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The importance of body language

In this article John Hackett discusses how to deliver information in an interview and the significant part body language plays in securing a new role.

How you present yourself and your non verbal communication style is often referred to as your body language. Many say that this has a far greater influence on showcasing who you really are in an interview. Therefore, it naturally follows that a prospective employer's opinion of you is going to be largely formed by the body language you display. It is therefore not what you say that is as important as how you say it!

Before your interview commences ensure that you give yourself enough time to assess and if need be, correct your emotional state. Plan to arrive at least 15 minutes beforehand so you can prepare yourself emotionally. Remember it is normal to feel nervous before an interview so spend this time not only recognising how you feel but also remind yourself that you do deserve to be there because you wouldn't have been invited to interview if you weren't being seriously considered as a candidate. And remember that an interview is not a life-or-death situation so be sure to keep things in perspective.

If you are feeling anxious take a few moments to focus on your breathing. Breathing is something we can control and regulate and by doing this, you can redirect any troubling emotion you're experiencing and focus on achieving a relaxed and clear state of mind. Once you feel ready make your way to the meeting place, remember to "stand tall" and introduce yourself to the reception or front of house confidently, making eye contact and with a smile on your face. This is a great start and will demonstrate that you are pleasant, approachable and paying attention.

Of course your demeanor must be maintained when you first greet the interviewer. We all know that the first 60 seconds of any meeting are crucial and it is during this time that a prospective employer will form an opinion of you. So start by shaking hands firmly and confidently and again smile, make eye contact, and stand up straight. This will make the most of this crucial and limited window of time and should mean that your

self-assurance is perceived positively by your interviewer before the discussion even begins.

Now you are in the interview itself you must try and pay attention to your body language. When you are seated try and focus on the following:

- Try and relax your shoulders but ensure you're still sitting up straight.
- Nod and smile in agreement to points the interviewer makes.
- Sit forward to give an impression of confidence and interest but also be mindful of not encroaching the interviewer's personal space.
- Maintain eye contact but make sure it is steady and natural – don't stare incessantly.
- Make a conscious effort not to fidget. If you have a tendency to do so keep your hands clasped together on the table or in your lap.
- If possible, try and mirror your interviewer's body language to show empathy. One way to do this is to follow their forward/ and backward movements, as they lean in or back away in the course of your discussion.
- Try and avoid slouching, rocking back in your chair, sitting with crossed arms or glancing all over the place.
- At the end of the interview make sure your farewell handshake is as confident as when you first met.
- And most importantly try and be yourself and as natural as you can be.

By being aware of the importance of body language in an interview situation, but also in all your day to day personal interactions your chances of getting the outcomes you desire from these relationships should be greatly enhanced. **m**

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