what position you interviewed for.

Remind employer of your skills and experience.

Say thanks one last time!

Greetings Ms. Gonzales,

Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today regarding the CNA position at Chicagoland Senior Care. I believe this job would be a great fit based on my past experience and skills. I am compassionate and patient by nature, and spent years caring for my ill grandmother.

Thank you again for the opportunity. I look forward to the prospect of joining your team.

Sincerely,

Robert Jones
333-333-3333

Reflect on Your Experience

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Now that you've completed the interview process, take a deep breath and give yourself a pat on the back! After that, take a few minutes to reflect on how your interview went. What did you do well? What could be improved upon?

Interviewing can be difficult, especially when first beginning your career. Remember: practice makes perfect!

About Us

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Be sure to check out free caregiver resources on our blog, low-cost caregiver training, and professional resume services to give yourself an ongoing competitive edge.



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