

Interviewing Mistakes to Avoid, The 25 Worst Job Interview Mistakes

1. Arriving Late

Nothing makes a worse impression. If you can't turn up on time for the interview, what on earth would you do as an employee? If there's even a remote chance that weather, traffic or hard-to-follow directions might be a problem, leave absurdly early just to be sure.

2. Arriving Early

Don't arrive too early, either! Arrive (in the building) at 3:30 for a 4 o'clock interview. Arrive in the waiting area 10-15 minutes before the interview. Relax somewhere nearby, focus on the interview, have a drink of water, review your portfolio and employer research, and check hair and clothing.

3. Dressing Wrong

How you look has a lot to do with how you're "seen." Often in the very first few minutes of the interview, the decision is made whether it's going to be a turndown or a second interview. It either clicks on or it clicks off, and the remainder of the interview is spent validating that early judgment. Dressing too casually can ruin your chances. The safest choice for any interview is a tailored suit in a conservative color like black, navy, gray or tan. Even the executives in wildly creative fields will respect you for knowing that a job candidate should look businesslike.

4. Dressing in a Rush

If you select your clothes right before you leave, you won't have time to fix the loose button or wrinkled shirt you've just discovered. In the job interview, neatness counts. Try on your entire interview attire several days before the appointment. That way you can make any necessary improvements, repairs or purchases.

5. Smoking

In one Seattle University study, up to 90% of all executives surveyed said they would hire a nonsmoker over a smoker if their qualifications were equal. Anyway, smoking makes you look nervous. If you smoke, brush your teeth and use breath mints. Smell your clothes ... really! Yuck!

6. Drinking

Even if this is a lunch or dinner interview and others are ordering cocktails, it is always best to order mineral water or soda. Only if your host insists on buying a bottle of wine should you have a few sips from the glass to be social. Don't finish the glass, or they will pour you a new one. You need to be alert for this experience, not mellow.

7. Chewing Gum

Gum is not a good substitute for cigarettes or self-confidence. Gum chewing looks appropriate only in vintage movies.

8. Bringing Along a Friend or Relative

Don't laugh ... this happens! Tempting though it may be, resist the urge to bring someone along to hold your hand or help you fill out applications. Even being seen saying goodbye to your best friend or your spouse at the building door can make you look as if you didn't have the nerve to get there on your own. Being picked up afterward also reeks of dependency.

9. Not Doing All Your Homework

It is not necessary to memorize the company's annual sales and profit figures, but you should know something about their products or services. One candidate lost out on an AT&T interview by mentioning the company's involvement in a news story that had been about ITT. Check out information about employers on websites or in business magazines. Also remember, some of the best information can come from people who used to or currently work there.

10. Skipping a Dress Rehearsal

You wouldn't make a speech to a class or student organization without planning what you're going to say, yet people walk into job interviews every day just assuming that brilliant words will leap to their lips. Don't assume. Make a list of the questions you'd ask if you were interviewing someone for this job then rehearse the best answers using a tape recorder and/or a friend for feedback.

11. Not Admitting a Flaw

To the question, "What is your greatest weakness?," illustrate a weakness that you've tackled successfully. Respond by identifying the weakness, describing specific steps you have taken to improve, and communicating the results. For instance, "Lack of confidence in my presentation skills was a weakness when I first arrived at college. Since then, I have sought out situations where I was forced to develop stronger communication skills. I have taken a speech class where four class presentations were mandatory. And, as an officer in ASME, I have gradually become more confident in speaking to both large and small groups. I now realize the importance of having and continually improving excellent presentation skills." Be honest: Nobody believes you when you say your flaw is working too hard.

12. Not Knowing Your Own Strengths

Researching the company is only half your pre-interview homework assignment. You have to research yourself as well. You must know your own background so thoroughly that you are prepared to answer any question about it without hesitation and in enough detail to satisfy the interview. Hesitating, being vague on certain points, or groping for proper words destroys the effect you are trying to create. Make a list of ten work-related things you do well or know a lot about. Then, during your interview rehearsal, come up with graceful ways to bring them up.

13. Asking Too Many Questions

If you were the interviewer, would you hire someone who hijacked the entire interview and put you on the defensive? Enough said.

14. Not Asking Any

On the other hand, when the interviewer asks, "What questions do you have?," replying that he/she has covered the subject so well you don't have a thing to ask about is a bad idea, too. It makes you look uninterested, unimaginative or both. Take this opportunity to "close" the interview with a question or two. Also summarize your strengths and interests in a brief 1-2-minute statement, "In addition to my questions, I would like to emphasize my interest in working with your company. I feel I have the right background and specific skills, such as _____ to make immediate contributions and fit in with your existing team of engineers."

15. Inquiring About Benefits Too Soon

Ask not what the company can do for you but what you can do for the company—at least at this point in the selection process. If you seem more interested in the three-week vacation policy or the new dental plan than in actual job duties, the prospective boss may develop serious concerns about your priorities. Naturally, you have a right to know about the benefits package, but chances are the personnel representative or hiring manager will bring it up on his/her own. If this doesn't happen, you can broach the subject after an offer has been made in writing. Explain that the offer you will accept depends on the value of the whole compensation package.

16. Revealing Your Price Tag (never bring up \$\$)

Did you ever really want to buy a new "toy" before knowing how much it cost? It may have taught you to look at the tag first, in case the price is out of the question. Things work similarly in a job search. Let people discover your qualifications before they mention salary. If they ask about expectations, you might say, "Yes, I have some salary thoughts, but I need to know more about what the job entails." Or, "I have brought the UW-Madison ECS average salary statistics with me for our discussion, but I would need to look at the entire job offer package prior to making a decision." Or, "I am willing to consider any job offer you extend to me. What did you have in mind?"

17. Crying Discrimination

Not every recruiter knows exactly which questions aren't allowed; in complete innocence they may bring up a forbidden issue. Don't jump up and scream accusations. Instead, reassure him/her that you can handle all your responsibilities. Even if the intentions aren't honorable, a dramatic protest is unlikely to get you the job. If you don't get hired, then you can file a complaint. If you do, you can bring up the issue later as an employee—and make important changes from the inside.

18. Bad-Mouthing Your Boss

Never say anything negative about a person or employer for whom you have worked. It brands you as a complainer.

19. Name Dropping

Attempts to play "who do you know" with your interviewer have backfired. Drop the name of someone and it could turn out to be the hiring manager's worst enemy. Announce that you went to school with the chairman of the board's daughter, Felicia, and it can come off as elitist. Even worse, the interviewer may wonder why Felicia didn't ask her dad to put in a good word for you. A much better way to use inside contacts: Ask them to recommend or introduce you to the powers that be.

20. Energy Failure

It doesn't matter if you only slept four hours last night and are coming down with a cold. When you get to the interview, you have to appear bright-eyed and eager. Job candidates with lackluster attitudes rarely get the offer. Mental energy is what it takes, so psych yourself up before making your entrance. Some speakers play music right before presentations. Play an upbeat tune in your head. Think of yourself as a presenter whose show must go on.

21. Handshake Failure

A limp or otherwise distasteful handshake is like bad breath, one of those things that even your best friends may never tell you about. So try this: Go to a trusted buddy and say, "If I were going to develop the world's most perfect handshake, would I make mine a little firmer, a little more gentle, a little shorter, longer or what?" Then shake her or his hand to demonstrate.

22. Glancing at Your Watch

Clock-watching gives the impression that you're late for a more important date. Avoid that problem by asking beforehand, how much time you should allow for the interview. If the interviewer asks, "Will you have time to meet our vice president?" then you can check the time and make a decision.

23. Playing the Hero(ine)

In 999 of 1,000 jobs, you will work as part of a team. Never convey the message, "You guys have really messed it up, but I can show you how to turn this company around." Instead, stress how well your talents and experience would mesh with those of others in the department.

24. Losing Your Cool

Expect the unexpected. Occasionally, interviewers have been known to test job applicants by surprising them with loaded questions or blunt comments, such as, "What makes you think you can handle this job?" Remain calm, even though your injured ego may be fleeing for the nearest exit. Some companies like to see just how professional you are.

25. Lastly...

Now that you've absorbed the "do's and don'ts" of the job interview, feel free to set this aside, reflect on the purpose of the interview and its importance to you, and concentrate on what a fine job you will do. Then relax and be your best self.

Source: Thomas Staffing, www.thomas-staffing.com.