

Top Ten Interview Blunders (they are all fixable!)

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I've had the opportunity to observe at least 1,000 interviews in my career as an executive recruiter. I find it very distressing when I see a qualified candidate not get a job due to an interview misstep. Here are some of the most common missteps I've seen.

- 1. Poor Initial Impression** – *Candidates must shake hands with every interviewer (firm, not crushing and definitely not limp), make eye contact, and smile when entering the room. Remember that elected officials or other hiring authorities are picturing you circulating in their community. They want to know that you can project a welcoming demeanor.*
- 2. Appearance Issues** – *Be sure to wear a suit that fits you. If you have gained or lost weight, invest in a new suit. Do you need a haircut that projects a groomed, professional image? Also, be aware of any nervous habits you have that may creep into an interview. These can include your leg shaking under the table, saying “um” frequently, turning red – some of these are not controllable. If you are aware of them, though, you might be able to take steps to counteract them in advance of the interview.*
- 3. Dated Language** -- *Under no circumstances should a candidate say “girls in the office”. For professional purposes, females over the age of 18 are not ladies, girls or gals – they are women. Failure to make this transition indicates you are not “current” in your perspective of women in the workplace. Other phrases such as “data processing” can also project a dated image.*
- 4. Failure to Answer the Question** – *Answer each question directly, give an example to support your answer, and conclude. If you have to ask if you answered the question, you probably have not. If you are unsure, you could say “can I provide you with another example?”*
- 5. Longwinded Answers** – *You must strike a balance between being succinct and getting your story out. If the recruiter or one of the interviewers brings up time constraints and the need to focus your answers, pay attention to this! You can still salvage the interview, if you heed the warning.*
- 6. Inability to Convey Your Accomplishments** -- *Clients have said to me that I did a better job of outlining a candidate's accomplishments than the candidate did. This is not good. You have to be able to convey your accomplishments. Make a few notes on a notepad in your portfolio (you must bring one to an interview) of key points you want to make – no*

matter what. If you have not had the opportunity to make all of your points, ask for a chance at the end of the interview to make a brief closing comment and then indicate you “have these other experiences you believe may be compatible with their community...” We all have had the experience of walking out of a presentation and thinking of what we should have said. If that happens and you feel the omission is significant, follow up with an email or letter.

- 7. Failure to Prepare** – *Do your research on the community. Read the materials on their website, watch Board meetings (if they are available on the website), visit the community if at all possible, and then include some of your observations in your answers. Also, practice answering questions you think might be asked. You do not want to sound rehearsed, but this will help you focus your answers on key points you want to make. Also, preparation includes being sure your social media presence is what employers will find acceptable. Check your public facebook page and twitter comments. More and more candidates are not advancing due to social media missteps.*
- 8. Use of the Word “Retire”** – *Do not say this word in an interview if at all possible. Elected officials are very nervous about seasoned managers looking for a “retirement job” (like there are any of those in city management!). Phrases such as “staying here until I retire,” or “I can retire from my current job and move to your state” or “I have one more move left in me” are not what elected officials want to hear. They want you to be excited about coming to their community. You can say that you have family in the area and have had the opportunity to get to know the community. I would avoid saying that you have aging parents nearby and want to move closer. That can come out later, but communities want you to want them.*
- 9. Failure to Ask Thoughtful Questions** – *If given the opportunity to ask one or two questions, do so! If you are not given the opportunity, ask the interviewers if you can ask a question. Be sure to come prepared to ask questions that reflect research you’ve done on the community.*
- 10. Failure to Exhibit Energy** – *This is the biggest misstep of all. You need to show your passion for the community and for public service. To quote my friend and colleague Greg Kuhn: “This is not a budget hearing.” You need to smile, lean forward with your forearms on the table, and engage the group with your answers. Then, if you want the job, ask for it! Good luck!*