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The Perfect Job Interview in 8 Simple Steps: by Jeff Haden November 21, 2012

You landed the interview. Awesome! Now don't screw it up.

I've interviewed thousands of people for jobs ranging from entry-level to executive. Easily three-fourths of the candidates made basic interviewing mistakes.

Did I still hire some of them? Absolutely... but never count on your qualifications and experience to outweigh a bad interview.

Here are eight practical ways to shine:

1. **Be likable.** Obvious? And critical. Making a great first impression and establishing a real connection is everything. Smile, make eye contact, be enthusiastic, sit forward in your chair, use the interviewer's name.... Be yourself, but be the best version of yourself you possibly can. We all want to work with people we like and who like us. Use that basic fact to your advantage. Few candidates do.
2. **Never start the interview by saying you want the job.** Why? Because you don't know yet. False commitment is, well, false. Instead...
3. **Ask questions about what really matters to you.** (Here are [five questions great job candidates ask](#).) Focus on making sure the job is a good fit: Who you will work with, who you will report to, the scope of responsibilities, etc. Interviews should always be two-way, and interviewers respond positively to people as eager as they are to find the right fit. Plus there's really no other way to know you want the job. And don't be afraid to ask several questions. As long as you don't take completely take over, the interviewer will enjoy and remember a nice change of pace.
4. **Set a hook.** A sad truth of interviewing is that later we often don't remember a tremendous amount about you -- especially if we've interviewed a number of candidates for the same position. Later we might refer to you as, "The guy with the alligator briefcase," or, "The lady who did a Tough Mudder," or, "The guy who grew up in Panama." Sometimes you may be identified by hooks, so use that to your advantage. Your hook could be clothing (within reason), or an outside interest, or an unusual fact about your upbringing or career. Hooks make you memorable and create an anchor for interviewers to remember you by -- and being memorable is everything.
5. **Know what you can offer immediately.** Researching the company is a given; go a step farther and find a way you can [hit the ground running or contribute to a critical area](#). If you have a specific technical skill, show how it can be leveraged immediately. But don't say, for example, "I would love to be in charge of revamping your social media marketing." One, that's fairly presumptuous, and two, someone may already be in charge. Instead, share details regarding your skills and say you would love to work with that team. If there is no team, great --

you may be put in charge. If there is a team you haven't stepped on any toes or come across as pushy. Just think about what makes you special and show the benefits to the company. The interviewer will be smart enough to recognize how the project you bring can be used.

6. **Don't create negative sound bites.** Interviewers will only remember a few sound bites, especially negative ones. If you've never been in charge of training, don't say, "I've never been in charge of training." Say, "I did not fill that specific role, but I have trained dozens of new hires and created several training guides." Basically, never say, "I can't," or "I haven't," or "I don't." Share applicable experience and find the positives in what you *have* done. No matter what the subject, be positive: Even your worst mistake can be your best learning experience.
7. **Ask for the job based on facts.** By the end of the interview you should have a good sense of whether you want the job. If you need more information, say so. Otherwise [use your sales skills](#) and ask for the job. (Don't worry; we like when you ask.) Focus on specific aspects of the job: Explain you work best with teams, or thrive in unsupervised roles, or get energized by frequent travel.... Ask for the job and use facts to prove you want it -- and deserve it.
8. **Reinforce a connection with your follow-up.** Email follow-ups are fine; handwritten notes are better; following up based on something you learned during the interview is best: An email including additional information you were asked to provide, or a link to a subject you discussed (whether business or personal.) The better the interview -- and more closely you listened -- the easier it will be to think of ways you can make following up seem natural and unforced. And make sure you say thanks -- never underestimate the [power of gratitude](#).

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