

# Avoid These 10 Interview Bloopers

by Deborah Walker

We've all heard stories of job candidates who looked great on paper but who were absolute disasters in person. With fewer and fewer interview opportunities available in this competitive market, it's essential to make the best possible first impression. You can learn from the mistakes of others and avoid the top 10 worst interview blunders.

**Poor handshake:** The three-second handshake that starts the interview is your first opportunity to create a great impression. But all too often an interview is blown right from the start by an ineffective handshake. Once you've delivered a poor handshake, it's nearly impossible to recover your efforts to build rapport. Here are some examples:

- The Limp Hand (or "dead fish"): Gives the impression of disinterest or weakness
- The Tips of the Fingers: Shows lack of ability to engage.
- The Arm Pump: Sincerity is questionable, much like an overly aggressive salesman.

Even if you're a seasoned professional, don't assume you have avoided these pitfalls. Your handshake may be telling more about you than you know. Ask for honest critiques from several friends who aren't afraid to tell you the truth.

**Talking too much:** In my recruiting days, I abhorred over-talkative candidates. So did most of my client employers. Over-talking takes a couple of forms:

- Taking too long to answer direct questions. The impression: This candidate just can't get to the point.
- Nervous talkers. The impression: This candidate is covering up something or is outright lying.

To avoid either of these forms of over-talking, practice answering questions in a direct manner. Avoid nervous talking by preparing for your interview with role-play

**Talking negatively about current or past employers/managers:** The fastest way to talk yourself out of a new job is to say negative things. Even if your last boss was Attila the Hun, never, never state your ill feelings about him/her. No matter how reasonable your complaints, *you* will come out the loser if you show that you disrespect your boss because the interviewer will assume that you would similarly trash him or her. When faced with the challenge of talking about former employers, make sure you are prepared with a positive spin on your experiences.

**Showing up late or too early:** One of the first lessons in job-search etiquette is to show up on time for interviews. Many job-seekers don't realize, however, that showing up too early often creates a poor first impression as well. Arriving more than 10 minutes early for an interview is a dead giveaway that the job seeker has too much time on his or her hands, much like the last one picked for the softball team. Don't diminish your candidate desirability by appearing desperate. Act as if your time were as valuable as the interviewer's. Always arrive on time, but never more than 10 minutes early.

**Treating the receptionist rudely:** Since the first person you meet on an interview is usually a receptionist, this encounter represents the first impression you'll make. Don't mistake low rank for low input. Often that receptionist's job is to usher you into your interview. The receptionist has the power to pave your way positively or negatively before you even set eyes on the interviewer. The interviewer may also solicit the receptionist's opinion of you after you leave.

**Asking about benefits, vacation time or salary:** What if a car salesman asked to see your credit report before allowing you to test drive the cars? That would be ridiculous, and you'd walk away in disgust. The effect is about the same when a job-seeker asks about benefits or other employee perks during the first interview. Wait until you've won the employer over before beginning that discussion.

**Not preparing for the interview:** Nothing communicates disinterest like a candidate who hasn't bothered to do pre-interview research. On the flip side, the quickest way to a good impression is to demonstrate your interest with a few well thought out questions that reflect your knowledge of their organization.

**Verbal ticks:** An ill-at-ease candidate seldom makes a good impression. The first signs of nervousness are verbal ticks. We all have them from time to time -- "umm," "like," "you know." Ignore the butterflies in your stomach and put up a front of calm confidence by avoiding verbal ticks. You can also sometimes avoid verbal ticks by pausing for a few seconds to gather your thoughts before each response.

One of the best ways to reduce or eliminate them is through role-play. Practice sharing your best success stories ahead of time, and you'll feel more relaxed during the real interview.

**Not enough/too much eye contact:** Either situation can create a negative effect. Avoid eye contact and you'll seem shifty, untruthful, or disinterested; offer too much eye contact, and you'll wear the interviewer out. If you sometimes have trouble with eye-contact balance, work this issue out ahead of time in an interview practice session with a friend.

**Failure to match communication styles:** It's almost impossible to make a good first impression if you can't communicate effectively with an interviewer. But you can easily change that situation by mirroring the way the interviewer treats you. For instance:

- If the interviewer seems all business, don't attempt to loosen him/her up with a joke or story. Be succinct and businesslike
- If the interviewer is personable, try discussing his/her interests. Often the items on display in the office can offer a clue.
- If asked a direct question, answer directly. Then follow up by asking if more information is needed.

Allowing the interviewer to set the tone of conversation can vastly improve your chances of making a favorable impression. You can put the interviewer at ease -- and make yourself seem more like him or her -- by mirroring his or her communication style.

### **Final Thoughts**

Just as a strong resume wins you an opportunity to interview, strong interview skills will win you consideration for the job. You already know that you won't earn an interview unless your resume sets you apart as a candidate of choice. Similarly, you should know that polishing your interview skills can mean the difference between getting the job offer -- and being a runner-up.

Start your job search with a resume that creates a stellar first impression, then back those facts up with your extraordinary interview skills. You will have made yourself a better candidate by avoiding these ten interview pitfalls. And no one will have to talk about you as the candidate who "almost" got the job

## **Practice Interview Questions**

What can you tell me about yourself?

Why do you want to work for this company?

Why have you chosen this field as your career?

Why did you leave your last job?

What salary do you expect?

What are your career objectives five years from now? Ten years from now?

What do you feel your strong points are? Your weak points?

Which courses did you enjoy most in school?

Have you had trouble with any courses in school? Why?

How would you describe yourself?

How has your education prepared you for this position?

How do you define success?

In what way do you think you can make a contribution to this company?

What type of relationship do you feel should exist between a supervisor and subordinates?

What was your most rewarding experience during school?

Do you have plans to continue your education?

What have you gained from your extracurricular activities?

Are you more comfortable working in a large group or with just a few people?

How do you think you work under pressure?

What do you know about this company/job?

What do you feel is the most important aspect of a job?

Are you willing to relocate? Travel? Work overtime?

How do you spend your spare time?

How well do you get along with other people?

Why should I hire you?

# INTERVIEW RATING SHEET



Listed below are some qualities used to rate potential employees during an interview. After practicing an interview, how do you think you rate on these?

	Above Average 5	Average 3	Below Average 1
Ability to Talk			
Aggressiveness			
Appearance			
Courtesy			
Enthusiasm			
Intelligence			
Maturity			
Personality			
Poise			

Using the values given under each category, add the score for your answers and determine your rating on the following scale:

- 36 - 45      Ready for the interview
- 27 - 35      Might handle it; could use more practice
- 9 - 26        Definitely need more practice

## **SUMMARY**

### **To Do Or Not To Do, That Is The Difference**

#### **DO**

- Prepare a complete, attractive résumé that stresses your qualifications in a positive manner.
- Get permission from people you plan to use as references.
- Write an effective cover letter that really sells "you."
- Fill out the application completely, accurately, and legibly.
- Use the completed résumé as a reference for filling out the application.
- Arrive for the interview a few minutes early.
- Dress appropriately for the interview.
- Go to the interview alone.
- Bring résumé, social security card, work permits and licenses to the interview.
- Greet the receptionist and the interviewer courteously.
- Present yourself with confidence.
- Research the company.
- Be prepared to answer questions about yourself and your qualifications.
- Be prepared to ask questions about the company.
- Smile.
- Follow the interview with a thank-you letter.

#### **DO NOT**

- Do not present a résumé that was hastily put together or has typographical errors and smudges.
- Do not use a general, all-purpose résumé.
- Do not give inaccurate information.
- Do not present an application that is unreadable or incomplete.
- Do not arrive late for an interview.
- Do not wear jeans, wrinkled clothing, or outrageous jewelry to an interview.
- Do not overdo perfume or aftershave.
- Do not take friends or family to an interview.
- Do not act as if the receptionist and interviewer are doing themselves a favor by seeing you.
- Do not forget your manners.

## **MOST COMMON REASONS WHY PEOPLE ARE NOT HIRED**

- Bad personal appearance
- Too aggressive
- Unable to express self clearly
- Poor interest and enthusiasm
- No career planning, no goals
- Overly nervous, under confident
- Too much emphasis on money
- Not willing to start at the bottom
- Discourteous
- Immature
- Speaks ill of former employers
- Cannot make eye contact with interviewer
- Messy application form
- Late arrival for interview
- Did not show appreciation for interviewer's time
- Asked no questions about the company
- Could not give direct answers when questioned