

When Interviewers Attack!

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The interview is undoubtedly the most important part of your job search. Your network and your [resume](#) may help you get your foot in the door, but you've got to ace the interview to get the job. What happens, though, if your interviewer is -- gulp! -- mean or abrasive?

Read on for advice from job-search experts and learn how to save the day -- and when you should walk away.

1. Remain calm. Job-search mentor Roberta Chinsky Matuson of Human Resource Solutions suggests, "Take a moment to compose yourself. Then simply answer the question using a calm tone. Eventually the person will stop being so hostile, particularly if you are responding in a way that is not giving them any fuel for their fire."

2. Watch what you say. "Do not let an interviewer's tone push you over a ledge to potentially say things that you may later regret. Remember that business networks of people are wide and expansive, and your negative response or behavior in an [interview](#) could have lasting repercussions in wider circles," says Justin C. Honaman, a strategic business process and technology professional.

3. Remain confident. Stephen R. Balzac, president of 7 Steps Ahead, an organizational development firm, says, "The more confident you are, the easier it is to operate on the assumption that you're not dealing with malice. That gives you the room to ask the interviewer if there's something wrong or if this isn't a good time. Frequently, what comes off as hostility is due to something else entirely: The interviewer may be distracted, upset about something else, have a tight deadline, etc. In one case, an interviewer's young son was extremely ill and when offered a chance to reschedule, he jumped at it."

4. Get to know your interviewer. "If a vein is popping out of your potential new employer's head, ask questions directly related to the interviewer, such as, 'How long have you been with the company? What role did you have when you started? Tell me the story of working your way up,'" says career consultant Angela Lussier of 365 Degrees Consulting. "If you get her talking about herself, you can quickly turn her lion's roar into a kitten's meow."

5. Address the issue. "The best thing someone can do when faced with a hostile interviewer is pause and ask if he/she has done/said something to upset or irritate the person conducting the [interview](#). Usually, people don't realize that they are coming across in such an off-putting way, and they quickly adjust when the issue is raised, but gently," suggests Donna Flagg, workplace expert and founder of The Krysalis Group, a business and management consulting firm.

6. Remember that it may be a test. "They may just be testing you -- to see how you handle pressure or deal with certain circumstances. They want to know if you stay calm and collected, or if it gets to you and affects your decision-making and actions. Many times these situations arise in business, so, unbeknownst to you, they may be placing you in a bit of a role-play scenario," reveals Bruce Powell, a managing partner with executive recruitment firm IQ Partners Inc.

7. Turn things around. Interview expert and author of "Hiring and Firing" Marlene Caroselli suggests, "Employ the 'turnaround' technique. Buy time by turning the question back to the interviewer. For example, you're told, 'We need an exceptional candidate for this position. From what I've heard so far, there's nothing exceptional about you.' Your turnaround response would be, 'Can you tell me what is so exceptional about the job that only the rarest of skills are needed?'"

8. Grin and bear it. "If an interviewer is that rude, he's probably run off other good candidates. Your only goal is to get to the next step. Figure out what that is and if you can get there," advises workplace communications specialist Linda Swindling.

9. Leave. Rachel Ingegneri, human resources expert and author of "Ten Minutes to the Job Interview," says, "If an interviewer is hostile to the point of creating fear or possible physical harm, I suggest that the candidate politely remove himself from the room or area and speak with someone in higher authority (a receptionist or secretary may provide that information). If there is no one else to speak with, vacate the premises as soon as possible. If hostile tactics appear to be the norm, that does not seem like the type of place to be employed."

10. Close strong. "Give a strong close at the end of the interview," states Lauren Milligan, founder of ResuMAYDAY.com. "Say, 'I'm very interested in this position and I sincerely thank you for your time and insights today. If I am chosen to continue on in your recruiting process, will I have the opportunity to interview with other managers as well?' This shows you were able to deflect their bad attitude and are hungry for more. In these times, only the strong survive, so don't let someone's bad attitude throw you off your game!"