

Making the First 10 Minutes of an Interview Count

Seven Tips By The Creative Group

A hiring manager can often tell if you're the right fit for his or her organization just minutes after the two of you shake hands. In a recent Robert Half survey, executives polled said it typically takes them only 10 minutes to form an opinion of a candidate during an employment interview, despite meeting with staff-level applicants for nearly an hour, on average.

With such a short amount of time to interact with a hiring manager, how can you evoke a positive response? Projecting confidence and enthusiasm is key, so keep the following advice in mind:

1. Dress to impress.

For better or worse, a good part of the impression an interviewer first forms of you depends on how you're dressed. So wear a nice suit or business-appropriate dress, even if you know the office to be a casual environment.

2. Remain calm.

One of the best ways to make a good first impression is to quell any pre-interview jitters. Plan to arrive at the interview destination 10-15 minutes early. This will give you time to compose yourself and relax a little.

3. Show some respect.

Many hiring managers ask everyone who has interacted with a candidate -- from administrative staff to members of their department -- for feedback on the prospective employee. So be pleasant toward those you meet and avoid the urge to hold a loud cell phone discussion in the elevator or lobby.

4. Break the ice.

Small talk plays an important role in the interview by helping to break the ice and put both parties at ease. If the hiring manager asks if traffic was heavy or if you had problems finding your way to the office, offer more than just a "yes" or "no" answer. Just be sure not to prattle on.

5. Focus on the little things.

The fact that employers form opinions of candidates so quickly places additional importance on the more subtle points of the interview, such as giving a firm handshake, maintaining eye contact and practicing good posture. Your nonverbal cues can say a lot about your personality and interest in the position. Crossing your arms, nodding hurriedly or making tense facial expressions can all send the wrong message.

6. Demonstrate your knowledge.

Hiring managers often start interviews by asking job candidates some straightforward questions about their experience, knowledge of the company and ability to excel in the position. For example, "Can you tell me a little about yourself?" "What do you know about our firm?" and "Why do you want to work here?" are three common questions. Research the business beforehand so that when answering these types of queries, you can relate your responses to the firm's needs or priorities.

7. Remain positive.

The executives surveyed said interviews take an average of 55 minutes for staff-level job candidates and 86 minutes for management-level applicants. Even if you fear you've already made a negative impression in the hiring manager's mind, stay positive and focus on what you can do during the rest of the meeting to convince the employer you're right for the job. Consider whether you're making any common nervous mistakes -- such as rushing your responses or not listening to the full questions -- and adjust your communications as necessary.

No matter how well you prepare for an interview, things may not always go as smoothly as you had hoped. Whether you become tongue-tied or are thrown a curveball question, roll with the punches. Keeping a positive attitude and remaining confident in your ability to land the job is one sure way to impress any hiring manager.

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