

10 commonsense interview tips too many people flub

When we refer to something as being “common sense,” we usually mean that it is something we think everyone should know. Often, though, it turns out that what may seem like common sense to one person isn’t always so to someone else. For example: Veterinarians spend their days around animals, so they might consider it common knowledge that cats sleep about 18 hours per day; hence the reason your vet seems so amused when you bring Muffin in for a checkup, concerned about her inability to stay awake. Similarly, because human resources professionals constantly screen and interview candidates, what may seem like a commonsense interview tip to them might not have crossed a job seeker’s mind. Following are commonsense interview tips straight from the experts’ mouths.

1. Be presentable

Wear a suit that fits, and don’t cut corners when it comes to ironing or dry cleaning, says Monique Honaman, CEO of leadership development company ISHR Group. “I knew one guy who was in such a rush the day of his interview that he only ironed the front of his shirt. Later, during the course of his interview day, it was hot and he was encouraged to remove his jacket and get more comfortable and it was clear that he had cut corners and only ironed the front! He was very embarrassed,” Honaman says. Also, while you should always wear deodorant, try to avoid perfumes and colognes. You never know who will be allergic or just downright averse to your scent. “A hiring manager once told me a story of how he didn’t select an incredibly well-qualified candidate for a role because she wore the same perfume as his ex-wife,” says Danielle Beauparlant Moser, a career coach with Blended Learning Team. “He said she walked in the room and his only thought was how to get her out of his office as quickly as possible.”

2. Don’t be too early

While you should always arrive at your interview a few minutes early, try not get there more than 15 minutes before your scheduled interview time, advises Ben Yeargin, a manager at Spherion Staffing. “[Arriving early] will lead to anxiety on the candidate’s part because they have to sit and wait for an extended period of time, and it will lead to frustration on the hiring manager’s part because they will feel rushed with the project that they are trying to accomplish prior to the interview,” he says. If you find yourself getting to the building earlier than you thought, wait in your car or take a walk around the block until it’s closer to your interview time.

3. Know whom you’re meeting with

“Know the name of the interviewer so that you can ask for that person at the receptionist’s desk,” advises Cheryl Palmer, President of Call to Career, an executive coaching firm. “It’s embarrassing when the receptionist asks, ‘Who are you here to see?’ and you can’t remember. Have this information either in your head or write yourself a note that you refer to prior to arriving in the waiting area,” Palmer says.

4. Remember: You are being interviewed as soon as you walk in the door

“Most people would never think of the receptionist as being an interviewer, but it’s true,” Palmer says. “It’s fairly common that the receptionist will report back to the hiring manager how candidates behaved in the waiting area. Don’t be remembered as the one who ate all the candy out of the candy dish or spoke disrespectfully to the receptionist.”

5. Make proper eye contact

"One of the most obvious mistakes interviewees make is with eye contact, and it costs a lot of people a lot of jobs," says Barry Maher, who owns a California-based career coaching firm. "Eye contact is simple," he says. "Any given eye contact should last about five seconds at a time. And if there's one interviewer, make eye contact with him or her about 40 to 60 percent of the time. More than 60 percent is intimidating. Less than 40 percent comes off as shifty and perhaps insincere, even dishonest."

6. Eat before the interview, not during it

Duh? Not according to Yeargin, who has experienced interview-snacking firsthand. "I was in an interview, no more than 10 minutes into it, and I got called out for two minutes to answer a question," he says. "When I returned, the applicant was eating some sort of granola or other snack bar. Needless to say that individual did not get a job with my company." No matter what the candy bar ads have to say, your hunger can wait.

7. Make sure that what you *do* eat beforehand does not involve onion or garlic

You want to be remembered for your professionalism and outstanding skills, not for what you ate for lunch. Advises Palmer, "Don't eat anything that has a strong odor before the interview."

8. Don't look at your watch

Block at least two hours of time for the interview, says Cindy Loftus, co-owner of Loftus O'Meara Staffing. Loftus also advises keeping your schedule relatively clear on the day of the interview, to avoid feeling the need to rush. "Don't create distractions to your interview," she says.

9. Tell the interviewer you are interested

Don't forget to tell the recruiter you want the job. "If you truly feel the position is a fit, let them know and tell them you would like to get to the next round of interviews, and be prepared to tell them why," Loftus says.

10. Get business cards from your interviewers — and use them

"Ask for the business cards of all of the interviewers that you have met and make sure you take a second or two to read their card," Loftus says. This will not only be helpful in remembering each person you met with, but will make it easier to send proper thank you notes and follow-up emails, which should always be done within 24 hours of leaving the interview.