
S&L Personnel Advice Centre

Making body language work in your favour!

Being successful in a job interview not only depends upon the obvious requirements of having the necessary qualifications and saying the right thing to the interviewer but also on the more subtle technique of body language. Successful body language can prove the difference between failing the interview and passing it with flying colours. What's more, it doesn't take a lot of research or preparation to become an expert on making body language work for you.

Physical appearance

Perhaps the most obvious and immediate aspect of body language is physical appearance. It may sound obvious to state that interviewers will prefer interviewees who have made an effort to be smartly dressed (an accurate idea of what is appropriate to wear can be gained by observing current employees of the business) but there are other more subtle aspects of appearance which are not so readily considered. For example, having excessive facial hair can give negative connotations of aggression, sloppiness or just plain laziness - not good qualities in a potential employee. The same applies to hair styles: try to keep it smart and above all else, give the impression that you have made an active effort and care about getting this specific job. Do not give in to the temptation to overload on fragrances either - deodorant in this situation will prove far more effective!

First impressions

The interviewer is likely to have formed an impression of you based upon your physical appearance before you have even been introduced. However, these initial pleasantries can make an equally important impression upon your potential future employer. Many people going for a job interview worry needlessly about these preliminary exchanges but they only exist to make you feel at ease and comfortable in a potentially daunting situation. It is important to keep your composure during these initial exchanges because if you show an inability to cope under this kind of pressure, the employer will not be impressed. Therefore it is important to give a firm but not aggressive handshake, whilst maintaining eye contact and a friendly, warm smile. Before the interview, it may be worth preparing how you introduce yourself, as a rehearsed delivery will sound more confident and assured than a spontaneous one. Let the interviewer take the lead by starting initial conversations but avoid one word answers and make an overt effort to keep the initial conversations flowing.

Posture

The typical structure of interviews means that following these important initial exchanges, comes the crux of the interview. Obviously it is important to say the right things and to sell yourself to the best of your ability. However, it is also vitally important to retain a consideration of how your body is physically expressing the qualities you possess for this job. Posture is one aspect which demands attention as a bad posture will be painfully obvious to the interviewer. Do not slouch on your chair; sit upright with both feet comfortably on the floor and lean towards your interviewer in order to show attention and keenness.

Crossing legs or arms acts as an obvious defensive barrier and is an unfortunate comfort zone, which many people are quick to slip into. Doing this will show the interviewer that you are uncomfortable in a pressurised environment and have a defensive tendency to shun uncomfortable situations, which you are bound to encounter in the workplace. It will also inhibit your ability to express yourself to the best of your ability because of this shield partially hiding your true personality.

On the other hand, do not fidget. When many people force themselves out of their comfort zone of arm and leg crossing, their automatic reaction is to fidget. Fidgeting can manifest itself in a variety of ways including tapping feet on the ground, playing with hair or showing a general inability to keep hands still. Unfortunately this behaviour

shows nervousness just as much as crossing arms and legs. Fidgeting, especially nervous touches of the face, neck and head also betray a sense of dishonesty and can completely undermine what you are saying.

Eye contact

One aspect of body language which is notoriously difficult to master yet imperative to a successful interview is eye contact. Many people find that eye contact is difficult to maintain, especially with strangers and even more so if they are in a position of authority. One helpful tip is to imagine the interviewer as someone you feel comfortable with: a family member for example. Picture mentally how easy it is to maintain eye contact with this person and translate this natural ease to the interviewer.

Be careful not to stare or look wide-eyed as this will make you seem uncomfortable and is not the impression to be giving a potential employer! If an interruption occurs, such as another person entering the office or a phone call, drop eye contact to show you respect the interviewer's privacy. Casually glance through some of your notes to show this respect actively. If there are multiple interviewers, the rule regarding eye contact is very simple. Maintain comfortable eye contact with the interviewer addressing you but when you reply, make sure that you look at some point during your monologue at all the interviewers present.

Voice

When replying to the interviewer, do not let your voice run away with itself. Remain constantly conscious of the speed of your delivery and if you feel it becoming too fast, take a deep breath to calm down. Try to keep your answers as clear and concise as possible. Before the interview, it is always worth practising answers to questions which are likely to be asked.

Concluding the interview

When the interview is over, show the same composure as when it began. End with a firm, confident handshake and an assured smile. Even if you feel you could have done better in the interview itself, a confident goodbye could go some way to rescuing you.