

Top Four Interviewing Mistakes

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Who would want to undermine his or her interview performance? Job candidates do it all the time. If you're inclined to sabotage your job interviews, follow these guidelines to make sure you fail. They'll guarantee you won't get the job you deserve. If you wish to sidestep these landmines, heed the advice that follows.

1. **Focus on negative thoughts.**

You may be the best candidate for the job. But if negativity dominates your mind, no one will discover what you have to offer. You may look professional on the outside, but if on the inside you're bombarding your mind with cheap shots, you're set up to fail.

To eliminate these threats to your candidacy, try these tactics:

The day before your interview, rehearse likely questions with a friend. Ask for a critique. If it's less than glowing, rehearse until you seem confident but not cocky.

An hour before your interview, study your resume. Review your accomplishments, experiences and competencies.

Half an hour before your interview, take several deep breaths. Tell yourself you've met tougher challenges. There always will be other interviews for other jobs. Confirm your ability to remain cool under fire.

Five minutes before the interview, recite a verse or some other piece from memory. It could be a Christmas carol, a corporate mission, the Pledge of Allegiance--anything that clears your mind and allows you to refocus on your objective.

It's important to recognize the stress caused by the "foreign" setting of an interview, says Steve Conner, director of consulting services for Performance Concepts International Ltd., a training firm in Rochester, N.Y. Recognize your personal strengths, he says. Armed with self-knowledge, you can control more of the interview and become an active, rather than passive, participant.

Take only life-affirming thoughts with you on interviews, says Linda Cambareri-Fernandez, a New York City psychologist in private practice. Review your accomplishments and visualize yourself following the same pattern of success with the potential new job.

2. **Sound like everyone else.**

Interviewers tend to ask the same questions. "Tell me about yourself" is a common one. You won't stand out from the crowd if you reiterate your resume.

How can your responses help you make an impression? Outstanding candidates discuss what isn't on

their documents. For example, this answer would distinguish you from others: "I'm a non-conforming conformist. I'll conform with the policies and procedures, regulations and rules established by the firm. But if I'm ever asked to do something I consider unethical, I won't conform."

Dr. Cambareri-Fernandez says your unique style of speaking also sets you apart. While you want to stand out, you don't want to seem bizarre. She suggests mirroring others' behavior to make them feel comfortable. For example, you could match your rate of speaking to your interviewer's.

3. Say what first comes to mind. I

If you answer every question immediately on hearing it, you may create the impression that you're over-eager or you don't take enough time to assess a problem before offering a solution.

Some questions require a pause before you respond. However, pausing before every question may make you appear overly cautious or even nervous. Some pauses refresh and some proclaim a dull wit. Think of the question-and-answer process as a continuum. You can answer most questions quickly by thinking about your answer as the words leave the interviewer's mouth. Anticipate the second half of the question as you formulate the first part of your response. To keep the pace of your exchange flowing smoothly, try these tactics.

Listen closely. Often the kernel of your response is in the question. If your nervousness distracts you, you might miss the point.

Paraphrase to buy time. It's the ninth-grade English-class essay tactic: restate the question before answering. For example, if asked, "Why might others find it hard to work with you?" you could say, "I've never actually had anyone tell me it was hard to work with me. But if I had to identify my own faults, I'd say I can become very involved, perhaps too involved, with a project that interests me."

Ask a question. Seeking clarification buys time and you can fine-tune your answer. Of course, try to avoid, "Could you repeat that question?"

4. Ignore interview protocol.

Interviewing has its own specific set of expectations and practices. Appearance is important, but savvy interviewers don't overplay it, says Rob White, director of materials for ITT Cannon, an electronics company in Santa Ana, Calif. In these days of business casual attire, other issues take precedence. Interviewers look for evidence of character and citizenship. Providing an anecdote, for instance, mentioning how you handled a delicate situation, can provide insight.

Mr. White also pays attention to a candidate's body language and his ability to maintain appropriate eye contact. Further, he's impressed by candidates who call or write to thank him for the interview and inquire about the status of the hiring decision. Such actions, he feels, usually reveal the candidate's interest in the position. Ignoring this protocol is a surefire way to make sure you don't get the job.