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## How your body language could cost you that job

*by Kenya McCullum | May 3, 2012*

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You've worked hard to prepare for your [job interview](#). You've practiced answering questions -- even those weird behavioral questions that interviewers tend to throw your way. You've thought about questions to ask your interviewer, and carefully selected anecdotes of your work experience that will let the [employer](#) know

that you're the right one for the job.

But if you think you're ready to go out and land that job -- think again. You may not realize it, but it's not what you say that can put you ahead of the candidate pack when you interview -- it's what you don't say.

"Because applicants are so similar in the schools they attended, the degrees they have, the jobs they've held, and the resumes and cover letters that they provide, the interview is an outstanding opportunity for you to differentiate yourself," said Bruce Clarke, President and CEO of human resource management firm CAI. "The best way to do that is to use your nonverbal communication during the interview to show that you're physically and emotionally engaged. Otherwise, it's very easy for an interviewer to put you in that bucket with everybody else -- where you'll be anonymous and easily forgotten."

### **The best and worst nonverbal behaviors for a job interview**

**Eye contact.** We all know that eye contact is a great way to connect with other people, but it can also be a double-edged sword. Too much of it can seem aggressive and inappropriate, while too little makes you look like you're being dishonest and have something to hide. So how do you make that balance between looking evasive and looking like you're about to challenge your interviewer to a duel?

"Good eye contact is about maintaining eye contact, but it's not staring at the person for 40 minutes," said Vicky Oliver, the author of "301 Smart Answers to Tough Interview Questions." She explains, "I think a good thing to remember is, if you have an interview with somebody for 40 minutes, and then you leave and don't know what color their eyes are, you haven't maintained good eye contact. You want to really look at them and connect, but you're also going to look away some of the time."

**Eye rolling.** Although eye contact can be either good or bad, depending on how long you maintain it, rolling your eyes is never a good idea. Oftentimes people will roll their eyes when they disagree with someone or when they think the other person has said something dumb. The problem is, people generally aren't even aware that they're rolling their eyes -- so it's important to become really cognizant of what you're doing so that you don't offend your interviewer.

**Posture.** During an interview, you want to sit up straight -- but not to the point where you look like an ironing board. By doing this, you will show that you're interested in the conversation you're having with your prospective employer, while not appearing too stiff.

**Handshake.** Just like with eye contact, your handshake can either leave an employer with a good or bad impression of you, depending on how you do it. "You don't want to break bones, but a firm shake conveys a more positive attitude than a limp wrist," Oliver said.

**Tapping.** You may not do it on purpose, but if you're tapping your fingers or toes during your interview, a potential employer may get the impression that you're agitated or that you have something better to do.

**Voice.** With so many hiring managers conducting phone interviews these days, you may think that you're off the hook because your interviewer can't actually see you. But not so fast: The way you say things -- also known as paralanguage -- can also tell a potential employer a lot about you. For example, if the tone or pitch of your voice is flat, your interviewer will believe that you're not really interested in the job -- no matter what words you use to convey otherwise. Also, certain [speech patterns](#) -- such as excessively using words such as "like," "um" and "ah" -- can tell an interviewer that you're not confident about what you're saying, or did not adequately prepare for the interview.

## How to practice your body language

Although we are largely unaware of the nonverbal cues that we use to communicate, there are ways that you can figure out what you're doing wrong so that you can correct it.

**Videotape yourself.** If you videotape yourself during a mock job interview, it will become clear to you what nonverbal ticks that you have. "That is the best way to practice because nobody will have to tell you what you're doing right and what you're doing wrong," said Clarke. "You'll be able to see it for yourself and you may be embarrassed by what you see in some instances."

**Work with a friend.** By having a mock interview with a friend, you will have someone right there who can tell you what kind of impression that you're giving off -- and what nonverbal cues may turn a hiring manager off.

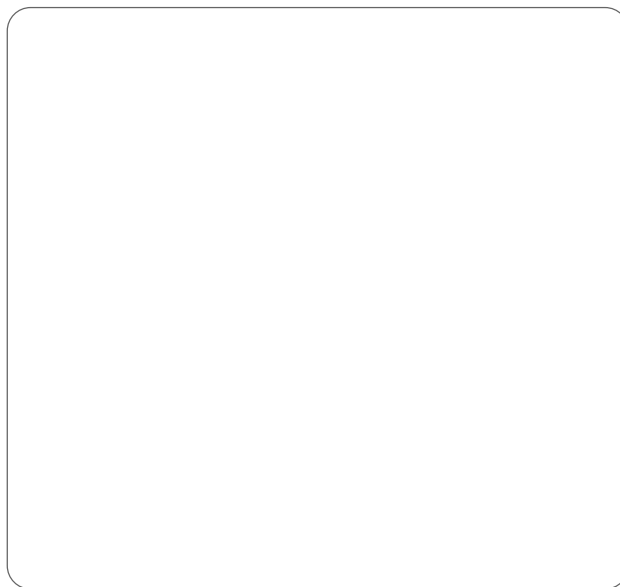
**Call the one that got away.** If you're feeling courageous enough, call someone you interviewed with who didn't offer you a job. That person may have some insight on your nonverbal behaviors during your interview and will also be able to tell you what ultimately led to you not landing the job.

### About the Author

*Kenya McCullum is a freelance writer based in California.*

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