

Big, bad interview blunders will not land dream job

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By **JAN BEHRS**
Special Writer

When asked about your previous employer, resist using the word "jerk."

It's also best to turn down an interviewer's offer of coffee; in a nerve-wracking situation where you tend to talk too much anyway, caffeine may just make things worse.

Don't bring your children or friends with you to an interview.

And, at the end, when asked if you have any questions, don't say "no." Have one or two prepared.

Most people know the basic rules of interviewing: know something about the company; be on time; make eye contact; dress appropriately; send a thank-you note afterwards. It's the things they don't know that raise interviewers' eyebrows.

"Do not ever badmouth previous bosses or employers," said Liz Plotkin, owner of Career Crossroads. "People who have been laid off usually are too raw to be interviewing for a new job right away. Make sure you are over the grief and anger; wait a bit to be at a point where you can show your enthusiasm for the new job," rather than your dismay at losing the old one, she said.

"Some people come in and are extremely negative about their previous jobs or co-workers," said Kelly Lester, a service representative with Manpower Temporary Services. "It makes us wonder what they're going to say about us."

As for the friendly offer of coffee, Plotkin said, "Stay away from it. It's OK to accept a glass of water, although there's the chance it could spill, but with coffee you might become a chattermouth. What you want to do is answer the interviewer's questions succinctly, then stop."

Dressing appropriately means wearing what the other people at the company wear. "If you are applying for a professional job, don't dress casually," said

Marylee King, director of the Life Planning Program at Marylhurst College.

Plotkin goes a step further. "Dress one step above what the people wear there," she said. If the employees are in jeans, wear khakis or twill. Also, "Be conservative and wear business colors such as gray or blue," Plotkin said.

Lester, of Manpower, said that it is people who bring children to interviews who most amaze her. "One woman brought her children in, and when I asked whether she wanted to come back later, at a time when she could find daycare, she said, 'Oh, they'll just wait.'"

"I had one woman who brought in a 2-year-old; he sat on her lap through the whole interview. Maybe because we're a temporary service, they think it doesn't matter, but they can't take their children to the job site with them," Lester said.

Another surprise Lester and her co-interviewers have encountered is people who bring in cans of pop or chew gum during interviews. "They'll come in with a Coke or a Big Gulp in their hand," said Lester. "I had one guy who was chewing tobacco; he kept spitting into a cup" while she did her best to concentrate on talking with him.

Renette Meltebeke, owner of Career Guidance Specialists, said that while the people she deals with usually are sophisticated about the interview process, she does advise them to avoid overselling themselves. "Don't try to be somebody you're not," she said. "It's a matching process. If you pretend you can do things you can't do, if you get the job you're not going to like it anyway."

"When they ask you whether you have any weaknesses," said Meltebeke, "don't bring up personal issues such as marital problems."

"That's a really big no-no," said King of Marylhurst. "The interviewer may enjoy talking about your personal issues, but you won't get the job."

It's better to turn that often-

asked question, "What should I know that's bad about you?" into an opportunity for one more positive statement, said career counselor Plotkin. "Say something like, 'I've always been a really hard worker, but I've learned to pace myself,'" she advised.

Something to remember about interviews, said Plotkin, is that if you've been selected for one, the company probably has decided that you have the qualifications for the position — the interview is to see whether you will fit the team.

And, finally, she said, be certain you are just as friendly to the person you check in with as

you are to the interviewer. An interviewer is quite likely to ask employees their impression of you after you leave.

Jan Behrs is a Portland writer.

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Interview requires planning

By ELIZABETH SCHEIBNER
Copy/News Service

There's no question that job interviewing can be a stressful experience — even for the most confident and seasoned appli-

cant. One way to minimize the stress and feel more at ease is to be well-prepared. The more you know about the company and the employer's needs, the better you'll do in your interview.

Give yourself at least a day or two to prepare. Ask the employer to fax a copy of the job description if you don't already have access to one. You should also ask the hiring manager or human resources department to send you information and brochures about the company. Some other

ways in which to prepare:

If you're interviewing at a public company, do research at the local library or through the Internet to learn about the company's history, products and services; size, employees and financial data so that you are more familiar with the organization.

Bring extra copies of your resume, a note pad, pen, letters of recommendation, list of references and appropriate work samples.

Practice interviewing at home with a friend or spouse. If possible, videotape your presentation so that you can see yourself in action.

Be as positive and upbeat as possible. Don't bad-mouth former employers or co-workers. Try to turn a negative experience into a positive one.

Be prepared to answer questions about any employment gaps, layoffs, terminations or job hopping. Explain how you learned from the situation rather

than acting defensive or making self-defeating statements.

Develop your listening skills and focus on the company's needs rather than your own desires.

Prepare a list of intelligent questions in your head, which may help clarify the position or help you to better understand the employer's expectations and objectives.

Be prepared to give concrete examples of your accomplishments and achievements.

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