

Beware of Hidden Interview Pitfalls

Suit. *Check*

Two hours of company research. *Check*

Three hours practicing answers to interview questions. *Check*

Extra copies of resume. *Check*

Fancy leather folder thingy to hold extra copies of resume. *Check*

Limp, wet handshake. Huh?

All the expert interview advice and all the practice in the world still might not prepare you for hidden traps that can trip you up and foil your job interview.

Weak Handshake

Science backs up what the etiquette books have been saying all along, that a firm handshake helps make a good first impression for both males and females. A University of Alabama study found there is a substantial relationship between the features that characterize a firm handshake (strength, vigor, duration, eye contact and completeness of grip) and a favorable first impression.

The proper handshake should be firm, with an energy that communicates sincerity, strength and professionalism, says Dianne M. Daniels, a certified image coach and author of *Polish and Presence: 31 Days to a New Image*. Extend your arm with your hand outstretched with thumb straight up. Slide your hand into the other person's until your webs touch and give a firm, not squeezing, pump.

Not Asking Questions

Not asking an interview questions sends a signal that you don't know enough about the business to ask an intelligent question, or it shows that you don't see yourself within the environment of the company. At best, it shows a lack of creativity. Your questions do more than show your interest; they can also provide valuable information you can use in assessing the job.

If you are a good listener, you should be able to follow up on something the interviewer said during your visit. Ask him or her to expand on what was said. This shows you were attentive and also shows where your interests lie.

Most career counselors advise applicants to have a number of questions rehearsed and ready to go. Many of the prepared topics will be discussed during the course of the interview, but there should be some left over at the end. Have several ready so you can return the serve.

Employment Background Check

Statistics show that the number of companies conducting background checks is growing. For some jobs, screening is required by federal or state law. For others, it's a way for employers to learn more about each candidate and ensure the hiring decisions they make are good ones.

Some employers will use your credit history to gauge your level of responsibility. Whether a valid assumption or not, employers who run credit checks are likely to believe that if you are not reliable in paying your bills, then you will not be a reliable employee. Unfortunately, a bad credit report can work against you in your search for employment.

So you won't be surprised, you can do your own check and make sure the information is correct. Order a copy of your credit report, check court and DMV records and ask to see a copy of your personnel file from your old job. One option CareerBuilder.com offers is SureCheck, which enables job seekers to increase their marketability by pre-screening their own personal histories and credentials for potential employers.

Brainteaser Questions

Tell me about yourself. Why does this job interest you? How many quarters would you have to stack to reach the top of the Empire State Building? Designed to measure candidates' intelligence, creativity and analytical skills, brainteasers and logic questions often involve obscure subjects.

Recruiters aren't that concerned with whether a candidate comes up with the precise answer, but rather insight into their thought process and whether they work thorough problems in a logical manner.

These types of questions are meant to make you think on your feet; the trick is to start big and take it one step at a time. The only sure-fire way to fail at these questions is to be stumped. Offer up your ideas even if they seem bizarre.

Interview Checklist

You just scheduled an interview. Congratulations! All your hard work putting the finishing touches on your résumé, networking and job searching has finally paid off. Follow these interview tips and you're sure to nail the interview and be the winning candidate:

Be prepared.

This means more than merely making extra copies of your résumé. It means having researched the industry and company, as well as thought about how your skills match the responsibilities of the position, says recruiter and career coach Rick Nelles.

Dress to impress.

Your interview attire should be tastefully simple, clean and wrinkle-free. Forgo trendy for conservative when deciding what to wear.

Be on time.

Being on time for an interview really means arriving at least 15 minutes before your scheduled interview. Not only will your punctuality be noted, the extra time allows you to calm down, focus and review your résumé and notes you prepared for the interview.

Make eye contact.

Greet your interviewer with a firm handshake, warm smile and direct eye contact. Avoiding the gaze of the interviewer can make you appear inexperienced, unsure of yourself and untrustworthy.

Show your enthusiasm.

If you're locked in a dead heat for a job with other candidates, you need to find a way to stand out. "In a tight candidate race, the most enthusiastic almost always gets the job," says Martin Yate, career coach and author of several career advice books, including "Knock 'Em Dead 2007 -- The Ultimate Job Search Guide." Your enthusiasm for the job tells the recruiter you will be a highly-motivated employee.

Demonstrate that you're a team player.

Employers want a team worker who can take direction, Yate advises. No one wants to hire an unmanageable employee. They also are looking for someone who can galvanize a team to work toward a common goal. So give some examples of how you worked together with colleagues to tackle a large project or service an important client.

Sell yourself.

The interview is a sales pitch in a sense. Have a list of things you want to make sure the interviewer knows about you and be ready to bring specific topics up on your own if they are not adequately touched on in the interview.

Be honest.

You should never stretch the truth on your résumé or during the interview. Today's technology makes fact checking far reaching and lightning quick. Remember, companies are looking to fill a position, not hand out the Nobel Peace Prize. You don't have to be a Renaissance man (or woman), just the right person for the job.

Act professionally.

You would think this goes without saying, but candidates often need to be reminded not to chew gum, slouch or steer the conversation too far off work-related themes. Sit up straight and conduct yourself with a professional demeanor at all times.

Ask questions.

An interview is meant to be a fact-finding mission for both the interviewer and the interviewee. Don't be afraid to ask questions about the responsibilities of the job, clients or projects. In fact, it is to your detriment to be completely passive and reactive in an interview. If you do not engage the interviewer, you appear weak and ineffective.

Say "thank you."

Close the interview with another firm handshake, a "thank you" and a smile. Ask when they will be making their decision and if you should follow-up. Later, send a note or e-mail thanking the interviewer for the time spent and letting them know you are interested in the position and will contact them again soon.