INTERVIEWING STRATEGIES AND SECRETS

The interview is your opportunity to convince the employer that you are the right person for the job. In most instances, an employer is expecting you to articulate your future career goals and past accomplishments. Employers want students to understand their strengths and weaknesses, have clear objectives and goals, and to be able to answer why they want to work in a specific job at a specific company, environment and location; so it is important for you to understand your own reasons (not just that you need a job).

Marketing Your Skills and Experiences. As a job hunter, you must be able to communicate your experiences, skills, and goals in a way that is clear, brief, and compelling; you must be able to communicate why you would be the best choice for the specific position at hand.

This is sometimes called “personal marketing,” but many job seekers are uncomfortable with the phrase. They don’t want to “sell” themselves. You’re not really selling yourself—you’re making clear connections between the skills and experiences you’ve built in your life and the qualities an employer seeks.

Applicants are nearly always fully qualified to do the job. What determines who gets the job offer is the person who stands out by virtue of their specific qualifications and who they think they will be comfortable working with. Remember: You are not up against the job description; you are being compared to all of the other candidates in the applicant pool.

In an interview there are three agendas. The first is direct Can you do the job? Do you have the necessary education, skills, and experiences; while the second is subtler Do we want to work with you? Will you be a team player, do you have a sense of humor, and how are your communication skills. Sometimes the interviewers are unaware of the second agenda, but it is always a factor. Everything the interviewers are doing is designed to figure out if you can do this job competently and if you are the best person they will find among the applicants. The third agenda is proving to the employer that you actually want this internship or job and not just any position. Employers usually have a lot of selection in who they can hire, so it is imperative to demonstrate to them that you want this above anyone else.

These three agenda items are intertwined throughout the interview process and need to be addressed simultaneously throughout the interview.

Non–Verbal Communication

Which form of communication do you think is more powerful: verbal or non-verbal? Of course the "what" you say is very important in an interview, but many people are not aware just how important the "way" you say something is. Non-verbal communication may be described in many ways, such as your behavior, your manners, your attitude, your etiquette, etc. However you say it, using the right non-verbal communication is key to having a successful job interview.

The evaluation of your non-verbal communication will start as soon as you walk into the company's lobby and continue until the interview is finished. If your nonverbal communication skills aren't up to par, it won't matter how well you answer the questions.
The CollegeJournal reports that, according to some studies, "Body language comprises 55% of the force of any response, whereas the verbal content only provides 7%, and paralanguage, or the intonation -- pauses and sighs given when answering -- represents 38% of the emphasis."

With these kinds of statistics we can’t afford to ignore the importance of non-verbals. Your manners, looks, hygiene, behavior, attitudes, personality, and fit to work culture are all being evaluated as part of the second agenda- Do I want to work with you? Of course, interviews claim to be unbiased and many professionals try to be objective in these meetings. However, humans are humans and the process of judging another human will always involve a certain degree of subjectivity.

**Tips on How to Give the Right Non-Verbal Communication in an Interview to Help you Land the Job.**

**Dress.** If you don't know how to dress for the interview, then you didn't do your homework. You should know what the corporate culture is like at this company. In the interviewer's mind, a saleswoman or a software engineer has a certain "look" and "behavior". You need to know that look and add a +1 to it. Dress a little more formally than the average person in that position for the interview. This way, you will not be too overdressed, or much worse, not too underdressed for the job.

**While You Wait.** The way you sit in the lobby, the way you greet the receptionist and the interviewer, and the way you wait, will all have an impact on whether you are going to be considered for the job. Be friendly and pleasant, but, not overbearing. If you need to wait, sit quietly (no phone calls) and patiently.

- To avoid sweaty palms, visit the rest room, wash your hands, then run them under cool water prior to the interview. Keep your palms open rather than clenched in a fist and keep a tissue you in your pocket to (surreptitiously) wipe them.

**The First Meeting.** Meeting your interviewers for the first time is going to leave your host with a very strong and immediate feeling about you. From the very first glance and handshake, your interviewer will be "sizing you up". Keep in mind that even though they are professionals as well, they may also be feeling a bit of nervousness and anxiety -- it's natural for humans. Put them at ease! Take it upon yourself to make THEM feel comfortable. The most important thing you can do during this first contact is to offer a big, warm, sincere smile, and let them know that you are relaxed and excited to meet such interesting people.

**Introductions.** Of course, address them formally with title and last name (family name) when you first meet. They will probably invite you to call them by their first name. If they do, then do it. Make sure you drop the Mr., Ms., or Mrs. from the first name. It sounds very strange (impossible) to Americans to use a title with a first name (i.e. Mr. John - yuck!). Offer an easy to remember nickname for them to call you. This is key! If you don't have a familiar sounding name, or they can't pronounce it, then how can they easily remember you? Give them something easy to remember.

**The Handshake.** The handshake is a basic form of greeting in North America and is used to communicate agreeableness. It is used to say hello, good bye, congratulations, thank you,
conclude agreements, and is done at sporting events to indicate good sportsmanship. A good handshake conveys warmth and sincerity.

For Americans, this is going to give one of the most powerful and lasting impressions of you. Show them that you sincerely are happy to meet them and are interested in who they are and what they are doing in the company.

- If your culture or religion prevents you from shaking hands (or from shaking hands with women), be consistent in your action. Avoid shaking hands with both men and women to avoid the appearance of favoritism. If you feel comfortable, you can say that your religion does not allow you to shake hands. (If someone extends their hand, simply say “I do not shake hands but I am very happy to meet you- and then smile and make eye contact or add in another non-verbal gesture like a head nod.) With more people having germ phobias these days, not shaking hands is starting to be a little more understandable.

- If a man and a woman are meeting, the man should wait for the woman to offer her hand. (Usually you can wait for the person interviewing you to offer their hand first).

**Physical Distance.** Americans sometimes adopt strategies to keep others at what they consider a comfortable distance. They sit behind desks or stand behind an obstacle, such as a chair or coffee table, to establish a barrier. In North America and Northern Europe, businesspeople usually stand close enough to shake hands, about two and a half to three feet apart. Beware of your physical space and take note of what the interviewer is doing and try to mirror them.

**Taking a Seat.** Don’t sit until invited to do so. Notice how you are asked to sit. If there is a desk or table, are you asked to sit across the desk from the interviewer (desk in the middle) or next to the desk? Where you sit in relation to the interviewer and desk says a lot about the roles of the participants. A more conservative, traditional interviewer who wants to show his position and power will sit behind a desk and will have you sit in front of the desk. A more equal relationship, partner, or modern employer will sit with you, next to you, or have you sit beside the desk. The key here is to adjust your attitude and to the interviewer’s. If the interview is more traditional, then use more titles, deference, use of "sir" or "ma'am", and be a very attentive listener. If the interviewer is more modern and equal in, then show that you can be more relaxed, more cheerful and humorous, more friendly and outgoing. Be casual and be yourself.

**What to do with your Hands.** If you are unsure of what to do with your hands, rest them, loosely clasped in your lap or on the table. Hold a pen and your notepad or rest an arm on your chair. Don’t let your arms fly around the room while making a point or bite your fingernails. Control your hands by being aware of what you are doing with them.

- Having your hands above the neck, fiddling with your face or your hair, is unprofessional and conveys nervousness and anxiety. Interview body language experts will tell you that touching the nose or lips can indicate that the candidate is lying. Holding a hand behind your head is often a sign that you are annoyed or uncertain.

**Folding your Arms** across your chest suggests a closed and defensive attitude. Common wisdom is that the less you move your arms and hands about the more confident and in control you are. Practice a comfortable way to loosely place your arms and hands while you are sitting, both at a table and in a chair on its own.
**Leg Movement.** Be aware of the interview body language message your legs are giving. A lot of leg movement is both distracting and indicates nervousness. Resting one leg or ankle on top of your other knee makes you look too casual and comes across as arrogant. Crossing your legs high up conveys a defensive attitude in the one-on-one context of a job interview. Crossing them at the ankles or placing both feet flat on the floor conveys a confident and professional look during the job interview.

**Posture.** When the interviewer offers you a seat at the start of the job interview, sit upright but not too stiffly in your chair. This indicates that you are comfortable and feeling confident. Hunching down in your chair gives the impression of nervousness and low self-esteem. A sloppy posture indicates a careless attitude and a lack of energy. Sitting on the edge of your chair can come across as being nervous and tense.

- Relax and lean slightly forward, about 10 degrees, towards your interviewer. This gives the message that you are both interested and involved. Leaning back makes you appear too relaxed and casual. Leaning to the side can be perceived as not feeling comfortable with the interviewer. How you position your head also sends a message. Tilting your head very slightly to one side comes across as friendly and open. Keeping it straight comes across as self-assured and authoritative.

- It is also important to pay attention to the posture of your interviewer. Sometimes you can establish rapport by adopting the same posture as the other person. This is called mirroring. If they have adopted a more formal posture do the same until you see that the interviewer has relaxed and become less formal.

**Your Things.** Put your things next to you on the floor. Be careful about putting briefcases or bags on their desk, especially if it is the interviewer's desk. If it is a general purpose meeting table, then this is more acceptable. But don't allow anything to block your view of the interviewer (or interviewers). Coats, jackets, hats, etc., should never be placed on the table, but they may be placed on your chair. Have writing instruments and notebook appropriate to the position. All of these things are a part of your image and presentation and must be chosen carefully. Someone who wants to present himself as a professional Marketing Manager should not be taking notes with a "Hello Kitty" notepad. Present yourself! A presentation requires some performance. Play the part and act the part, and you may get the part!

"Would you like a Cup of Coffee or Glass of Water?" Yes, that would be nice, thank you. Many interviewers will offer you something to drink. Let them be hospitable and if they are trying to be a good host, help them. Show a big smile and show how much you appreciate their kindness. They will feel good that they have done something nice for you. Reward them with your happiness and they may want to do more good things for you later (like give you a job).

**Voice Delivery.** Speaking in a clear and controlled voice conveys confidence. Avoid speaking in a monotone by varying your tone and pitch, however don't overdo it and come across as overly excited or emotional. Breathe and pause before answering a question, this gives you time to react in a considered way and it ensures that the interviewer has finished the question. You should interact with the interviewer as an equal, not a subordinate. Ensure that your voice tone is not apologetic or defensive. Don’t be too loud or quiet.
Generally it is advisable not to show too much or too strong emotion during your job interview. Smile at appropriate times but don’t overdo it. Avoid erupting into laughter on your own; laughing along with the interviewer is far more acceptable. Do not tell jokes, but if the interviewer does, you may laugh along with it, if you felt it was humorous.

**Facial Expressions.** Keep your facial expressions positive or thoughtful, as often people are too demonstrative with their facial expressions. If you smile frequently you will be perceived as more likable, friendly, warm and approachable.

**Eye Contact.** A very interesting study recently compared interviewees who gave extensive eye contact with those who gave less eye contact. People viewing the interviews on video tape were asked to rate the candidates on this basis alone. Those who held more eye contact with the interviewers were judged to be more sincere, trustworthy, professional, interested, and confident. They were the ones who were to get the jobs.

- Interview body language experts suggest that when you are doing the talking you need to **hold eye contact for periods of about 5-7 seconds** before looking away briefly and then re-establishing eye contact. Overusing direct eye contact when you are speaking can come across as lecturing or challenging the interviewer. Typically the listener maintains direct eye contact for longer than the speaker who breaks it off at intervals.
- Looking constantly downwards makes you appear insincere or submissive. It is acceptable to look down if you are making notes or referring to information in front of you. However if you are speaking, or the interviewer is asking you something, raise your head and make regular eye contact to show that you are actively involved.
- With panel interviews it is best to look at and direct your answer to the person asking the question, with a glance periodically at the other interviewers.
- Eye contact is essential interview body language to establish rapport with your interviewer. Not making eye contact makes the interviewer feel disconnected from you. Eye contact should be a positive aspect of interview body language, if it is not used properly however it can quickly become negative.

**Interviewer Stands.** When the interviewer stands up, that means the interview is over. Thank them for the opportunity to come in and discuss the job. When offered a handshake, hold for just a second longer and give them a strong and sincere closing sentence to remember you by such as, "Thank you so much for your time today. You've got a great company here and I'd sure enjoy being a part of it!" Leave them with a sense of your commitment and character, and leave them with a smile.

**The Interviewer’s Non-Verbal Message**
Watch for these interview body language signals from your interviewer to read the message they are sending you.

1) Body language cues that can indicate boredom include resting head on hand, fiddling with hands and losing eye contact. If this happens wrap up what you are saying and move on by asking the interviewer a question such as "Is there anything else you would like to know about that topic?"
2) If the interviewer crosses arms or leans away it could mean that they are feeling uncomfortable. Perhaps you are leaning in too close and invading their space in some way. Create more space between yourselves. If there is not a table between you that creates a safe degree of personal space, keep a distance of about two to three feet, this is a comfortable amount of personal space for most people.

3) Drumming fingers and rubbing the face can indicate irritation. Clarify that you are answering the question with the information they want and not frustrating them with an off-the-point response.

4) Preparing for your job interview includes not only knowing what to say but how to say it. The best way to be aware of your interview body language and the way you are coming across is to practice in front of a mirror or friend. This way you can be confident that you are sending the right message in your job interview. The message that you are a professional, confident, and enthusiastic candidate for the position!

5) Look for incongruent behaviors where someone's words do not match their non-verbal behaviors. For example, someone might tell you they are happy while frowning and staring at the ground.

6) Look at signals as a group, as a single gesture can mean any number of things or maybe even nothing at all. The key to accurately reading non-verbal behavior is to look for groups of signals that reinforce a common point.

7) Always consider the context of the situation in which the communication occurs. Some situations require more formal behaviours that might be interpreted very differently in any other setting.

8) Don't be afraid to ask questions and clarify a point if you are confused about non-verbal signals and mixed messages the interviewer is demonstrating.

**Non-Verbal Do's and Don’ts**

"Do’s"

- Research the organization ahead of time to determine the dress code and the work environment.
- Know the directions to the interview. Plan your commute with time to spare.
- Have neat appearance including recent haircut, clean nails, clean and pressed clothes, that fit appropriately.
- Use the rest room and hang-up coat and any outerwear before the interview.
- Get a good night’s sleep.
- Smile and maintain eye contact since interviewers place a great deal of emphasis on this. When interviewed by a group, make eye contact with everyone in the group. Be mindful of not focusing most of your eye contact on just one person.
- Appear enthusiastic, using moderate gestures to make a point.
- Write out questions to ask before the interview.
- Keep calm and don’t panic.
Non-Verbal “Don’ts”

✓ Drink coffee or other caffeinated beverages before the interview; it causes you to sweat and if you drink more than one cup, it can make you jittery.
✓ Be late for the interview.
✓ Wear perfume or cologne.
✓ Sit down or dash to your chair until the interviewer gives some indication to be seated; otherwise you appear overanxious.
✓ Lean on the interviewer’s desk. Sit erect in your chair.
✓ Demonstrate your nervousness by tapping you fingers, swinging your legs, playing with your hands, face, hair, jewelry or clothes.
✓ Appear to eavesdrop on any phone calls the interviewer receives in your presence.
✓ Read materials on the interviewer’s desk.
✓ Cross your arms: makes you look defensive.
✓ Sit on the edge of your seat or rock on the seat.
✓ Smoke before or during an interview and avoid eating food that may have a strong odor before an interview. Utilize a breath mint such as peppermint to help refresh the mouth.

References:
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http://www.best-job-interview.com/

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