

FIRST IMPRESSIONS IN THE JOB INTERVIEW

How important are first impressions in an interview? The answer is simple – first impressions are critical. In fact, some studies have suggested that an employer often decides whether to hire or not hire a person in the first few minutes of the interview. Fair or not, it is a simple fact that first impressions are an important consideration in the hiring process. By following some simple strategies in this reference, you could be on your way to making the best impression you can with a prospective employer.

Interview Preparation

- ◆ Research the company and community. It will help you discuss formal and informal issues throughout the entire interview.
- ◆ Know how to get to the interview location, as well as parking arrangements. Leave sufficient time to arrive 10 minutes ahead of your scheduled interview.
- ◆ Dress appropriately. Even in today’s casual work environment, going to a job interview generally means getting reasonably dressed up. This means that nothing about your appearance – clothing, jewelry, hairstyle, perfume, etc. – falls outside the expected norm of that type of organization. A job interview is not the time to be the trendsetter, but rather to “fit in” with the organizational culture.

→ **HOT TIP:** A recent study found that interviewers rated 40 percent of all applicants as having grooming problems that created a negative first impression.

Arrival Advice

- ◆ Be polite and respectful to everyone you meet.
- ◆ Greet people by name. If you don’t catch the name, ask for it again.
- ◆ Give a firm handshake.
- ◆ Introduce yourself to the receptionist, explaining who you are and your purpose in being there.
- ◆ Give good eye contact to everyone you meet.

- ◆ Smile and relax.
- ◆ Be enthusiastic and eager about the opportunity to meet with the employer.
- ◆ Be yourself.

Nonverbal Strategies

- ◆ Act interested in the position. Lean slightly forward in your chair and make good eye contact throughout the interview.
- ◆ Eliminate annoying behaviors such as foot tapping, saying “ahhh” excessively, etc.
- ◆ Pay attention to the tone and volume of your voice.

Quickly Establishing Positive Relations

- ◆ Use the interviewer’s name as often as possible.
- ◆ Use Mr. or Ms. etc, unless invited to use first name.
- ◆ Use small talk whenever possible, but particularly in the first few minutes of the interview. Don’t be in too big of a rush to get down to business.
- ◆ In a genuine manner, note something of interest that you see in the interviewer’s office. It will help to provide a connection with him or her.

→ **HOT TIP:** Make sure that your résumé, letters, and thank you notes are neat and error free. These items create an impression too!

20 Interview Impressions NOT To Make

The following statements are actual notes written from interview evaluations conducted in a variety of organizations. Although somewhat humorous, they make several points to help you understand your goal of “a great first impression” in the job interview.

1. This associate is really not so much of a has-been, but more definitely a won't be.
2. Works well when under constant supervision and cornered like a rat in a trap.
3. When he opens his mouth, it seems it is only to change whichever foot was previously there.
4. This young woman has delusions of adequacy.
5. He sets low personal standards and then consistently fails to achieve them.
6. This employee should go far and the sooner he starts, the better.
7. Not the sharpest knife in the drawer.
8. A room temperature IQ.
9. Got a full six-pack, but lacks the plastic thingy to hold it together.
10. A gross ignoramus – 144 more times worse than an ordinary ignoramus.
11. A photographic memory but with the lens cover glued on.
12. A prime candidate for natural deselection.
13. Bright as Alaska in December.
14. Donated his brain to science before he was done using it.
15. Has two brains: one is lost and the other is looking for it.
16. Gates are down, lights are flashing, but the train isn't coming.
17. If you gave her a penny for her thoughts, you would get change.
18. If you stand close enough to him, you can hear the ocean.
19. Take him an hour and a half to watch 60 minutes.
20. Wheel is turning, but the hamster is dead.

How NOT to Create a Positive Impression:

Actual Case Studies from *Job Hunting for Dummies*, 2nd Edition:

1. A candidate waiting in the lobby opened a large bag of cheese crunchies and began eating them. When the interviewer greeted him, he extended a hand covered with orange dust.
2. The interviewer walked into the lobby to meet a nervous candidate, whose mouth displayed a ring of antacid from the bottle he was holding.
3. A candidate tilted his chair back and put his feet on top of the interviewer's desk.
4. A candidate pulled his pet iguana from his briefcase, saying, “I didn't want to bring him here, but he hates to be alone.”
5. A candidate who was chewing gum noticed the interviewer staring at her mouth. The candidate said, “Oh, I'm sorry, did you want a piece?”
6. A new graduate came to his interview wearing sunglasses and licking a lollipop. He commented to the hiring manager, “This is my style... you can take it or leave it.”
7. A candidate took a framed graduation photo from the interviewer's desk and said, “Is this your daughter? You look so young to have a kid that age.”