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## Call to Action: Avoid These Interviewing Pitfalls

Thursday, April 30th, 2015



This week's Call to Action identifies some common mistakes job-seekers make in job interviews that drive employers mad. Make note of these pitfalls and fix any you may do before your next job interview!

If you have not had a job interview in some time, or are not sure about how to critique your interviewing style, we suggest you set up one or more mock interviews; these practice interviews can provide you with some *great* insights into all aspects of your interviewing strengths – and weaknesses. ([Learn how to conduct a mock interview here.](#))

### Common Job-Seeker Interviewing Mistakes That Hiring Managers Dislike

**Treats receptionist, assistant, or other lower-level staff poorly.** Job-seekers need to think of all interactions with support staff as a pre-interview. In other words, be on your best behavior! Many a promising candidate's future has been derailed by treating staff rudely and unprofessionally. When we were hiring managers, we always asked our staff to provide feedback on each candidate's

behavior and attitude when not under the interview spotlight.

**Arrives inappropriately groomed or attired.** Not dressing and grooming for the interview is the most basic no-no for job-seekers. You should always be prepared for an interview, and part of that preparation is knowing what to wear (dressing for success), as well as proper grooming (no body odor, including too much perfume/cologne; clean/neatly shaven; styled hair; clean fingernails, fresh breath, and the like). Check out our [Dress for Success Tips](#).

**Delivers long, boring, unfocused, rambling responses to interview questions.** Hiring managers want short, concise, and crisp responses to most interview questions. Once you bore – or worse, antagonize – the hiring manager, the interview is over. How do you avoid rambling responses? The best method for job-seekers is to anticipate the questions and prepare written responses that you practice saying, without memorizing it. (You don't want monotone answers either.) For each question, focus on the key element the question is asking, and develop a short response that highlights your fit with the job. Check out our article, [Composing Written Responses to Job Interview Questions](#).

**Lacks authenticity.** This topic is the hardest to describe, hardest to understand. Hiring managers want to interview the real you, not some personality you are putting on simply to get the job. That said, job-seekers must put on a positive, upbeat, and interested face when interviewing... but be as sincere and honest when doing so. Do not recite memorized stories or responses to interview questions. Your goal is to have a selection of roughly sketched out anecdotes that you can share in an interview; but if it comes across as too polished or overly rehearsed/memorized, you risk turning off hiring managers.

**Oversells, exaggerates accomplishments – or undersells as a result of poor sales skills.** Indeed, a fine line here. Candidates must convince hiring managers they have the skills, experience, and past accomplishments to thrive in the job they are interview for, but they must also be careful of going over the top in selling themselves. More inexperienced job-seekers have the opposite problem, often not selling the strength of their candidacy strong enough. The goal should be to show how you'll be able to make a solid contribution right from the start – without making it sound like you think you're Superman.

**Gives self too much or not enough credit for team accomplishments; fails to clarify role in projects.** Because so much of our work – and our successes and accomplishments – is done as part of a team, a major task for job-seekers in job interviews is explaining team accomplishments in such a way that clearly identifies their role and showcases their unique strengths and contributions to the team's success.

**Fails to provide examples of skills or experience.** This error is typically made by inexperienced and/or unprepared job-seekers. Hiring managers want you to explain your key skills and accomplishments – even if they are right there on the resume sitting on their desk. Develop key stories/anecdotes about each of the skills and

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accomplishments you believe are relevant to the job you are seeking — and work them into the interview, even if the hiring manager does not ask about them directly.

**Demonstrates inadequate knowledge of prospective employer.** A perennial major sin of job-seekers is not having the proper depth of understanding about a prospective employer — or, worse, somehow not demonstrating that knowledge. In the era of Google and LinkedIn, as well as myriad of other information sources, there is no — NO — reason why job-seekers should arrive to an interview without a plethora of information about the employer to wow the hiring manager.

**Appears unenthusiastic, lacking energy.** Do you want the job? Employers use lack of energy as an umbrella excuse for not liking/hiring numerous candidates. You don't need — or want — to be jumping out of your seat in job interviews, but your posture, voice, and eye contact do play key roles in expressing your enthusiasm. Stay actively engaged in the interview.

**Fails to ask substantive questions.** Related to the previous peeve, many hiring managers relate job-seeker disinterest to the lack of questions asked — and/or the lack of insightful questions asked. When prepping job-seekers, our last piece of advice is always for them to develop 3-5 complex questions to ask the hiring manager. Usually, these questions come directly from your research into the prospective employer, but there may be questions that arise during the interview itself. Always ask questions, especially when the hiring manager asks if you have any. Besides questions arising from your research, [here are a few good fallback questions you can ask in the interview.](#)

**Gives scripted responses that sound like they came from a book.** There are numerous books and Websites (and videos) that provide sample job-seeker responses to typical interview questions — and they are all great tools to help you understand the best way YOU should respond to the question without copying the response. Seeing the samples can help you understand the type of information the employer is seeking from the question, but your response has to come from your own experiences, skills, accomplishments, training, and the like.

**Offers little or no eye contact.** Eye contact is one of those socially necessary skills, and for younger and inexperienced job-seekers, practice may help. You can also pretend to make eye contact by looking at the bridge of the interviewer's nose, if looking into his/her eyes is too overwhelming. Eye contact is partly tied to authenticity as well as to interest and enthusiasm, so you must do your best to make eye contact — especially when you are responding to interview questions.

Find additional tips for strengthening your interviewing skills here: [10 Best Job Interview Tips for Job-Seekers.](#)

See also our detailed article, [Top 20 Executive Interview Pet Peeves from Hiring Decision-Makers.](#)

*Authored by Dr. Randall Hansen*

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