

Interview Body Language Mistakes That Can Cost You The Job



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You've sent in your perfectly manicured résumé and flawless cover letter. You've researched the company and gave brilliant responses to tough interview questions. You're probably a strong candidate—but forget to smile, slouch in your chair or fail to make eye contact during the interview, and you could be out of the running.

“A candidate can give out thousands of non-verbal cues within the first minute of meeting a hiring manager, and those messages make more of an impact than the words that you use during the interview,” says [Patti Wood](#), a body language expert and author of *Snap: Making the Most of First Impressions, Body Language, and Charisma* (to be released October, 2012). “Our body language says a lot about who we are and our emotional state, and poor body language often sends a message that we are stressed or fearful.”

In Pictures: Body Language Mistakes That Could Cost You The Job

Wood says don't wait until you're in the hot seat to start focusing on your body language. Be aware of your posture, your facial expressions and your gestures from the moment you arrive.

Author and career expert [Dan Burns](#) agrees. "I try to stress to people that the first impression you make happens before you even sit down to interview," he says. "The hiring manager will look at your face, your hair, what you're wearing and the image you are projecting, all before you have had a chance to formally meet."

Once the interviewer greets you, make eye contact and offer a palm-to-palm handshake that is not too strong and not too weak. Keep an appropriate distance as he or she greets you. Relax your body and smile. "Don't freeze," Wood says. "Candidates often stiffen up when they are walking in to an interview."

Once you're in the hot seat, find an appropriate place to set down your belongings. Don't put your briefcase or purse on your lap or on the table. Sit up straight, avoid touching your face and hair, and don't cross your arms or hide your hands. "Don't be afraid to gesture," Wood says. Gesturing shows that you're enthusiastic and expressive. It can also help access more information in your brain and create vocal variation, she adds.

Power and confidence are typically conveyed through body language, and so are your stress level and how open and honest you are. "An employer will get a sense of who you are and how you will perform under pressure by assessing your body language before, during and after the interview," Wood says.

"Interview body language mistakes may tell the hiring manager that you're flippant, scared or passive," she adds. "If you're under-qualified or you say the wrong thing, the interviewer can forgive that, but if your body language says you're a person who doesn't work well in stressful

situations or that you're not confident, that's something they know they can't change."

So how do you avoid making body language mistakes? With practice and preparation.

"Practice entering and leaving a room, think about where you will put your briefcase during the interview, and plan how you will say hello and goodbye to the interviewer," Wood says.

Preparation for the interview often builds confidence, Burns says. When you're confident, you tend to have fewer body language issues.

The hiring manager looks for ways to set a candidate apart from others, Burns says. "The negative differentiators, like poor and ineffective body language, help make the decision easy for the hiring manager."

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Here are some interview body language mistakes that could cost you a job offer.

Weak Handshake

Before you shake hands, rise, walk up to the hiring manager with confidence, make eye contact and smile.

"Make sure your handshake is firm, but don't crush the hiring manager's hand," says body language expert and author Patti Wood. "The secret to a great handshake is palm-to-palm contact. Slide your hand down into the web of theirs and make palm-to-palm contact. Lock thumbs with the hiring manager, and apply as much pressure as he or she does." But remember that the appropriate pressure varies from culture to culture.

Invading Personal Space

Be respectful of the hiring manager's personal space. Don't stand too close and certainly don't hug them.

Crossing Your Arms

That can make you look defensive or uncomfortable. Instead, gesture with your hands. That way you'll appear more enthusiastic and engaging.

Playing With Your Hair

"It's a stress comfort cue that can make you look childish," Wood says. You don't want to distract the hiring manager with this body language gaffe.

Bad Posture

Sit up straight. "Asymmetrical body language can make you look confused or dishonest," Wood says.

Lack Of Eye Contact

"It's okay for the candidate to look away when he or she is talking," Wood says. "It's normal to look around when you're speaking because you're accessing different parts of the brain by moving your eyes. But be attentive and make eye contact when the interviewer is speaking." Think of eye contact as a connection tool.

Looking Like You're Not Interested

"It's fine if you have an expressive face," Wood says. "It makes you more likeable." But be aware of your facial expressions, and don't check your watch or your cell phone during the interview.

Not smiling

You can all too easily appear nervous or unfriendly. Smile, but keep it subtle.

Fidgeting

Don't touch your face, play with change in your pocket or bite your nails. Fidgeting is a distraction and a sign of anxiety.

Hiding Your Hands

"Don't sit on your hands or hide them in your lap," Wood says. "Place them on the arms of your chair or the desk or use them to gesture.

Gesturing makes you look more expressive, and the interviewer can read how open and honest you are by looking at your hands.”