

UMSL
Office of Multicultural Student Services

11 Mistakes to Avoid During an Interview

Mistake #1: Show up late and think it doesn't matter. Anticipate getting lost, getting stuck in traffic, spending 10 minutes looking for parking. Time is money and the person interviewing you has set aside a period of time for you. You've just wasted his time and that's a bad thing. It also plants the seed in his head that you are someone who doesn't plan for contingencies and are likely to be chronically late for work if he hires you.

Mistake #2: Keep your cell phone on so he'll know just how important you are. A big no-no. Turn off your cell phone -- off altogether -- before entering the door to that office. You only have a brief window of time with your interviewer and you want to make sure that you have no interruptions that might break the interviewer's concentration. It also pays deference to the interviewer and shows how important this job interview is to you. Plus, isn't self-importance one of the deadly sins? It should be.

Mistake #3: Offer a limp handshake. People who do this are generally intimidated by the situation. Don't let that be you. There is an art to hand-shaking. It goes like this: Extend your right hand in vertical position with the thumb upright and fingers extended. Shake web to web firmly. Don't squeeze so hard that a trip to the ER becomes necessary and just shake with two pumps, then release. Also, wait for the interviewer to extend his hand first. If the interviewer is seated at the desk when you enter the room, wait for her to rise and walk around the desk to greet you. You don't want to invade the interviewer's personal space.

Mistake #4: Chat up a storm. When you get nervous, there's a tendency to verbally rush in and fill the silence ala Chatty Cathy. Don't do it. The key to being a good conversationalist is to listen and ask thoughtful questions. Do your research beforehand.

Mistake #5: Slouching. It seems your mother was right. People who stand with erect shoulders make a better impression. Don't slouch. Stand up straight.

Mistake #6: Pretend the interviewer is your new BFF. A major no-no. Don't act too familiar. Maintain a professional distance and don't get too personal. Avoid nosy questions and don't offer the fact that you were out dancing until 2 a.m. and pounding back Cosmopolitans.

Mistake #7: Ignore body language. Actually, you give a lot away by how you sit. Gaché says to keep your arms and legs uncrossed and be aware of excessive fidgeting. No foot tapping, hair twirling or nail biting. Crossed limbs signal that you are on the defensive and uncomfortable and send the message that you'd rather be on a spaceship to the moon than at this interview. The best combat for nervousness is

preparation and maybe some relaxation techniques. Women should sit with ankles crossed and angled toward the right. Place your left hand on your left thigh and your right hand on top of that. Hand gestures are wonderful, if kept in proportion. Never flail. For men, feet and knees are shoulder-width apart and hands are top of the thighs near the knees.

Mistake #8: Remain unsmiling to convey your seriousness. In fact, you should smile a lot. Be happy -- maybe you're getting a job! The job market right now is cutthroat competition and even if you are feeling discouraged, put on your happy face and "fake it until you make it," says Gaché. There is nothing worse than a bad attitude -- and that includes feeling depressed. Leave your personal baggage at home. Nobody wants to hire a Debbie Downer or Negative Nellie.

Mistake #9: Let the employer know just how entitled you are to this position. Yes, you used to head up a division of 200 employees. Look at the cubicle this company is offering and keep the eye-rolling to yourself. If you don't want this job, the next 300 guys do. Get over yourself and welcome to the New World Order. Leave your sense of entitlement at home.

Mistake #10: You may think snail mail thank-you notes went the way of eight-track tapes. Sorry, but they haven't in this situation. Send a handwritten, snail-mail thank-you note. Not e-mail, snail mail. Yes children, they still sell stamps, although there's a good chance the price of them has gone up since you last used one. Writing a thank-you note demonstrates professionalism. You'll stand out because most other applicants won't bother. You can also add a comment or insight that you forgot during the interview. And writing a thank-you note gives you another opportunity to restate your interest in the position. Saying thank you leaves a strong and positive impression.

Mistake # 11: Treat an interview over a meal as if you were dining with your pals. Meal interviews are standard operating procedure for a lot of jobs in high-end sales. And you are being tested on more than your table manners. It's a chance for the boss to observe your public behavior. It's important to treat wait staff with respect. Some tips: Don't order saucy pasta or a big plate of beef ribs. Absolutely don't order alcohol unless your host does first, but even then, it still may be a test. It's best to refrain. Business shouldn't be discussed until your host brings it up, generally after the meal.