

First Impressions in the Interview

First impressions play an important role in life, and a prime example would be the dating scene. We draw conclusions about strangers before they are even introduced to us. Tailored clothing? He must be a tidy person. Pulling her hair back with a nervous gesture? She must be nervous to meet me. However, after a short introduction, we might change our minds about this person. For instance, we might discover that what we thought was a shy person really has a lot of confidence, or that someone who looked tense at first glance actually teaches yoga and has a very tranquil character.

The problem with job interviews is that potential employers do not have the time to get to know you and. In fact, they may have already formulated an opinion about you based on your resume or in the first couple minutes of the job interview. You have very little time to introduce yourself properly or maintain and change that first impression you give.

Resumes – the key to first impressions

A professional resume is not only about your accomplishments; it is the very first impression your potential employer gets of you, and is critical to opening doors to your career. In fact, the "why me" that you convey in your resume has about 40 seconds – the average initial screening time of resumes – to make a good impression.

But conveying that message is not a simple task and, of course, you are up against stiff competition for the job. In order to come out on top, you need to invest time and effort into tailoring the contents and design of the resume to make it appropriate to the needs of the targeted recruiters. The idea is to shift the entire contents, wording, and marketing to meet the needs of the employer, so that you will be remembered and called in for the interview. Remember: the goal is not only to receive an interview, but to impress the potential employer enough that you can be in a strong position for salary negotiations. You can refer back to the education, skills, knowledge and experience in your resume when making the argument for your salary.

Designer resumes

As employers have an average of 30-40 seconds to formulate an opinion about your resume, visual elements like your choice of font become significant. Simplicity is key, as a resume with special flowery or distinct fonts only becomes difficult to read for your potential employer and may distract him from the content that you are trying to convey.

There are several standard fonts for writing resumes. The most simple and popular of which is Arial font. Not only has Arial proven to be easier to read by those with disabilities, its visual simplicity allows employers to understand the message quickly and easily during that initial 40-second scan.

Formatting is also important to the visual clarity of your resume. Use short, concise sentences, put your writing in bullet form, and bold headings, so that your recruiter or potential employer can easily scan to find what they are looking for. Always design your resume with that “first impression” in mind. The better you present yourself on your resume, the better your first impression will be in person, and the easier your interview will be.

Body language

A job interview is one of those situations in which we have the most at stake and it is most critical for us to ensure that we convey the message we want, using every means at our disposal. Preparation includes how we introduce ourselves and our previous roles, how we talk about our weaknesses, what we want to say, and what we are going to wear. We even plan our personal hygiene routine ahead of time. However, upon meeting our interviewer, it is our non-verbal communication, or body language, that will have the greatest impact on the impression. Thus, it is critical that we use our body language in a positive way, to strengthen the message we want to create or, at the very least, not obstruct what we are trying to say.

So what are some key things you need to know about body language in an interview? One thing to be aware of is face touching. Touching one’s face during the job interview will make your interviewer question what you have to say and distract from what you are really trying to say. For instance, touching the bridge of the nose conveys that you are tense or tired. Hiding the mouth conveys that what you are saying may not be reliable. Eye rubbing implies that you do not feel comfortable with what you have to say, and that you might distort the truth. Women might be subtler with their movements by fussing with their make-up, for example. However, no matter how subtle the movement, the message is the same – you are not comfortable with what you are saying in the interview.

The neck - rubbing the neck may indicate disappointment or frustration.

Clasping of the hands – clasping your hands behind your head is a gesture of dominance that says to the person in front of you, “I’m the boss” – obviously, not an appropriate message to convey to your future boss! Crossing of the arms across the chest indicates a negative or defensive attitude, while placing the hand on the chest conveys that you are honest and sincere. So where should you put your hands and

arms the rest of the time? A general, neutral position to relax your hands is either on the chair (if there are armrests) or on your thighs, palms facing down.

Hand movement – movement of the hands while you talk allows you to express a variety of positive messages. Open, broad gestures help to convey honesty, openness, and confidence, which enhances your verbal message and helps your future employer visualize you as a positive part of his team.

Sitting position – In general, feet should be on the floor, relaxed, knees closer together for women or spread about hip width for men. For men, spreading the knees far out to the side can be considered casual and rude. Crossed legs can indicate defensiveness, defiance, or even arrogance, depending on the upper body language. In any case, women should avoid showing too much leg – if wearing a skirt, the skirt should cut off fairly close to the knee.

First day at work

How you present yourself and behave on the first day of work helps to create a lasting first impression and pave the way for a positive work relationship with boss and coworkers. The dress code should be similar to that of the interview. As for punctuality, it is imperative to arrive not only on time, but early, to show how enthusiastic and keen you are to start work.

When introducing yourself to new colleagues, make eye contact, smile, and give a warm, firm handshake. If given the chance to have a brief chat, use a few sentences to talk about both your personal and professional background. Tell them what your new role is, where you have worked before, or any other employment history details that you feel are relevant. Besides helping you get acquainted with others, exchanging this type of information also provides plenty of conversation topics for friendly chat in the future.