

Body Language and the Interview

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The job market has tightened, the economy is down and you've got to find a job, now. You have a job interview coming up and you need every possible advantage to win that job. What do you do?

Recent studies have shown that employers will form an opinion of you within the first 10 minutes of the interview.

But here's the kicker: It's not always based on what you actually say, but on something we term "body language." For instance, 85 percent of what you communicate is not with words. It's through the tone of your voice, the way you sit and a wealth of other messages that your body involuntarily sends. This is according to Greg Hartley, a body language expert who earned his chops with 20 years as an interrogator in the Army.

With this in mind, here are six dos and don'ts on the art of non-verbal communication to give you a winning advantage in a job interview.

1. Be real from the start

When you greet your interviewer, smile a real smile that engages your eyes, and offer a firm handshake. Say something like, "I'm pleased to meet you" to provide a positive anchor.

Janine Driver, a body language expert also known on the Internet as the "Lyn' Tamer," states that maintaining good eye contact shows respect and interest. She advises that in the U.S., 60% eye contact is ideal. She suggests focusing on the upper triangle of the face from the left eyebrow across the bridge of the nose to the right eyebrow. Avoid staring at the other person's forehead, lips and mouth.

2. Watch the excess energy

The more energy you have, the more will need to be vented. This often results in mannerisms Hartley terms "adapters." What this means is that excess energy gets dissipated into fidgeting, a definite sign that you're nervous or ill at ease. While it's easy to say, "Watch the fidgeting," Driver suggests you never touch your face, throat, mouth or ears during an interview. The interviewer may think that you're holding something back, typically, the truth. Although this is a false assumption, to try to establish credibility, it's necessary to avoid touching your face.

3. What to do with those hands and arms

Driver says that clasped hands are a signal that you are closed off. A palm-to-palm gesture with one thumb over the other thumb sends the signal that you need the interviewer's reassurance.

To come across as confident, receptive and unguarded, have your hands open and relaxed on the table. When your body is open, you project trustworthiness.

Avoid crossing your arms over your chest. When you do, you signal that you are close-minded, defensive or bored and disinterested.

4. Crossing those legs

Don't cross your legs. According to Driver, this posture creates a wall between you and your interviewer. It can also become a distraction when you keep crossing your legs back and forth. Crossed ankles are a "no-no" because you are signaling that you want to be elsewhere.

5. Posture

A straight posture is imperative during an interview. Pull your shoulders back and sit up straight. You'll give yourself a burst of confidence and allow for good breathing. This can help you to avoid, or at least reduce, feelings of nervousness and discomfort.

6. Finger gestures

Bet you never thought you had to worry about your fingers during an interview. Driver suggests that steepling your fingers makes you look arrogant. She also says to never point your index fingers like gun barrels. These are the types of aggressive messages you want to avoid sending.