

You're Killing Your Chances of Getting the Job in the first five minutes of a job interview

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Everybody knows that the first step to securing a job is a compelling and convincing resume that grabs the attention of a prospective employer. But most people don't realize how important it is to put your best foot forward as you take that next step, the job interview—otherwise you'll blow your chances and walk away empty-handed.

The Problem: You've got the education, experience, and references, all presented on a well-put together resume that gets you job interviews. But you never get a job offer.

The harsh truth: Most recruiters and potential employers know within the first five minutes of an interview whether you're right for the job. Even before you have spoken one single word, you are judged by what you look like. The mind and "gut feel" works so fast that within a few minutes a decision has already been made.

The Solution: First impressions can get you in the door, but you also want to stay. You'll have an advantage by knowing what recruiters and potential employers are looking for and how they think.

The Job Interview Secrets No One Tells You

As the founder of a successful global headhunting firm serving Fortune 500 companies for over twelve years, and author of the books: *A Second Life, God is giving you a second chance*, and *Secrets of the Executive Search Experts*, well as self help books on "how to get the job," I have coached thousands of people who have gotten the jobs they wanted. Some of the secrets I shared with them:

How to walk, talk, dress, and look for a job interview

Recruiters and potential employers very often like to recruit people like themselves and, of course, they want employees who will be good representatives for their company. When going for a job interview, you'd better dress the part, so wearing inappropriate clothing won't be a reason for them to reject you.

In my younger days even I messed this up by either saying the wrong things or dressing in such a bad way that I am now surprised that I did such a thing. When I was twenty-one, I went to the office of a leading U.S. consulting firm to apply for a part-time job wearing an off-white linen suit and a pink shirt. This was in the late eighties and the

outfit was a great going-out-socially outfit at the time, but it was a disaster for the corporate world. I lost the job before I even got to say a word.

- How do you know what to wear?

There are some universal rules that apply no matter what environment you want to work in. First, always dress as though you are worth how much they are going to pay you. When I meet a candidate who dresses like a slacker, my first impression is that he/she isn't worth the money they would be paid. And if someone doesn't have enough respect for himself/herself to dress appropriately, he/she would not be an asset in any job.

Look at the environment where you are applying for a job and dress accordingly. If you have to, do reconnaissance. Park or stand near the building where the company is located and see what types of outfits the employees entering or leaving the building are wearing. Or call the company's main number and ask the person who answers the phone what the dress code or preferred attire is for those working there. Always over dress rather than under dress, but don't go so far that you're a total mismatch. Use common sense. When applying for a corporate job, don't come in jeans. When applying for a job in a grocery store, don't wear a dark blue suit with a tie. Always dress your part. And no matter what, you need to look sharp—neat and clean.

Remember, for your first interview—and all other interviews that follow—always go in looking like you're ready to do the job you're applying for and will fit right in at the company. That way you'll never be judged or disqualified for the way you dress.

- Preview your outfit at home.

After studying your potential new work environment and deciding what you're going to wear, put on your outfit and look at yourself in a full-length mirror. Start with your shoes. Do they look worn out and soiled? For men: Do your socks match the shoes and the pants? Are the pants clean, pressed and in good condition? How about your belt, shirt, suit jacket and tie, if they are appropriate? For women: Do your shoes, dress or suit look like a coordinated outfit? Are your clothes clean, pressed and in good condition? For both men and women: Are you well put together? Does what you are wearing represent you?

Bottom line, your outfit should all match and be of the best quality possible. I do realize when times are tough or money is tight that you may feel overwhelmed when looking in your closet, thinking you have nothing good enough, new enough or of the appropriate style or quality for the job you want to get. If possible, invest in yourself: Go out and buy an "interview outfit." When that's not possible, borrow an outfit from a friend. The point is, this may be your opportunity to change your economic circumstances, as well as create a better job/career future, so give it your all.

It's also very important to always be well groomed. Trends come and go, such as sideburns, a goat beard or long hair on men, but one thing that never fades or changes in the professional world is looking clean cut, well groomed and professional. In the very competitive job market don't give potential employers *any* reason to kill your opportunity of getting a job just because you can't bear to part with your ponytail or goat beard (if you're a guy), claiming it's a statement about your authenticity. When you are a player in the job market you have to follow the rules in order to win.

- Handshake and eye contact.

A limp handshake shows no backbone. If a job candidate grasps too hard, it feels uncomfortable for the other person and it can appear that he/she is trying to prove something. Perfect a handshake that is warm and connecting; firm, but not too hard; and engaging, but not wishy-washy.

When it comes to eye contact, look your interviewer straight in the eyes throughout your meeting—unless, of course, they are showing you something, such as a report or a spreadsheet, then give it your full attention. Don't scan the room or look toward the window or down the hallway. People with wandering eyes appear to be not all the way present, which translates to "not really interested or focused." People who don't maintain eye contact also come across as being insecure, which is a liability in the work world, not an asset.

- Always keep structure in a conversation.

When communicating with a potential employer, in addition to being well prepared, always have a mental structure in your mind about how the meeting should and will go. In this way you can make sure everything that's important to you gets covered. Also, make sure to get to the point fast. If you have nothing to say, don't just talk. It's annoying. Plus, people who don't convey facts or answer questions directly come across as having something to hide. On several occasions I have presented very strongly qualified and experienced candidates to clients/companies, but for some reason they couldn't get to the point. After an entire hour of social talk, not many facts were conveyed and the clients didn't feel they learned anything about the person. In essence, the job candidates talked themselves out of great job opportunities.

During a job interview conversation, always have a structure in mind and make sure that everything gets covered during the allotted time. Your chances of nailing the job will dramatically increase.

- Be confident, but be humble.

Few companies want to hire a person who comes across as insecure. But they also aren't interested in the other extreme, a person who is cocky. Nobody likes a person who is full of himself/herself. Arrogance doesn't come across as self-confidence, but rather, as insecurity demanding attention. No company wants or needs an employee with that kind of attitude. However, one quality every company looks for in someone to hire is a person who is balanced—confident and humble at the same time.

- Humor is important.

In every company environment that I have known, humor is key. People with a sense of self-irony are always likeable because they don't take themselves too seriously. A job environment without smiles and laughter is a horrible place to work. Little feels better than having a good laugh. Therefore, job candidates with a sense of humor are much more likeable than a dry person that has a hard time smiling. The stories from the work environment that people remember and tell others are often the funny things that took place. The same goes with when an interviewer meets a well-qualified candidate with self-irony and a sense of humor. Such a person is easy to remember.

Being able to put a smile on the face of the person interviewing you is an ice breaker, which gives you an advantage. But don't push it too far by giving the impression you don't take yourself or your job seriously—again, it's all about the balance. Nobody wants to work with a disrespectful clown. And humor can never be at someone else's expense.

Job candidates with a smile, who have the ability to connect with others, always have an advantage. And, of course, when everything else is in place they're way ahead of the game.

- Physical posture in a meeting.

When a job candidate enters the room for their interview with bad posture and looking uncomfortable, the impression they make is just as negative as being inappropriately dressed and unprepared. I have even seen high-profile candidates leaning back in their chairs as if they were at home in their living rooms.

It's important when you are in a job interview to sit up straight and behave as professionally as you can. And it is always more engaging if you lean forward a little toward the interviewer as it shows more interest than almost falling off the chair backwards when being too relaxed.

- How to follow-up after the interview.

After someone takes time out of their busy schedule to meet with you regarding a potential job opportunity, it's customary and a courtesy to always send them a thank

you letter or email. This letter or email is very important. It gives you an opportunity to do many things, especially when you are left with the impression that another interview or a job offer may be coming:

- politely thank them for their time and the opportunity to meet with them
- once again state your strong interest in the job
- express that you got a great impression of their company
- tell them you look forward to the next step in the process
- tell them that if they need any more information from you to please let you know

Even if it was clear at the end of your interview that you and the specific job you were interviewing for weren't a good match, a thank you letter is still needed to leave the best possible impression. Include in such a letter: Thank them for their time and tell them what a great impression you got of their company. Also say something like: "If there are any future opportunities that come up that may be a better match for my skills, please keep me in mind." After all, there's always a chance that could happen. And even if it doesn't, you could directly or indirectly run into that person again in the future. Always leave a good impression.

When a friend, acquaintance, someone in your network, or a recruiter has given you the job lead or set up the interview, it's important to thank them too. Thank them for the opportunity and tell them you are excited about it. If a job offer comes through, don't forget to let your contact know with another thank you. And if a recruiter arranged your contact with the company that resulted in a fantastic job, send a gift to the recruiter. Always remember: When someone refers you for a job or hires you, they put their own name and reputation on the line. This is something to be very grateful about. Follow-ups, both after an interview and when you are hired, are critical ways to show gratitude.

A proven system for making your job search more successful is detailed in the life manual, *A Second Life, God is giving you a second chance*. It contains an extensive chapter with detailed guidance on how to find a job, interview tips, winning the job and creating a job insurance policy once you've got the job. It also tells you how to fully develop all five key areas of life, so that if you are struggling in the job market, you won't feel like the world is going to end. Go to the Web site: ASecondLife.com to download a free book excerpt and articles containing more job/career tips.