

MY INTERVIEW IS TOMORROW! NOW WHAT DO I DO?

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It's tough enough standing out in a crowded field of candidates. Now that your resume has someone's attention, could this be the job of your dreams or will your actions turn it into a nightmare? You want to ensure you make a good impression, but it's not just what you say that can land you or cost you this job. It's just as important to realize what not to say and do. Your words, actions and body language all are part of that job interview. Here are some "Don't" and "Do" items to better your chances at getting the job and not alienating the Interviewer.

1. You are late and don't bother to call ahead.

What it means: "I'm inconsiderate and I'm not sure I want this job."

Call the day prior to ensure your interview time, with whom you will meet, directions to the location and if there is a particular place where you should park. This allows you to make a positive impression on both the interviewer and the Receptionist (you're organized, you want to be on time and you are excited about the interview). Thank the Receptionist for providing directions. Don't be there too early either. Sitting will just make you nervous and can be judged as inconsiderate too.

2. You dress in your best jeans and a polo shirt.

What it means: "I have little personal pride and even less respect for the interviewer."

Never under dress for an interview, even if they tell you to "dress casually". A coat and tie or business suit is always appropriate. Keep it simple and leave the jangling bracelets and bling at home.

3. You smell of smoke, heavy cologne or perfume.

What it means: You will offend someone very quickly.

Breath mints may help reduce the cigarette odor but your favorite cologne or perfume can quickly disqualify you due to allergies or workplace policy. Better to have no odor than any "unique" smell. And ditch the gum or mint before you enter the office.

4. You interrupt the Receptionist while she's answering calls.

What it means: "I am self-important and treat everyone with equal disrespect."

Receptionists are usually the first to meet you and often are asked about their impression of candidates. Don't chat up the receptionist as she has a job to do. Be respectful and sit quietly and patiently.

5. You aren't sure what this company does.

What it means: "I didn't do my required homework and am not really interested in the job."

Check the company's website and read any marketing materials in the Reception area. Show the interviewer that you cared enough to do basic research. It will also help you to ask relevant questions about the job and identify how you can fit into the company.

6. You give the interviewer a "dead fish" handshake and greeting.

What it means: "I'm not a strong person and I have little enthusiasm."

Be first in extending your hand, say your name clearly then say "It's a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Smith." Grasp the interviewer's hand firmly and look them in the eye. Thank them

immediately for the opportunity to interview for the job. Don't call them by their first name unless they ask you to do that. Better to be polite than too familiar. Present a fresh copy of your resume and identify any relevant updates.

7. You answer interview questions with rambling thoughts and verbal pauses.

What it means: "I'm not a good communicator and I lack confidence."

The interviewer's job is to determine your qualifications for the job and your character. Probable questions are what interested you in your field, what do you like about what you do, why are you looking for another job, how could you benefit the company as a new employee, etc. Answer the questions that are asked and stay on that topic if you amplify an answer. Give concrete examples of a significant problem you solved or how you saved the company \$XXX. Be able to answer any questions about your resume. If you have thought through the questions, you won't rely on "uhs" to give you time to think.

8. You don't ask about the job requirements.

What it means: "I'm just looking for a job and a paycheck."

You should be asking about responsibilities, promotion potential, problem solving opportunities, suggestions programs, team projects, work schedule, training and education, and key staff members. Save the questions on pay, vacation and benefits for last.

9. You don't relate your training, experience and expertise to the interviewer's questions.

What it means: "I expect the interviewer to connect the dots on my resume."

This is your opportunity to steer the conversation to your strengths and reinforce why they brought you in for the interview. Be prepared to identify your outstanding qualities such as successful projects, team experiences and unique skills. Identify simple descriptions of your character and work them into the conversation, ex. leadership, problem solving, diligence, focus, cost controlling, and sensitivity to the customers' needs.

10. You use profanity and trash talk about your previous employers.

What it means: "I'm an equal opportunity offender and could be become HR's worst nightmare!"

Even if you use mild expletives and sometimes acceptable words, there is no place for them in the interview. Your vocabulary is a good indicator of your character and how you will or won't fit into the Company culture. If you had a bad work experience, explain a positive lesson learned from it rather than finger-pointing. Adversity and failure can build character.

11. Your resume is a good example of "creative writing".

What it means: "I'm not much of a thinker or doer and am desperate for a job."

HR professionals agree that a majority of resumes contain inaccuracies or outright untruths and overstate the individual's skills, experience and responsibilities. A skilled interviewer can easily identify inconsistencies and fabrications in your background or experience. If you discuss a team project, address your part and how everyone worked together to achieve success. Remember your resume was intended to get you in front of the interviewer so they can learn more about you. Paint an accurate picture of what you've accomplished with your work experience and how your character makes you the best person for the job and the company. Take pride in who you are.

12. You wiggle and slouch in your chair and show how uncomfortable you are with the interview.

What it means: "I am nervous and bored and can't wait for this interview to end."

Sit quietly and use good posture at all times. Minimize your body movement. The interview isn't forever but your impression on the interviewer may be. Never lean on the interviewer's desk or table. That's bad manners. Mirror the interviewer's posture to some extent, i.e. if they lean forward, you may also. Use your body language and gestures to show interest and enthusiasm. Raise the volume in your voice slightly if you seem to be losing the interviewer's interest. Ask them a question to get them refocused on you.

Relax and let your body language also add to the conversation through using your hands, voice inflection and keeping a smile on your face. Speak to everyone who is part of the interview so you don't offend anyone. Gauge their body language and their response to what you just said. That can tell you if further explanation is needed. Organize your thoughts then speak (with some enthusiasm and change of inflection) calmly, clearly and concisely while making continuous eye contact with the interviewer. Show your confidence.

Practice with someone before the interview who will critique your answers and behavior honestly. Don't be thin-skinned as improving your interview performance is your goal.

13. You are reading this article at home while waiting for your phone to ring with a job offer. What it means: "I didn't finish my last interview on a positive note and sure hope Santa comes early."

Ensure you express your appreciation to the interviewers and receptionist when you leave. A solid handshake and smile will leave them with a positive impression. Ask for their business card and when a decision may be made on the position. A short "Thank you" email or a handwritten note to the HR contact or Interviewer will make a positive impression. Ensure you spell all names correctly. These little things do say a lot about you and attention to detail. After a few days, call or email them to ask if there are any other questions or information the interviewer may need. This will help put you on their mind and show your continued interest.

Remember in school when you took a big test? If you studied and were prepared, you had confidence in yourself. And it's okay to be nervous. Channel that energy into preparing for the interview and learn from each opportunity. Even if you don't get this job, the good impression you make may lead to another position with the company that would be a "perfect fit."