

Interview DO'S and DON'TS

By FEC Career Services



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Dress

Appropriately.

Business attire, business attire, and more business attire! Remember you are the CEO of your career and you are planning a major

merger. Look the part. If they tell you it is a casual office and everyone is wearing jeans and t-shirts, then dress casually but not sloppy. On the other hand, when in doubt-overdress.

Come Prepared. Have additional resumes and reference sheets. Carry these in a leatherette folder. Why not a brief case? Simple. Have you ever looked into someone's brief case and wondered about their organizational skills as they rummaged through it looking for something? With a folder it's hard to get too messy. Don't forget a professional looking pen and make sure that it works. Don't take one from the motel or from your favorite insurance salesperson, with their logos displayed, to the interview.



Poor Eye Contact. I

have a current client who is superior on paper, has a great personality, is verbally correct and otherwise presents a

polished and professional image. He is also a really nice guy. Unfortunately, if you were interviewing him and were to try to look where his eyes are moving, you would go dizzy and then crazy. I don't know who he is constantly looking at on my office ceiling, but they must be having a great conversation.

It is a real shame that some people don't understand this vital aspect of body language. The old expression, "the eyes are the mirror to the soul," is true.

How many times do you pass judgment on someone by the expression on their face as seen through their eyes? Look straight at the interviewer and don't take your eyes off them for a moment during any question they ask you or during your responses. No exceptions.

Arrive Strategically. Not too early and not too late. About five minutes before the appointed interview time is about right.

This does not mean, however, pulling into the parking lot with two minutes to spare and bolting for the interviewer's office. Arrive with about 10 to 15 minutes to spare, casually collect your stuff, and confidently walk into the interviewer's lobby about 6-10 minutes ahead of schedule. Who knows, they might take you early and you will then have more time for your interview session.

I'm sure you don't want to be running to get there, worried about whether or not you have all of the requisite materials you need and sweating profusely over this. Like one great sports coach said, "Never let them see you sweat."

THE DON'TS or, how to blow any chances of an offer whatsoever...



Those D---- Phones and Beepers. There is nothing more irritating than sitting with a candidate and having their phone or

beeper split the silence or an intense dialogue with rrrriiiiiinnnnnnggggg or bbbbuuzzzzzzz.

The Limp Noodle. Shaking the interviewer's hand like you are a limp noodle causes most interviewers to feel very uncomfortable. Most likely, they think that you are insincere or weak or indecisive or not really interested in being there. Whatever they think, if they feel uncomfortable, then you failed the number

Bad-mouthing a past employer. This one is self-explanatory.

Industry Knowledge. If you won't extend the courtesy of gathering information and understanding their company, why should they take a further interest in your career?

Being Late For The Interview. We've covered this previously in its positive form.

Seemingly Focused on Money and Benefits. You are there for the money, of course, and in due time the entire discussion will focus on this critical issue. BUT NOT NOW!!

Letting them back you into the corner with statements like, "what did you make last year," or talking about money at all early in the interview process guarantees that you will give away your personal power and lose any chance at successful negotiation sessions.

Bad Manners. This area really needs no explanation other than to emphasize that your manners and your courtesy toward others are critical in establishing your image and ensuring your position within your future workplace.

Being Cynical. It is rude, uncaring, unprofessional and unacceptable behavior. You are masking those "crazy tapes" Jim Farr said are being played because of past experiences. Change this lifestyle and behavior, or suffer the consequences throughout your personal and professional life.

Acting Passive. The words passive and passion are very close in spelling and worlds apart in meaning and potential

two selection criteria – "will they fit in here?"

The Bone-Breaker. Breaking their hand while shaking it makes the interviewer feel uncomfortable. It also hurts.

Perfumes and Colognes. Some men and women insist on smelling like they are an advertisement for a perfume company. I don't know who told them to wear enough to knock over the office. Also, some perfumes and colognes don't mix with your body chemistry, no matter how expensive or trendy they may be. I worked with an HR person once who bought expensive perfume. Unfortunately, her body chemistry didn't work with that chemical oil base and it smelled like bug spray.

I can't tell you how many times I've had to gasp and try to go with the interview, all the time thinking about how long it will take me to clear my office of the stench. When I am thinking about that, I am not focusing on you. It is the same for any person who interviews you. Think before you douse yourself.

Worse yet, some interviewees put hand cream on their hands and then want to shake mine. The first thing I want to do is wipe it off. If I can't, all during the interview I sit there thinking about wiping my hands and not touching my tie or items on my desk instead of listening to what the candidate is saying. Ask yourself who loses in these encounters.

outcomes. The difference between them is often the difference between winners and losers and those who will be hired and those who are not.

Condescending Attitude. I have interviewed with many people in my life. In some cases I was older, more experienced, more technically competent and just plain knew more about life than they did. Not one of them ever felt this from me. I really try to take a genuine interest in people and feel I can learn from everyone I meet.

On the other hand, people who viewed themselves as the person who had invented sliced bread have interviewed me. When you meet them, and you will, grit your teeth, smile and then determine if you have to work with or for them, or if they might have an influence on your work or success, once you've been employed. If the answer is yes, then drop that company like a hot potato. It only gets worse, never better, when dealing with those people. Believe me, life is too short for that nonsense.

Bad Handwriting. There is nothing worse than getting something you can't read. Sloppy handwriting on any submitted material is inexcusable from you as an applicant, much less when you are working there.

My handwriting is really, really bad. I make it a special point to slow down and attempt to be legible whenever I fill out a form.

Over Sharing. When interviewing, don't over share. It's rude and, worse yet, wastes valuable time that could be spent on your SHARE stories or information gathering



Know-It-All.

Overbearing, overaggressive, or “know-it” all attitude – Remember, “you attract more flies with honey than vinegar.”

In this context it means that you must do more listening than talking and quit trying to impress them with your ability to pontificate. If you are really good, your SHARE stories will speak volumes for themselves.

Inaudible or Poor Voice Tone. No one wants to have to strain to hear you. On the other hand, no one wants to run out for earplugs either. I remember a fellow I once knew who literally shouted everything he said and was a real embarrassment in public situations. It also goes without saying that if you have a uniquely unpleasant voice tone, and it calls attention to your “non-blendable” qualities, you should seek the help of a voice coach.

Poor Grammar and Slang. Almost without exception, if your grammar is poor, you might as well forget a long-term career ladder. Oh, you might get a job and decent pay but at the point you decide you want to advance and fill a senior manager role, you are dead in the water.

Stop and ask yourself how many senior corporate managers from reputable, wellknown corporations have you personally met who have poor grammar and language usage.

Do you think you will be paraded in front of an investor group to do a presentation to raise capital or communicate the growth

(power building).

The fact that you have a cat and two dogs and came from somewhere, USA isn't that germane to your being hired. I interviewed one client and after 20 minutes, I just wanted to see how long he would actually ramble, he looked at me and finally said, "I guess I blew that, huh?" Point made.

Indecisive. As you should know by now, people hire you because you can solve problems. Solving problems means that you can construct a plan of action, make a decision, and then properly execute it, regardless of the problem being managed. Go back to the SHARE exercises and practice your answers before your interview sessions. Know what you want from the company and the job before you walk into the interview.

Being Intolerant. I don't know of any organization worth its salt that actually likes hiring bigots, critical or generally intolerant people, do you? If you have an opinion about a particular ethnic group or belief system, keep your mouth shut and hold your opinions to yourself.

Your personal opinions are just that, personal; don't take them to the office with you. Working as a professional is about focus on business. If you feel strongly that your opinions and personal beliefs are in conflict with company policies or workforce makeup, then look elsewhere.

Smoking or chewing gum. Don't ever smoke or chew gum in an interview, even if the interviewer offers you the opportunity. Don't ever go outside for a smoke between multiple interview sessions. It makes your breath smell, your clothes stink and if you

potential of their company?

I've had clients who graduated from really well-known schools that verbally murdered sentence structure. Upon hearing it, to those of us who are in hiring roles or screening roles, it is like a grenade going off and can have extremely unpleasant after-effects for you.

This is one of the silent prejudicial barriers that will never be legislated against in this society. Many persons I interview today, especially young people, don't seem to be as well-spoken or prepared these days, but that is the subject for another book.

Lack of Planning. Almost always, you will be asked to tell them what your long or short-range goals are or why you want to work at this company. If you can't provide them with a well thought out answer, you look unconcerned, unprepared and unprofessional. Any one of these will eliminate you from further consideration.

Lack of confidence. If you seem too nervous or ill at ease, you could not only make the interviewer feel nervous too, but also have them begin to suspect you might have something to hide.

The way you make sure to control this is to practice what you have prepared – over and over and over and over and over and keep repeating it until it is good enough. When you think it is good enough, remember my rule stating, "good enough, never is."

Talking about your past failures. The only time, and I mean the only time, you ever talk about "the" past failure (notice singular case) is when they ask you the interview question, "tell us about a past

put a mint in your mouth to cover it up, you violate rule number one – nothing in your mouth. More and more companies are now implementing a no-smoke or limited smoke zone at their companies. Every day, more are adopting a "no-hiring smokers" policy. Be smart, be kind to others and yourself and just plain don't smoke. In fact, just quit and you will be better off.

Whining. "Nobody likes a whiner, but everybody loves a winner."

Lack of a Sincere, "Thank You." When you leave the interview, please remember to say a simple "thank you." Don't do this, and you will probably be remembered for it. Thank them for their time, consideration, and informative session and BE GENUINE about it.

Slouching and Posture. Just like your dad or mom told you when you were younger, sit up straight, don't cross your legs, put your hands in your lap when not gesturing or making a point. Don't clasp your hands behind your head, don't look at the ceiling, don't swing or jiggle your crossed legs (if you must cross them) and for sure, don't pull or scratch at any of your body parts.

Lack of Verbal Expression. Only full sentences with understandable answers should come from your mouth. No "technojargon" unless you are interviewing with a "techno" person who asks you to explain a complex, technical issue and you are absolutely certain they will understand your answer.

Think about this a moment. You are being asked a question and they expect an answer. If you give them a simple "yes" or "no," you will have completely given up

failure you've had and how you handled it". What a great opportunity to take one of your SHARE stories that you have prepared ahead of time and share to your heart's content.

Why? Because you have the chance to turn a negative into a positive with the "E" portion of the SHARE story. This will demonstrate you are smart enough to learn from mistakes and to correct or modify your decision-making procedures to be a better manager or whatever you are. Please don't tell the worst thing that ever happened. Be smart enough to pick a not-so-bad story then build on that.



Making excuses or being evasive. Being evasive is a really bad interview technique. If you don't know the answer to something, tell them you don't

and immediately follow up with, "I will provide you the answer in an email or follow-up interview." You may not come off looking quite as professional, but they know you are honest and not a BS artist and will also realize you know how to deal with uncertainty and pressure. Then, follow up. Not to do so will eliminate your future with that company. Putting it in a more positive light, you get another shot at the interviewer.

another wonderful opportunity to communicate why they should hire you. It's like going to the battlefield without any ammunition in your gun.

The good thing about this list is that everything on it can be cured. The difficult part is admitting that you have any of these problems.



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