

Top 5 interview mistakes

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 interview opportunities available in our competitive job market, it's essential to make the best possible first impression. Learn from the mistakes of others and avoid these top five worst interview blunders:

1. Not preparing for the tough interview questions.

Like every job seeker, you probably have your own set of tough interview questions you hope will never be asked. The best strategy is to prepare ahead of time with answers to ALL of these questions.

2. Failure to match communication styles.

Making a great first impression is easier to do when you communicate effectively with your interviewer. The best way to do this is by mirroring his or her communication style. Allowing your interviewer to set the tone of the conversation will put him or her at ease and makes the conversation flow more naturally.

For instance:

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

3. Talking too much.

In my recruiting days, I abhorred over-talkative candidates, and so did most of my client employers who interviewed these candidates. Over-talking takes several 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, practice answering questions in a direct manner. Using role-playing in preparing for your interview will help you avoid excessive, nervous talking.



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4. Saying negative things about your current or past employers or managers.

Even if your last boss was Attila the Hun, avoid stating your ill feelings about the person or work situation. No matter how reasonable your complaints, your negative comments will be viewed as disrespect toward your boss. When faced with the challenge of talking about former employers, make sure you are prepared with a positive spin on your experiences.

5. Giving away too much salary and earnings information.

Candidates often weaken their future earning potential by speaking too freely about their current income. No matter the official salary range of the position you are interviewing for, your current earnings have an enormous effect on the size of the offer.

You already know that it takes a strong resume that sets you apart as a candidate of choice to be invited for an interview. The next step is to hone your interviewing skills to actually win job offers. Polishing your interviewing skills can mean the difference between getting the job and being a runner-up. ■

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