

Career Building

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How To Make a Great First Impression In a Job Interview

Deborah Walker, Certified Career Management Coach

The first few minutes of a job interview are critically important for creating a good first impression. In fact, the first 30 seconds can make you or break you. Interviewers gather clues about you based on the way you look, how you shake hands, the eye contact you make and the first words that come out of your mouth. It pays to have a strategy for creating a great first impression every time you interview. Here are five tips for starting your interview off on the right foot.

1. Dress for the White House.

If you were invited to interview with the President of the United States in the Oval Office, there would be no question in your mind as to the level of professionalism you'd want to portray. Your grooming would be impeccable, your clothes spotless and lint free, your shoes in perfect condition. Yet job seekers often make the mistake of dressing too casual for job interviews. Never dress business casual for a job interview. Your suit should be classic in style, and conservative in color. Women, don't wear low necklines or short skirts. Men, make sure your shirt is pressed to perfection and your tie isn't too loud. Likewise, avoid all perfumes, scented deodorants and aftershave lotions. By the way you dress you announce to the interviewer how important you see him and his company.

2. Your handshake tells all.

Remember when deals were made on a handshake? That should give you an idea of how important society views the handshake. Your interviewer will read your character in your handshake. He'll decide how honest you are by the way you shake his hand. A limp handshake reveals lack of interest. An aggressive handshake gives the impression of an overly eager or desperate candidate. A tip-of-the-fingers shake says lack of sincerity. Sweaty palms shows fear.

If handshaking isn't part of your daily routine, chances are your handshake is less than what it ought to be. The best way to practice is to go to some kind of social event where you'll have the opportunity to meet many new persons. Make it a game to shake as many hands as you can. See what you can read in others by the way they shake hands. Use the time to perfect your handshake so that your next interview you'll stick out your hand with confidence.

3. Mirror your interviewer.

The quickest way to connect with your interviewer is to mirror their speaking style. If he speaks fast, you speak fast. If he has a slow manner of speaking, so do you. More importantly, you must match the level of detail that your interviewer speaks with. There are some people that communicate very directly. When asked a question, they answer in the shortest manner possible. Others are story tellers who embellish their language with plenty of details. You must listen very carefully to your interviewer to discover their level of detail in communicating. If you provide too much detail to one who is direct, you will overload them with what they see as extraneous information. They will quickly lose interest in you. On the other hand, if you are too direct in your answers to one who enjoys details they will suspect that you are trying to hide facts.

It's true that you only have one opportunity to make a first impression. If you blow the first few minutes of your interview you

may have lost your chance at a great job. Remember, you'll most likely interview several people for each job opportunity. You'll have to make a great first impression with each interviewer. Don't get lax in your first-impression strategy. Use these tips for each and every person you interview with and you'll be on your way to your next best career opportunity.

How To Avoid Job Interview Brain Freeze

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Have you ever experienced brain freeze during a job interview? You are asked a question and your mind goes blank—it's horrifying. You lose composure as well as confidence. Your interview goes down hill from there. Brain freeze most often happens as a result of behavioral or situational interview questions that are not anticipated before hand. As a career coach, this is the most common interview problem I hear about from my clients. With the right preparation you can avoid the nightmare of brain freeze and improve your interview performance greatly.

First of all, it's important to understand what a behavioral or situational interview question is. It is any question that start with:

Tell me a time when ...

Give an example of ...

Describe a situation when ...

Employers ask these types of questions with the assumption that past behavior indicates future performance. These questions reveal a lot about a candidate, including a candidates ability to think fast on their feet. Given that interviews are inherently stressful, many job seekers find it extremely difficult to think fast during interviews. Here are four steps that will help you prepare for any interview question.

1. Take inventory of your accomplishments.

This requires more than a cursory mental note of the good stuff you've done in the past year. Take a systematic approach by asking yourself what challenges you've faced in each of your positions over the past five or more years. Try asking yourself What processes have I improved?How have I made work easier for others?What did I do to save my company money?When did I find a solution to a departmental problem.How did I save time?When did I go beyond the call of duty to solve a customer problem? Write out your answers to these questions. Remember to include the quantitative details when appropriate. Include dollars saved, hours cut, percentage increased etc.

2. Study the job description.

With your list of accomplishments in hand you are ready to turn your attention to the job description. Study the requirements to determine the all possible challenges involved with the job. If the actual job description is skimpy in details, look to other similar positions listed to help fill in the blanks. Additionally, ask others who hold similar positions what their greatest challenges of the job are. Write out your list of anticipated challenges.

3. Create a list behavioral questions.

Turn your list of challenges of the position into a list of questions that start with:Tell me a time when you ...Describe a situation when ...Have you ever had to ... Your list will look something like:Tell me a time when you had to cut costs out of your annual budget.Describe a situation when you had to fire a friend.How would you go about repairing a relationship with a disgruntled client?

4. Use your list of accomplishments to answer your behavioral questions.

Ask a friend to help you role play your interview answers. You should feel very comfortable communicating your success stories. The more time you practice actually talking about your accomplishments the faster you'll be able to recall your stories in your next interview. With interview performance more important than ever before it pays to prepare, prepare, prepare. There is no such thing as over preparation when it comes to interviews. Use this 1,2,3,4 approach to interview prep and you'll be surprised at how much more confident you'll feel in your next interview. The better you interview the faster you'll be at your new job.

Recruiters Not Calling You?

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Five Reasons Why—And How To Fix It

You've been hoping for a new job, but your phone is silent. No recruiters calling, no job offers; it's so quiet you can almost hear the crickets outside. Maybe it's time to reassess. Does this sound like your job search efforts?

- You've sent out hundreds of resumes to countless job postings but received little or no response.
- You've left dozens of voice mails to recruiters explaining why you are a perfect fit—and they never return your call.
- You've tweaked your resume so many times you no longer recognize it.

If this describes your situation, you are not alone. Many talented, qualified job seekers get ignored by recruiters and hiring managers simply because their resume has one or more of the following problems.

1. Your resume highlights your lack of industry experience

Most recruiters are looking for a point-by-point candidate match when screening resumes. Industry background usually ranks high on the list of qualifying issues. If you don't have experience in that industry, your resume is going straight to the circular file—unless you can give them a compelling reason to keep your resume in the stack.

If you lack specific industry experience, but you know you have the basic skills for the job, try highlighting your transferable skills instead. Job seekers who lack industry experience can make it past the resume screener by proving their ability with skills they have that transfer from industry to industry. Examples of transferable skills include expertise gained in sales, customer service, finance, accounting, negotiation, cross-functional communications, and/or team building. Look at the skills they need, then figure out how your background is a match.

2. Your resume shouts “Overqualified!”

Nothing scares off a recruiter faster than a candidate who is obviously overqualified for the job. The two main concerns are (1) that the candidate would soon get bored and leave at his earliest convenience, and (2) that the candidate would be too expensive to hire. Even worse is the assumption that the over qualified candidate is on a downward career slope - a has-been with all his best years behind him.

There are, however, many valid reasons job seekers wish to downsize to jobs with fewer responsibilities. Whatever your reasons, tailor your resume to fit your current career objective. This means you'll want to play down your prior responsibilities, list only relevant education (don't list a Ph.D. if you are applying for a mid-level management position!), and emphasize tactical experience over strategic planning when appropriate.

3. Your resume is crammed with information, but not the right kind

Pity the poor recruiter who must get through 200 applicant resumes before lunchtime. If your resume is in the pile, it will get a quick scan and pass over if she can't find what she is looking for in less than 30 seconds. If you have a resume that is disorganized or full of dense blocks of text, how will the recruiter learn anything about you?

You'll catch the recruiter's attention if you have a clear, easy-to-read resume that highlights your skills and accomplishments, even at a glance. The first rule of resume effectiveness is relevancy, so edit out the past data and redundant facts that aren't relevant to your current career path. Fill your resume only with the skills needed for that particular job, and you'll go a long way toward getting a recruiter's attention.

4. Your resume has too little information

While the “strong, silent type” may be attractive in men, it just plain flops in a resume. A resume that looks more like an outline just doesn’t give the reader enough to work with. Recruiters don’t want to guess what you did at your last job. You need to include enough information to give prospective employers a vision of the possibilities if they choose to hire you.

If you struggle with what to include in your resume, use job descriptions to help you understand what recruiters will want to find in your resume. Then review your previous jobs to determine what skills you have that will be a good match.

5. Your resume doesn’t include accomplishments

If you haven’t thought lately about how your employer has benefited from having you as an employee, it’s a sure bet that your resume is lacking in accomplishments. Remember, as a job seeker you are selling your talents, and you are competing with many others who have the same qualifications as you do. Accomplishments give recruiters a reason to choose you over others for the interview short list.

Give screeners ample reason to select you for interview. Highlight how you have saved time, increased efficiency, cut cost and increased client satisfaction. After all, if you don’t tell them, nobody else will!

If you use this five-point checklist to restructure your resume, you’ll soon hear back from recruiters who appreciate qualified, articulate and confident candidates. The time you spend enhancing your resume could shave off months of fruitless labor and frustrating effort in your job search.