

10 Ways to Make a Bad First Impression -- and How to Recover

Liz Seasholtz, WetFeet.com, Yahoo! HotJobs

In the book "You Are the Message," media executive Roger Ailes wrote that it takes only seven seconds to make a first impression. With a job on the line, the pressure to immediately impress is even more intense. No wonder we get flustered.

The good news is that no matter what goes wrong -- your fly is down, you spill your water, you mispronounce the company name -- it's all about how well you recover. "I had one candidate who sat on a chair, it flipped out from under her, and she landed on her back," says Ellen Reeves, author of "Can I Wear My Nose Ring to the Interview?" "But, she picked herself up, picked up the chair, and made a joke. She knew how to recover -- and she got the job."

Below are 10 ways to potentially botch your interview, and the steps to take to right your sinking ship.

1. You're Sick the Day of the Interview

Don't try to be a martyr. Even if you just have a cold, you should call and reschedule. "I once interviewed someone who told me she threw up on her way over," says Reeves. "I was just thinking, 'Why didn't you cancel?'" You may be trying to prove your dedication, but employers would rather interview you when there isn't a risk you'll give them the flu.

2. You Have a Black Eye

If you're hurt in some way -- whether you have a black eye, broken leg, or visible stitches -- first assess whether you can give the [interview](#) the same effort as if you were well. You may want to call and explain your condition, especially if it's severe or requires handicap access. If you decide not to call, be prepared with an explanation. A general rule of thumb: sporting accidents are more acceptable than bar fights.

3. You Have a Nose Ring

Facial piercings and visible tattoos are tricky. The best bet is to cover them until you feel out the culture. If you're concerned your personal decor won't be tolerated, make an anonymous call and ask the receptionist if it's the correct environment for your nose ring. If the answer is no, remove/hide your piercing/tattoo. If you're unwilling, be prepared to get rejected for not fitting into the company culture.

4. You're Sweating

You're human. You perspire. But don't let interviewers see it. If you arrive at an [interview](#) spouting like a sprinkler, excuse yourself to the restroom to compose yourself -- and towel down. Sweaty palms don't make for a pleasant handshake. Run your hands under cold water to cool them off, then dry thoroughly.

5. You're Underdressed

[Dressing to impress](#) should be a no-brainer, but many people still struggle with what to wear. "Do your homework," says image consultant Lauren Solomon. "Be able to walk in and look like part of the team -- but one step above." Solomon suggests looking at peoples' clothes on the company website, asking the secretary, or posing the question on Twitter. If all those fail, wearing a suit is always a safe bet.

6. You're Late

There really is no excuse for being late to an interview. Scope out the route beforehand, and give yourself plenty of transit time. If you have to be late -- your car stalled, your train is running late, or there was a UFO landing outside the office -- call the interviewer, explain the situation, and ask if he still has time for you or would like to reschedule. Be respectful of recruiters' time and they'll remember it.

7. You're Early

While you should give yourself plenty of time to get to the interview, hanging out in the lobby for 30 minutes before the interview makes you look desperate. If you arrive early, sit and wait in a coffee shop, or just sit in your car. Don't go into the office until 10 minutes before the scheduled time.

8. You Misuse Your Lobby Time

Count your 10 minutes in the lobby as part of the interview. "The security guard, doorman, and receptionist will all be judging you," says Reeves. "If you're rude or dismissive, they will tattle, and there's a good chance you won't get the job." Talking on your cell about last night's exploits or reading a book are also bad ideas. Spend your time gathering information -- read available literature or look at company bulletin boards.

9. Your Handshake Is Lacking

A University of Iowa study found a solid handshake is more important than physical appearance when establishing an impression in an interview. Your grip should fall between the dead fish and the bone-crunching clasp. It sounds silly, but practicing with a friend is the best way to perfect your handshake. Also make sure to look your interviewer in the eye and say his name.

10. You're Bad at Small Talk

Think of some questions to ask your interviewer as you walk through the hall. If you notice something like a company picnic flyer, inquiring about that can be a great way to learn about company culture. Another safe topic is how the interviewer learned about the company. By showing interest in your interviewer's background, you'll put her at ease and establish a connection.