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“When you go in for a job interview, I think it a good thing to ask is if they ever press charges.”

-Jack Handy



Avoid These 10 Interview Bloopers



By Deborah Walker (Published in Quint-careers.com)

We've all heard stories of job candidates who looked great on paper but who were absolute disasters in person. With fewer and fewer interview opportunities available in this competitive market, it's essential to make the best possible first impression. You can learn from the mistakes of others and avoid the top 10 worst interview blunders.

Poor handshake: The three-second handshake that starts the interview is your first opportunity to create a great impression. But all too often an interview is blown right from the start by an ineffective handshake. Once you've delivered a poor handshake, it's nearly impossible to recover your efforts to build rapport. Here are some examples:

- The Limp Hand (or "dead fish"): Gives the impression of disinterest or weakness
- The Tips of the Fingers: Shows lack of ability to engage.
- The Arm Pump: Sincerity is questionable, much like an overly aggressive salesman.

Even if you're a seasoned professional, don't assume you have avoided these pitfalls. Your handshake may be telling more about you than you know. Ask for honest critiques from several friends who aren't afraid to tell you the truth.

Talking too much: In my recruiting days, I abhorred over-talkative candidates. So did most of my client

employers. Over-talking takes a couple of forms:

- Taking too long to answer direct questions. The impression: This candidate just can't get to the point.
- Nervous talkers. The impression: This candidate is covering up something or is outright lying.

To avoid either of these forms of over-talking, practice answering questions in a direct manner. Avoid nervous talking by preparing for your interview with role-play.

Talking negatively about current or past employers/managers: The fastest way to talk yourself out of a new job is to say negative things. Even if your last boss was Attila the Hun, never, never state your ill feelings about him/her. No matter how reasonable your complaints, *you* will come out the loser if you show that you disrespect your boss because the interviewer will assume that you would similarly trash him or her. When faced with the challenge of talking about former employers, make sure you are prepared with a positive spin on your experiences.

Showing up late or too early: One of the first lessons in job-search etiquette is to show up on time for interviews. Many job-seekers don't realize, however, that showing up too early often creates a poor first impression as well. Arriving more than 10 minutes early for an interview is a dead giveaway that the job seeker has too much time on his or her hands, much like the last one picked for the softball team. Don't diminish your candidate desirability by appearing desperate. Act as if your time were as valuable as the interviewer's. Always arrive on time, but never

more than 10 minutes early.

Treating the receptionist rudely: Since the first person you meet on an interview is usually a receptionist, this encounter represents the first impression you'll make. Don't mistake low rank for low input. Often that receptionist's job is to usher you into your interview. The receptionist has the power to pave your way positively or negatively before you even set eyes on the interviewer. The interviewer may also solicit the receptionist's opinion of you after you leave.

Asking about benefits, vacation time or salary: What if a car salesman asked to see your credit report before allowing you to test drive the cars? That would be ridiculous, and you'd walk away in disgust. The effect is about the same when a job-seeker asks about benefits or other employee perks during the first interview. Wait until you've won the employer over before beginning that discussion.

Not preparing for the interview: Nothing communicates disinterest like a candidate who hasn't bothered to do pre-interview research. On the flip side, the quickest way to a good impression is to demonstrate your interest with a few well thought out questions that reflect your knowledge of their organization.

Verbal ticks: An ill-at-ease candidate seldom makes a good impression. The first signs of nervousness are verbal ticks. We all have them from time to time -- "umm," "like," "you know." Ignore the butterflies in your stomach and put up a front of calm confidence by avoiding verbal ticks. You can also sometimes avoid verbal ticks by pausing for a few seconds to gather your thoughts before each response.

One of the best ways to reduce or eliminate them is through role-play. Practice sharing your best success stories ahead of time, and you'll feel more relaxed during the real interview.

Not enough/too much eye contact: Either situation can create a negative effect. Avoid eye contact and you'll seem shifty, untruthful, or disinterested; offer too much eye contact, and you'll wear the interviewer out. If you sometimes have trouble with eye-contact balance, work this issue out ahead of time in an interview practice session with a friend.

Failure to match communication styles: It's almost impossible to make a good first impression if you can't communicate effectively with an interviewer. But you can easily change that situation by mirroring the way the interviewer treats you. For instance:

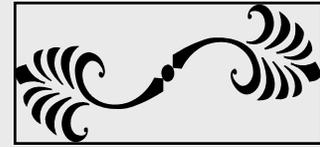
- If the interviewer seems all business, don't attempt to loosen him/her up with a joke or story. Be succinct and businesslike.
- If the interviewer is personable, try discussing his/her interests. Often the items on display in the office can offer a clue.
- If asked a direct question, answer directly. Then follow up by asking if more information is needed.

Allowing the interviewer to set the tone of conversation can vastly improve your chances of making a favorable impression. You can put the interviewer at ease -- and make yourself seem more like him or her -- by mirroring his or her communication style.

Final Thoughts

Just as a strong resume wins you an opportunity to interview, strong interview skills will win you consideration for the job. You already know that you won't earn an interview unless your resume sets you apart as a candidate of choice. Similarly, you should know that polishing your interview skills can mean the difference between getting the job offer -- and being a runner-up.

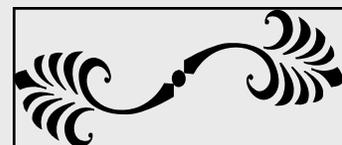
Start your job search with a resume that creates a stellar first impression, then back those facts up with your extraordinary interview skills. You will have made yourself a



Top Ten Resume Mistakes

(Source: Monster.com)

1. *Typos and Grammatical Errors*
2. *Lack of Specifics*
3. *Attempting One Size Fits All*
4. *Highlighting Duties Instead of Accomplishments*
5. *Going on Too Long or Cutting Things Too Short*
6. *A Bad Objective*
7. *No Action Verbs*
8. *Leaving Off Important Information*
9. *Visually Too Busy*
10. *Incorrect Contact Information*



better candidate by avoiding these ten interview pitfalls. And no one will have to talk about you as the candidate who "almost" got the job.

Deborah Walker is a Certified Career Management Coach. Her expertise includes resume writing and career coaching. She holds membership in the National Resume Writer's Association. As a former headhunter, her advice comes from an insider's prospective based on years working with HR professionals and corporate hiring managers. [Visit Deb on the Web](#). Or email her for a free resume critique/price quote at deb@alphaadvantage.com.

PREPARE YOUR REFERENCES AHEAD OF INTERVIEW

By [LILY WHITEMAN](#), published in the *Federal Times*, October 01, 2007

When you're asked for your references at the end of your next job interview, you may respond by mumbling something like "I'll get that to you soon" and frantically scramble to assemble your list.

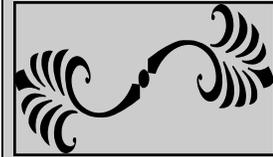
Or you may respond by instantly whipping out an organized, neat list of easy-to-contact references who will hit just the right notes when they sing your praises.

To help you do the latter, your references should have certain qualities:

They should be respected. Pick people of high professional stature — not your bowling buddies who don't know your work. If you can use your current boss as a reference, do so. If not, tell your interviewer that you are not using him as a reference because you don't want him to know about your job hunt.

As an alternative, use as references other current managers, previous bosses, colleagues, clients, customers, members of your staff, vendors or anyone else who is familiar with your work and thinks favorably of it. If you recently took courses or are a recent graduate, you may also use professors as references.

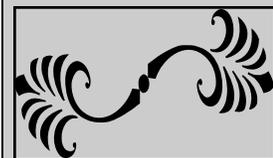
Your references should be enthusiastic about you. Before citing one of your contacts as a reference, ask him whether he can give you a glowing endorsement, and encourage him to an-



Top ten cities for jobs in 2008

(Source: *Forbes Magazine*)

- 1) Salt Lake City, UT
- 2) Wichita, KS
- 3) Austin, TX
- 4) Atlanta, GA
- 5) Fort Worth, TX
- 6) Indianapolis, IN
- 7) Houston, TX
- 8) Omaha, NE
- 9) Raleigh, NC
- 10) Seattle, WA



swer honestly. If he responds with any reluctance or hesitation, don't use him.

This rule was ignored by a recent applicant for a federal job whose list of references on his job application cited a federal executive, even though the applicant had had only a passing interaction with the executive more than 10 years earlier and had not spoken with him since. Unfortunately for the applicant, his choice for a reference was obvious to the selecting official, who turned out to be the federal executive cited.

Your references should be knowledgeable about you. They probably won't remember your academic or professional qualifications or even remember praise they have given you. Remind them of your selling points by giving them copies of your résumé, a list of your important projects and how you added value to them, and positive feedback your references have given you, including annual reviews, promotions, awards and complimentary e-mails.

Provide on your reference list the name, spelled correctly, and title of each reference along with a brief description of the relevant positive qualities you demonstrated to him. You might write of a supervisor on your reference list: "He can verify my technical knowledge of toxic sludge, my ability to write clear, accurate reports on technical topics, my project management skills and my ability to meet tight deadlines. He awarded me a merit-based promotion in January 2007." By doing so, you will encour-

age your interviewers to ask each reference about your best traits.

Your references should be knowledgeable about your target job. Give each reference a description of your target job and describe to them aspects of your background that you would like him to emphasize. Ask your references to provide reassurances to your hiring manager that will help counter any known weaknesses in your application.

Your references should be accessible. I have heard of finalists in job competitions getting rejected only because their interviewers reached the references of other worthy applicants before reaching theirs. Double check the phone numbers and e-mail addresses of your references before providing them to interviewers.

Don't use references who will be on vacation during your job search, are careless about returning calls or who may otherwise be hard to reach.

Many federal job applications require applicants to list their references. So you will probably have to contact your references as you prepare your applications. Doing so is time-consuming; so don't leave this chore to the last minute.

When you start interviewing, which could be months after you start applying, warn references they may soon be contacted by interviewers.

Once you get hired, thank each reference for helping you climb the career ladder.

Lily Whiteman is the author of "Get Hired! How to Land the Ideal Federal Job and Negotiate a Top Salary" (FPMI Solutions). She is a public affairs specialist at the National Science Foundation. Her Web site is www.Get-Hired.biz.

EDITOR'S NOTES

THE HIGHEST CREDENTIAL: VALUE OF A SECURITY CLEAR- ANCE IN TODAY'S JOB MARKET

*By Evan Lesser
Director, ClearanceJobs.com*

Retiring Federal workers and transitioning military service members on the job hunt will find the homeland security and defense job markets ripe with opportunity. Fueled by a record \$450 billion dollar government budget, private sector employers are being contracted to provide unique products and services to an increasingly security-conscious world. In this arena, having a government or military background is a plus; but having an active security clearance can mean the difference between an empty or full interview calendar.

While the U.S. economy continues to work its way back to pre-September 11th levels, most segments of the nation's workforce have experienced higher than average unemployment rates. In contrast, the U.S. defense industry is in a hiring boom, fueled by a record \$450 billion budget in FY2007.

New defense and homeland security initiatives along with the ongoing war on terrorism have produced a steady flow of multi-million dollar government contracts. These large and sought-after contracts require private sector employers to provide federal agencies with a range of services: information technology, building security, systems

engineering, logistics, intelligence analysis, linguistics, and management roles top the list of desired positions. As these contracts are awarded to defense industry employers, hundreds of new jobs become available each week.

This bandwagon is not for everyone to jump on, and the average person need not apply for these new jobs. A primary requirement for careers in the defense contracting world is a U.S. government-granted security clearance. Want one? According to ClearanceJobs.com, the leading online job board for security-cleared workers, most workers retiring from Federal service do. Especially in cities with a heavy military and defense contractor presence like San Diego, Colorado Springs, Norfolk, and metro Washington, DC where there are more open jobs than cleared talent to fill them.

Getting cleared is not easy. Enterprising individuals cannot simply fill out the necessary paperwork and start applying for these clearance-required positions. Those who have worked for the intelligence agencies know that security clearances are awarded only to U.S. citizens who have a 'need to know' and access sensitive information regarding national security in their daily work. Each uncleared worker is investigated for a clearance only at the direct request of an authorized government contractor or the U.S. military.

At present time, it can take a non-cleared civilian up to two years to obtain a security clearance – too long for a Federal contractor with open contracts to wait. The time delay and backlog of clearance investigations has boosted the demand for skilled candidates that have clearance already in place.

High Demand, Higher Salaries for Security-Cleared Personnel

A 2007 salary survey of cleared candidates by ClearanceJobs.com shows that cleared job seekers working contracts earn an average of \$25,000 more per year than their non-cleared counterparts. As an example, a Program Manager position in Dayton, Ohio posted on ClearanceJobs.com was paying a range from \$96,000 to \$110,000 per year. By comparison, a similar but non-cleared position with the same requirements in the Dayton area was paying only \$60,000 to \$75,000 per year – almost half that of the cleared position. Federal workers moving to contract work may find a career change to the U.S. defense industry the best way to boost their salaries.

ClearanceJobs.com explains that the deviation in salaries between cleared and uncleared workers with similar skills and experience is all about supply and demand. Employers are willing to pay more for a worker with a security clearance already in place. The additional expense is absorbed over the long term as contracting projects can be staffed sooner without the wait.

Furthermore, candidates that have undergone a Polygraph examination have the ability for an extra boost to their salaries. Whereas cleared candidates are short in supply, cleared candidates with Polygraphs are even less prevalent. Passing a Counterintelligence or Lifestyle polygraph significantly differentiates earnings potential among cleared professionals. Of the approximately 20 percent of all security-cleared candidates who have passed either polygraph, most earn about \$10,300 more per year than candidates who have not.

The salary survey also found that cleared women working in the U.S. defense industry are continuing to close the salary gender gap. Security-cleared women earn approximately 0.89 cents for every dollar that cleared men earn. In comparison, uncleared women make 0.77 cents to every dollar of uncleared men. This reflects a 1 percent change in the salary gender gap in favor of women since last surveyed.

The data indicates that security clearances have a slight leveling effect on the salary gender gap. In an industry where demand is high and cleared candidates are in short supply, expect to see more comparable wages between the genders over time.

For retiring Department of State employees who have the skills, work ethic, and active clearance in place, the defense industry will continue to be a prime employer.

Evan Lesser is the Director and Co-Founder of ClearanceJobs.com, a free, secure Internet job board that matches job seekers with active or current security clearances to hiring employers and recruiters looking for skilled cleared candidates.



“If you go to work on your goals, your goals will go to work on you. If you go to work on your plan, your plan will go to work on you. Whatever good things we build end up building us. “

- E. James Rohn

ATTENTION JSP GRADS!

MARCH JOB FAIR

Our next job fair will be held on Tuesday, March 25, 2008, from 1:00 to 4:00 pm in the gymnasium of Building D (aka the Field House) at FSI in Arlington, Virginia. Be sure to bring a photo ID and, if you have one, your Retiree ID.

To date the following employers will be participating:

1. ABT Associates, Inc. - www.abtassoc.com
2. Allied Technology Group, Inc. - ATG - www.alliedtech.com
3. AMIDEAST - www.amideast.org
4. ARD, Inc. - www.ardinc.com
5. Beacon Associates, Inc. - www.beaconassociates.net
6. Chemonics—www.chemonics.com
7. Clearance Jobs - www.clearancejobs.com
8. DevTech - www.devtech.com
9. Development Alternatives, Inc. – DAI - www.dai.com
10. Emerging Markets Group - EMG - www.emergingmarketsgroup.com
11. International Business Machines—us.ibm.com
12. John Snow, Inc. - JSI - www.jsi.com
13. Judge Company - www.Judge.com
14. L. Robert Kimball and Associates—www.LRKimball.com
15. Louis Berger Group, Inc. - www.louisberger.com
16. Man Tech international - www.mantech.com
17. Management Systems International – MSI - ww.msi.com
18. Northern Virginia Community College – NVCC - www.nvcc.edu/hr/employment.htm
19. Pact - www.pactworld.org
20. PRO-telligent LLC - www.PRO-telligent.com
21. Science Applications International Corporation – SAIC - www.saic.com
22. Senior Employment Resources – SER - www.seniorjobs.org
23. Snelling Personnel - www.snelling.com
24. The Services Group, Inc. - TSG - www.tsginc.com
25. Target - www.target.com/careers
26. Tessada & Associates, Inc. - www.tessada.com
27. University Research Col, LLC - www.urc-chs.com
28. U.S. Peace Corps - www.peacecorps.gov
29. United Nations Employment & Assistance Unit - IO/S/EA - www.state.gov/p/empl/
30. Wisdom Management Solutions — wisdommanagement.com
31. Worldwide Information Network Systems, Inc. – WINS - www.winsnetworks.com
32. WR Systems, LTD—www.wrsystems.com



Happy Valentine's Day
to our *wonderful*
clients!

*From the Career Transition
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