

Tips Sheet: Five Gaffs to Avoid for Job Interviews

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Preparing for a job interview? Preparing to interview a job candidate? Here are five tips for each of you to help facilitate an effective interview process.

For the Interviewee

(Person Being Interviewed; Job Candidate)

- 1. Approach the interview unprepared.**
Instead...
Show that you care enough about the organization and person with whom you interview by doing some research prior to your interview. Use the Internet and/or your local library to learn about the organization's history, goals, successes, and—yes—mistakes. Note three or four questions to ask based on your research. This impresses interviewers!
- 2. Skip your grooming habits on interview day.**
Instead...
Groom yourself to make a good impression. Keep perfumes or colognes to a minimum. Many people are allergic to—or offended by—strong odors. Clean and trim hair that shows (facial and head). Eliminate distracting jewelry. Freshen your breath. Manicure your nails.
- 3. It's a casual organization...wear jeans, t-shirt, and flip flops to the interview.**
Instead...
For the interview, wear "business casual" or a suit (men and women). Even casual environments expect you to make a formal first impression. Once you land the job and orient yourself to the dress code you can express yourself in the way that is most appropriate for the organization.
- 4. Prepare your best "off-color" joke as an opening line to show you have a sense of humor.**
Instead...
Prepare a respectful, upbeat conversation-starter for the first few minutes of "small talk" typical of an interview. Your interviewer will be impressed with your conversational skills and you set a respectful tone for the rest of the session.
- 5. Give a limp, damp handshake and plop down in a chair with slouched posture.**
Instead...
Regardless of gender (yours and the interviewer's) give a firm, dry, and warm handshake when you first meet. Remain standing and wait for the interviewer—the host in this situation—to invite you to sit. Then sit with good posture throughout the interview.

For the Interviewer

(Person Conducting the Interview)

- 1. Make them wait for you to show that you are in charge.**
Instead...
Show the person who interviews with you the respect you expect others to show to you. Be in your place earlier than the scheduled interview time. Look over the candidate's paperwork and credentials ahead of time. Note questions you will ask that probe the job-relevant areas for which you need more information. Greet the candidate warmly and set them at ease right away.
- 2. Look sloppy and disheveled. Look like you have a busy day with little time for interviews.**
Instead...
Freshen-up before the interview. If casual attire is your norm, keep a dark blazer or business sweater handy to wear for the interview. Dress for the interview with a formality you expect of the job candidate. You represent your organization.
- 3. Ask personal and embarrassing questions.**
Instead...
Know the job-related questions you can ask. Check with your human resources department ahead of time for legal implications of questions you plan to ask. If the information you seek from your candidate has nothing to do with their qualifications for the job or expected performance issues, then it likely has no business being asked in the interview.
- 4. Answer questions evasively or not at all.**
Instead...
A well-prepared candidate asks questions. Be prepared to explain both the positive, exciting aspects of your organization and industry as well as mistakes made and from which you learned. Show that you value openness and encourage risk-taking that moves the organization forward.
- 5. Answer phone calls and check your computer during the interview.**
Instead...
Give your undivided attention to the interview. Use active listening skills to learn as much as possible—both spoken and unspoken—about your candidate. If you hire them you invest many years and dollars in that person. Be as sure as possible that you make a solid choice.