

Make a Great Impression During Your Next Interview - Avoid These Common Mistakes

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Whether it's a limp handshake, an irrelevant answer or a ringing cell phone, interview mistakes are a real turn-off to potential employers.

You only have one chance to make a first impression during your next interview. Make sure it's a great one! Prepare yourself for success with this list of the biggest interview missteps and how to avoid them:

Failure to prepare – While an interviewer may occasionally throw you a curve ball, you should be prepared to intelligently answer the majority of standard interview questions. Before your interview, spend sufficient time practicing answers to common questions such as:

- What can you tell me about yourself?
- Why should I hire you?
- What's the biggest professional challenge you've experienced and what did you learn from it?

Plenty of interview question and answer resources are available online. Additionally, you should also research the company's background (check out their website, at the very least), including history, lines of business, locations, mission statement, etc. Print this information out, take it along with you and quickly review it before you head into the company offices.

Poor handshake – Like it or not, your handshake says a lot about you. Make sure you control the message. If you're not confident about your handshake, practice with a friend. Make sure your handshake is firm (not limp like a "dead fish," or crushing fingers like a "bear trap"); make sure you grasp the other person's entire palm (and not just the fingers); avoid the "arm pump" (which plays like an overly aggressive salesperson); and use the "three second rule" (no handshake should last longer).

Dressing inappropriately – Like your handshake, the way you dress for an interview sends a prospective employer important nonverbal cues about your suitability for an available position. While appropriate interview attire varies depending on the job and work environment, you should always dress professionally and conservatively for a job interview – even when the work environment is casual.

As a general rule, err on the dressier side. It's better to be over- than under-dressed. If you are unsure of what's appropriate, you can contact the HR department to ask for general information about the company's dress code. Other important tips related to appropriate dress:

- Avoid heavy cologne, perfume or scented lotion.
- Hide tattoos and/or piercings, with the exception of simple post earrings for women.
- Turn off your cell phone.
- Take a breath mint and use it before you enter the building.

Talking too much – If you're like most job seekers, interviewing situations make you nervous. If you tend to talk too much when you're thrust into the spotlight, you need to find a way to control over-talking. Practice giving succinct, direct responses to interview questions with a friend. The more you role play, the more comfortable you'll feel during the actual interview.

Talking negatively about current or past employers – Even if your last boss was a veritable Hitler, expressing this opinion during an interview will not help you land the job. Whether it's fair or not, if you "trash talk" your old boss, your potential employer will assume that you would likewise speak negatively about him. Remember, too, that it's a smaller world than you might think. Your interviewer might know (and like) that former manager you've just referred to as "a wet blanket." Your best bet? Keep negative opinions about current or past employers to yourself.

Failing to follow-up. It's easy to walk out of an interview, go home and wait for the phone to ring; however, it's not in your best interest. In fact, follow-up can be your secret weapon to help you edge out your competition. A simple note or e-mail expressing your thanks, and reiterating your interest in and qualifications for the position, will keep you top-of-mind and create a lasting positive impression. Before you leave, confirm the best means to contact your interviewer and follow-up within 24 hours.

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