

The interview: body language do's and don'ts

By Candace Corner, CareerBuilder.com writer

Your heart feels ready to leap out of your chest. Beads of sweat build on your forehead. Your mind is racing.

It's not a full-blown interrogation – although it may feel like it – it's just a job interview. While it's no secret that job interviews can be nerve-racking, a lot of job candidates spend a significant amount of time worrying about what they will say during their interview, only to blow it all with their body language. The old adage, "It's not what you say, it's how you say it," still holds meaning, even if you're not talking. You need to effectively communicate your professionalism both verbally and nonverbally.

Because watching your nonverbal cues, delivering concise answers and expressing your enthusiasm at once can be difficult when you're nervous, here's a guide to walk you through it:

Have them at "hello"

Before you walk into the interview, it's assumed that you will have done the following: prepared yourself by reading up on the company and recent company news; practiced what you'll say to some of the more common interview questions; and followed the "what to wear on your interview" advice. So you're ready, right?

Some hiring managers claim they can spot a possible candidate for a job within 30 seconds or less, and while a lot of that has to do with the way you look, it's also in your body language. Don't walk in pulling up your pantyhose or readjusting your tie; pull yourself together before you stand up to greet the hiring manager or enter their office. Avoid a "dead fish" handshake and confidently – but not too firmly – grasp your interviewer's hand and make eye contact while saying hello.

Shake your hand, watch yourself

If you are rocking back in your chair, shaking your foot, drumming your fingers or scratching your... anything, you're going to look like the type of future employee who wouldn't be able to stay focused, if even for a few minutes. It's not a game of charades, it's a job interview. Here's what to do (and not do):

Don't:

- Rub the back of your head or neck. Even if you really do just have a cramp in your neck, these gestures make you look disinterested.
- Rub or touch your nose. This suggests that you're not being completely honest, and it's gross.
- Sit with your arms folded across your chest. You'll appear unfriendly and disengaged.
- Cross your legs and idly shake one over the other. It's distracting and shows how uncomfortable you are.
- Lean your body towards the door. You'll appear ready to make a mad dash for the door.
- Slouch back in your seat. This will make you appear disinterested and unprepared.
- Stare back blankly. This is a look people naturally adopt when they are trying to distance themselves.

Do:

- Sit up straight, and lean slightly forward in your chair. In addition to projecting interest and engagement in the interaction, aligning your body's position to that of the interviewer's shows admiration and agreement.
- Show your enthusiasm by keeping an interested expression. Nod and make positive gestures in moderation to avoid looking like a bobblehead.
- Establish a comfortable amount of personal space between you and the interviewer. Invading personal space (anything less than 20 inches) could make the interviewer feel uncomfortable and take the focus away from your conversation.
- Limit your application of colognes and perfumes. Invading aromas can arouse allergies. Being the candidate that gave the interviewer a headache isn't going to do anything in your favor.
- If you have more than one person interviewing you at once, make sure you briefly address both people with your gaze (without looking like a tennis spectator) and return your attention to the person who has asked you a question.

- Interruptions can happen. If they do, refrain from staring at your interviewer while they address their immediate business and motion your willingness to leave if they need privacy.
- Stand up and smile even if you are on a phone interview. Standing increases your level of alertness and allows you to become more engaged in the conversation.

Say Goodbye Gracefully

After a few well-thought-out questions and answers with your interviewer, it's almost over, but don't lose your cool just yet. Make sure your goodbye handshake is just as confident now as it was going in. Keep that going while you walk through the office building, into the elevator and onto the street. Once safely in your car, a cab or some other measurable safe distance from the scene of your interview, it's safe to let go. You may have aced it, but the last thing you want is some elaborate end-zone dance type of routine killing all your hard work at the last moment.

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