



LOUDER Than Words

by Kenya McCullum

Your nonverbal behavior can speak volumes during a job interview.

Anyone who has been on job interviews knows that they can be a double-edged sword. On the one hand, they are a rite of passage that can open the doors to new career opportunities and advancements. On the other hand, job interviews can be awkward, nerve-wracking, and sometimes embarrassing.

But you don't have to be intimidated by the interviewing process. If you know what to do— and what not to do— during an interview, you can use it as a springboard into the job that you want. Unfortunately, there is a large component to the interviewing process that most people don't know about— and it could be the difference between you getting the job or getting passed over.

The Nonverbal Influence

You may be surprised to learn that most of what potential employers are responding to during an interview cannot be found on your résumé. In fact, much of the information you will give an employer does not come from any words at all. Although it is not commonly discussed, nonverbal communication plays a large role in your job interview performance.

“In many respects nonverbal communication is a lot more important than the actual verbal side,” said

Ron Krannich, author of *Savvy Interviewing: The Nonverbal Advantage* (www.impactpublications.com). “Most interviewers will make up their mind within the first five minutes whether or not they’re going to hire the person or bring them back for a second interview. It’s all about impressions— how you look, how you sit and your facial expressions.”

But what if you are saying all of the right things? Doesn’t that carry more weight to your potential boss than these elusive means of communicating? According to Krannich, at the end of the day, no matter how your words sound to an interviewer, if the nonverbal side of your presentation is off, that is what the person will respond to.

“The unfortunate thing is when you look at most of what’s been written about interviews, 95 percent focuses on the questions and answers— the verbal component of the interview— and that’s only 50 percent of it,” he said. “What happens to that other 50 percent? It goes back to the whole notion that you’re meeting a stranger for the first time and people read your nonverbal communication. Regardless of how well you practice giving great answers during the interview, if all your nonverbal stuff is off, the research shows that it’s the nonverbal communication that the interviewer trusts more than the verbal.”

Although we don’t tend to think about our nonverbal behaviors, there are several areas that Krannich suggests you can pay special attention to— which will decrease any inconsistency between your words and your nonverbal cues.

It’s not what you say, it’s the way that you say it.

Although your words are important during an interview, you should also be aware of the way that you say them— which is also known as paralanguage— because there are a lot of assumptions made about a speaker from these cues. For example, if you tell an employer that you are interested in a job but your tone of voice and pitch do not reflect enthusiasm, your words will not be believed.

Also, verbal pauses— the “uhs” and “ahs” that we use so easily without even thinking about them— should be kept to a minimum during an interview. According to Krannich, using too many of these can give a prospective employer the impression that you’re unsure about what you’re talking about and underprepared for the interview.

The eyes of the beholder. We’ve always heard about the importance of eye contact and in a job interview, the right amount of eye contact is imperative because too little or too much can create a bad impression.

“A lot of people don’t maintain good eye contact and they have what we call shifty eyes, which may indicate that you’re probably not very trustworthy or that you’re not listening. Listening skills are very important and are basically nonverbal,” Krannich said. “Also, too much eye contact can be seen as threatening and too little eye contact can mean you probably are hiding something. In American culture, we read eye contact as indicators of trustworthiness and honesty.”

So close, yet so far away. Remember the “Seinfeld” episode where Elaine’s “close talker” beau made everyone he met feel uncomfortable? This discomfort occurs when people violate the rules of personal space, also known as proxemics, which dictate the appropriate distance that we should maintain between each other. During a job interview, this distance should be about four to five feet— just enough to remain formal with your interviewer without being too far away. Also, remember that it’s important to keep an appropriate distance from items on your interviewer’s desk. It may sound obvious, but Krannich said that many nervous candidates will start picking up anything in front of them, which can also be a violation of the interviewer’s personal space.

Body positive. When you’re in a job interview, you want your body language to express how much you want the job. Remember when your mother told you to sit up straight as a child? This posture displays to a potential employer that you are alert and interested in the conversation. If you’re slouched in your chair, however, you send the message that you are not interested in what’s going on— even if you’re telling the interviewer how excited you are about the opportunity.

Other actions that will communicate enthusiasm are the openness of your arms and body and a positive facial expression.

If you’ve never thought about what you’re nonverbal behavior says about you during an interview, don’t worry. According to Krannich, you are hardly alone and in fact, most interviewers don’t know the importance of these cues and what they say about candidates either. As a result, when hiring managers give their sole attention to what they hear from candidates, and completely ignore what they see, they often end up filling positions with the wrong people.

About the author:

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Don't Do It!

If You Want The Job— Avoid These Pitfalls

Although keeping your nonverbal communication in check can help you stand out above your competition, there are still both verbal and nonverbal things that you should avoid during an interview.

- ***More is too much.*** Susan Heathfield, the Human Resources Guide at About.com (humanresources.about.com), suggests that candidates tone everything down while on an interview. Too much of anything— perfume, jewelry, make up, and even confidence— can turn off a potential employer. “All sorts of things can hit your interviewer’s hotwires, and you don’t even know what they are and the interviewer may not even know what they are but for some reason, somehow this candidate has turned them off,” she said.
- ***The blame game.*** Heathfield added that often an interviewer will ask you questions about what may have gone wrong at a former job and how you handled it. The point of this is not to make you pretend that you’re perfect, but to extract your ability to recognize your mistakes and learn from them. If you play the blame game when answering these questions— and criticize your former boss, coworkers and company— this is a huge red flag that will make you an undesirable candidate. “The very best candidates take responsibility for the fact that the team did not meet its goals. They don’t give the interviewer sixteen excuses or say it was everybody else’s fault,” she said.
- ***Flirting with compensation.*** Despite what you may have heard from job counselors, when you’re asked about how much money you expect to make in a position, be upfront.
- ***Don’t just get the job.*** Most people go into a job interview with only one goal in mind— to get the job. However, this is not the best approach to take. It’s better to view a job interview like a matchmaking exercise— you want to match your skills, interests, and abilities to the best position and employer for you. While you’re being interviewed by a potential employer, you should also be asking questions of your own to determine what you want in a job. Remember that the interview should be a two-way street.