

The Top Ten Ways to Screw Up an Employment Interview

Regina Clark, CSP

1. Show up late.

If you are late for a job interview, the interviewer will assume that you will be late for work. If you have a legitimate reason for being late, for example there was a bad car accident and the road was closed, you are expected to call the interviewer as soon as possible. Do not rely on sending a text message or email, an immediate phone call is better. It's always a good idea to have the cell phone number of the interviewer handy just in case you need it.

2. Have a sloppy appearance.

You will never get the chance to make a second first impression. You are supposed to be at your best for a job interview. If you can afford to, buy a new suit, tie, shirt, blouse, etc. Make sure that you are well groomed which means clean shaven, pressed clothes, clean nails, etc. Your appearance speaks volumes about who you are and where you are going. If you have tattoos and body piercing, you might want to cover the tattoos and remove distracting body jewelry. Not all employers appreciate visible tattoos, especially if you are interviewing for a job that deals with the general public.

3. Failure to answer the questions.

When an interviewer asks a question, answer the question directly. If you need time to think, take the time to think. The interviewer will appreciate a direct answer. If the question is a closed ended question like, *Are you available to relocate?* A yes or no answer is fine. When the interviewer asks an open ended question like *Tell me about a time when you took initiative to get a project completed.* The interviewer is looking for a specific example. Take your time and give the interviewer a good answer. Do not answer by being vague and saying something like, *I always take initiative.*

4. Bad mouthing your prior employer or supervisor.

It is never professional to burn bridges or bad mouth others. An interviewer will perceive this as a weakness. If you really hated your prior employer or boss you can say something like - *My prior position wasn't a good fit for me.*

5. Not understanding the job requirements.

When you search for a new job, you must find out the requirements of the job to make sure that you are a good match. If the position requires that you:

- speak Spanish,
- are available for international travel,
- and that you relocate to Chicago,

you must meet the requirements BEFORE the interview. If you don't know what the requirements are, you will waste your time and the interviewers' time. If you are working with a search firm, you can find out if the employer has any flexibility with the job requirements.

6. Using inappropriate language and/or poor grammar.

When you use inappropriate or offensive language during an interview, the interviewer will assume that that is the way you typically communicate. I can not think of any employer anywhere that wants an employee to use offensive language. As a matter of fact, when employees use inappropriate or offensive language, there is usually a performance problem and the offensive language could lead to creating a hostile work environment for others. Using poor grammar simply communicates lack of education.

7. Sharing confidential trade secrets.

When an interviewee shares confidential information about past employers, the interviewer will realize that in the future this candidate might share trade secrets about the new organization. This behavior is unethical and dishonest, not traits that employers are looking for! There is absolutely no explanation for sharing confidential information. If an interviewer asks for information that is off limits, respond by saying, *I'm not at liberty to share that information.*

8. Failing to provide references.

If you can't provide references, it looks like you are hiding something. A prepared candidate will show up at the employment interview with a list of references with current phone numbers and email addresses. Make sure that you let people know that you will be using them as references so they won't be caught off guard when a potential employer calls. You also need to make sure that there are

no inappropriate pictures or damaging information about you online. Employers will Google your name as part of a reference check. I recently heard of an employer taking away the offer of an internship to a college student because there was a picture of the student on Facebook using a bong.

9. Inability to make eye contact with the person that is interviewing you.

Looking directly at the interviewer during the interview communicates that you are paying attention, focused and listening. When you answer questions, you must make eye contact. Using good eye contact communicates confidence and self assurance. Years ago, I interviewed a very experienced executive that looked great “on paper”. During the employment interview, she never made eye contact. Her inability to make eye contact eliminated her as a possible candidate for the job.

10. Failure to do your homework about the company, the industry, and the position for which you are applying.

Part of your preparation for the employment interview is to research the organization and find out as much as you can about the organization, the industry, and the position. Obviously, the internet and the organizations’ website are good places to start. Checking out your alumni association might also provide helpful. If you find a fellow alumnus through a social networking site, such as Linked In, who works for the organization, you might be able to make a valuable connection.

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