8 Ways To Make a Great First Impression During A Job Interview

Forming a first impression of someone takes seconds, and that can feel impossible to nail when you’re in a job interview. Luckily, most hiring managers take more time to form their opinion. A study published in the Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology found that the first 15 minutes are when an impression is made during an interview, and that’s enough time to connect and sell yourself.

We spoke with hiring managers and found out what impresses them. Here are eight things to do to help you land the job.

1. Know That Your First Impression Starts Right Away

Be careful when waiting for the interviewer to come get you, as the receptionist may get a first impression that he or she can share with the interviewer, says Patricia H. Lenkov, founder and president of the recruiting firm Agility Executive Search. “Don’t talk on the phone, doze off, or otherwise act unprofessional, even if you believe the interview has not yet begun,” she says.

These first few moments matter, adds Nicole Cox, chief recruitment officer at the recruiting firm Decision Toolbox. “I have seen hiring managers ask reception staff about their interaction with a candidate,” she says.

Zappos is known to interview the shuttle driver when they bring a candidate in for an interview. If the person was less than courteous, they get sent home.

2. Smile

It sounds simple, but smiling is a powerful part of your first impression. Research from Cornell University found that facial appearance affects how we judge someone. “These facial cues are very powerful in shaping interactions, even in the presence of other information," writes Vivian Zayas, professor of psychology and lead researcher.

Neutral expressions, for example, can hinder a person’s likeability, while people who smile and lean forward a bit come off as being warmer.

People see a smiling person as more intelligent, attractive, relaxed, sincere, and reliable than a person who’s not smiling, says Denise Dudley, author of Work It! Get In, Get Noticed, Get Promoted. “Smiling also does some pretty amazing things to your body,” she says. “It helps decrease the amount of stress-induced hormones circulating through your bloodstream, lowers your blood pressure, and makes you feel more relaxed and happy by stimulating the release of feel-good neurotransmitters in your brain.”

When others see a smiling face, the reward centers in their brains become activated, releasing the same feel-good neurotransmitters that are already making you feel so great, says Dudley. “In short, each time you smile at someone else, both of you will experience activated reward centers and a release of positive chemicals in your brains,” she says.

3. Give A Firm Handshake

If your handshake is weak or if you lack eye contact, it can be challenging to overcome, says Lenkov. “I am often surprised when meeting otherwise successful and accomplished people who have a limp, ‘dead fish’ kind of
handshake,” she says.

A good handshake is firm but not excessively so, Lenkov adds. “It doesn’t hurt, but it also leaves the subtle impression of confidence,” she says, adding that it must be combined with eye contact. “Shaking hands without looking the other person in the eye takes away from the good impression one of trying to create.”

4. Start To Build Rapport

At the greeting stage, try to be the first to initiate conversation, says Cox. “It shows respect and confidence all at once,” she says, adding that you shouldn’t hurry or rush the greeting. “That can make you appear nervous.”

Then balance listening and speaking, says Jill Larsen, senior vice president of HR and talent for Cisco. “Many times candidates try too hard to say as much as they can in the interview,” she says. “Most candidates who get an in-person interview have the basic technical skills for the role; it’s the cultural or personality fit that’s important. Do your best not to be nervous, and try to connect with the interviewer.”

5. Summarize Your Experience

Without looking at your resume, be able to tell the hiring manager a summary of your career path, says Phil Shawe, co-CEO of TransPerfect, a global content management and translation services company. Include factors that influenced your choice of schools, the jobs you took, the moves you made, and the life experiences that make you ready to start a new chapter with your interviewer’s company, he suggests.

“From my experience, if someone cannot give a coherent summary about themselves, then they will have a hard time being an ambassador of their department internally, and a difficult time achieving further success,” says Shawe.

6. Share Statistics

Before going to the interview, review your career and list your major accomplishments, says Brian Binke, president and CEO of The Birmingham Group, a recruiting firm. Be specific about areas where you were able to save or make the company money, brought in new business, exceeded quota, or reduced turnover.

During the interview, ask exactly what the hiring manager is looking for, says Binke. “Most candidates will talk about what they have done,” he says. “The prepared candidate can be very specific. They can discuss how they have been highly successful in the past, and how their former company has benefited. For example, ‘We were able to save the company $600,000,’ or ‘First year turnover was reduced by 55%.”

7. Be Willing To Be Vulnerable

It’s great to be able to showcase your successes, but it’s also important to be able to describe situations where things didn’t work out as planned, says Larsen.

“When a candidate describes how they dealt with failure and what they learned from it, it gives a hiring manager insight into a person and how they react in difficult circumstances, giving them an edge over other candidates,” she says.

8. Ask Great Questions

Great questions give candidates information about whether the position is right for them, while allowing them to sell themselves, says Binke. For example, “If I make a change, my goal would be to find a company that I can retire from. Where do you see XYZ company five, 10, 15 years from now? If I do an excellent job, where can I be with your
company?

“This is a great question for a candidate that’s interested in finding a stable opportunity that offers upward mobility,” he says. “One of the most important things hiring managers look for when interviewing a candidate is one that will be with them for the long haul and is promotable.”