

Four Ways to Shine During An Interview by Jeanetta Chrystie

Today's competitive job market requires preparation before an interview. People who try to "wing it" during an interview, often expecting this to lessen their nervousness, fail to realize they are competing with many other hopeful job hunters who will have better prepared for each interview opportunity. An interview is not a job offer, it is the next step beyond the slush pile of resumes that employers receive.

During the interview, your prospective new employer is looking for specific information from you that rarely come across clearly on paper. Job requirements may include: someone who gets along well with diverse individuals, a person who listens attentively to others, someone who has good communication skills, and other skills that are best assessed in person. Interviewers not only want to verify what is printed in your resume, but also to "get a feel" for who you are as a person. Will you be a good fit in their department? How does your personality come across? What non-verbal signals do you give off?

To improve your chances of being called back for a second interview, or better yet, being offered the job soon; follow these steps before each and every interview. Yes, it takes time; so how much do you really want that job?

Do Your Homework – Learn all you can about the organization for which you hope to work. You can read from their web site, and also do searches on the company name to locate articles written about them. Sometimes an organization will have a marketing or publicity department that writes articles for magazines or business journals. Some may post financial information online. Others may actually have personnel pages available so you can read about the people who may be present at your interview. Rarely is an interview only with one person these days, unless it is with a paid "head hunter" who weeds out the candidates to recommend the top 3-5 people for the employer to interview.

Prepare Answers to Potential Interview Questions – Potential interview questions are available in many print and online locations. Prepare your answers to those questions; write them down if necessary, then create note cards with key phrases to jog your memory when you're nervous and tongue-tied during an actual interview. If possible, practice with someone. Keep your answers concise; the more you ramble, the more likely you are to "trip yourself up" verbally.

Put Your Best Foot Forward – You have 7-10 seconds to make your initial impression on an interviewer. Be sure your grooming is good, your clothing clean and well-fitting, and nothing is stuck between your teeth or on your face. Arrive a few minutes early to visit the restroom, check yourself in the mirror, and give yourself a confident smile. Dress to fit the position, or many head hunters now recommend you dress to the level of the position above the one for which you are applying. Remember your manners: be polite, shake hands firmly but not crushing, smile, make eye contact with each interviewer in the room, and thank them for their time.

Actively Participate without Taking Over the Interview– Avoid simple "yes" and "no" answers to questions. Be prepared with brief examples to avoid sounding like a "number 8 fortune-telling ball" toy. However, do not take over the interview by rambling on with long stories of your wondrous adventures, especially non-business-related stories. Most interviewers have a set length of time that are willing and able to allot for your interview; if you take up that time with long stories, they won't get to important questions—leaving you out of consideration for the job. Beware loaded questions, such as "describe your worst boss" and have a short, prepared answer ready to go; then quickly move on to a positive statement before they ask the next question. Watch their non-verbal cues, and smile.