

Six Interview Mistakes

by Michael Neece, founder of Interview Mastery
Monster.com Contributing Writer

It's tough to avoid typical interview traps if you're unsure what they are. Here are a half dozen to watch out for.

1. Confusing an Interview with an Interrogation.

Most candidates expect to be interrogated. An interrogation occurs when one person asks all the questions and the other gives the answers. An interview is a business conversation in which both people ask and respond to questions. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator.

2. Making a So-Called Weakness Seem Positive.

Interviewers frequently ask candidates, "What are your weaknesses?" Conventional interview wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness like "I'm a perfectionist," and turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed, because they've probably heard the same answer a hundred times. If you are asked this question, highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviewers don't care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.

3. Failing to Ask Questions.

Every interview concludes with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. Having no questions prepared indicates you are not interested and not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed by the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask. "I think a good question is, 'Can you tell me about your career?'" says Kent Kirch, director of global recruiting at Deloitte. "Everybody likes to talk about themselves, so you're probably pretty safe asking that question."

4. Researching the Company But Not Yourself.

Candidates intellectually prepare by researching the company. Most job seekers do not research themselves by taking inventory of their experience, knowledge and skills. Formulating a talent inventory prepares you to immediately respond to any question about your experience. You must be prepared to discuss any part of your background. Creating your talent inventory refreshes your memory and helps you immediately remember experiences you would otherwise have forgotten during the interview.

5. Leaving Your Cell Phone On.

We may live in a wired, always-available society, but a ringing cell phone is not appropriate for an interview. Turn it off before you enter the company.

6. Waiting for a Call.

Time is your enemy after the interview. After you send a thank-you email and note to every interviewer, follow up a couple of days later with either a question or additional information. Contact the person who can hire you -- not the HR department. Additional information can be details about your talents, a recent competitor's press release or industry trends. Your intention is to keep everyone's memory of you fresh.

The purpose of this article is to both provide information and facilitate general dialogue about various employment-related topics. No legal advice is being given and no attorney-client relationship created. Please see the disclaimer for further limitations and conditions.