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Words of blunder

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Every hopeful with a resume knows it's important to show substance during a job interview. Research the company. Know the job description. Keep track of industry trends.

But a surprising number of job seekers fail to get that this substance has to be displayed with style. Experts say too many applicants make common errors that mean a red flag to an interviewer, and walk out blithely unaware they've landed in the reject pile.

Some curse during interviews. Some badmouth former employers. Some cross the line from professionally assertive to coarsely aggressive.

"It boils down to a lot of job seekers really needing to take responsibility for their behaviors," says Kimberly Bishop, an executive recruiter.

To help you ace your next grilling, we polled hiring managers and recruiters to compile this list of interview don'ts.

* Don't swear. Dropping a casual f-bomb might have gone over big with the fellas in grade school, but it's not going to impress an interviewer. And "it's more common than you think," says Bishop.

An s-word slip here and there can be lived with, she says, but profane, Quentin Tarantino-inspired oratories cannot.

"I remember sitting there, and a third of the way into the interview I realized no matter what this person said next, it would involve cursing," says Bishop.

To Paul Sorbera, president of the executive search firm Alliance Consulting, the context is important. "I actually will overlook cursing at certain points in an interview. I'm a New Yorker," he says. "But if someone says it derogatorily towards a former employer, it's a real negative to me."

Which leads us to:

* Don't badmouth your former employer. You may have a beef with the bosses at your old job, but a job interview isn't the place to air them, experts agree.

Bishop recalls one interview that "was like a therapy session."

"The interview turned into all of their issues with their former employer, from the temperature in the building to the business practices they didn't like," she says.

Sorbera says he's seen interviewees get so hot under the collar about old employers that interviews have turned into a mudslinging fest.

"He's crying and complaining about the firm being terrible," Sorbera says of one applicant who had the temerity to complain about a company that was paying him almost four times what he'd previously earned. "He was really angry."

Smaller displays of pique can still be a game-changer, whether your complaints are legitimate or not. If asked why you've left a firm, keep the answer close to "it wasn't the right fit" and leave it there.

* Don't be informal. Too many applicants think a breezy style will impress an interviewer. In reality, it's more likely to turn them off.

New Jersey attorney Jay Weinberg remembers interviewing the boyfriend of one of his clerks. When Weinberg tried to tell the aspiring attorney that he "didn't want to BS" him about the menial chores he'd be required to perform, he was cut off after the BS-word.

"Isn't [BS] what you went to law school for?" asked the applicant.

Luckily for the boyfriend, Weinberg swallowed his tongue. But he says such overfamiliarity would usually get an interviewee bum-rushed from his office.

The informality rule applies to dress as well — even when a corporate culture emphasizes casual appearance. Career counselor Adriana Llamas recalls a candidate who lost a shot at a sales director position because he was underdressed compared to another candidate — even though the firm's dress code was "casual Friday."

* Don't be too aggressive. It's good to come across as a little hungry. Famished, not so much.

"I've had so many examples of people doing things more aggressive than assertive to get on my radar screen," says recruiter Bishop.

So avoid obnoxious questions about salary and benefits. Don't use deceit to get your foot in the door. And don't send gifts to interviewers. And whatever you do:

* Don't lie about your employment status: While it may be tempting to give the impression that you're gainfully employed, fibbing about it is a sure way to maintain your unemployed status.

Bishop says she recently called someone on just that lie, then asked him why he did so. The answer: "I think it makes me come across as a better candidate."

She disagreed.

* Don't be a flirt: The gestures and body language you use to score at a singles bar don't translate well to an interview situation. Too many people forget this, says Tracy Brisson of the career coaching firm The Opportunities Project, who recalls an interview with a finance industry honcho that took a turn for the worse when his flirtatious winking got out of hand.

"I thought maybe there was something wrong with his eye," she says. "He certainly made me feel uncomfortable."

* Don't get emotional. While job interviews are often pressure-packed scenarios, you've got to keep your emotions in check, experts say. Turning on the waterworks is not uncommon — and not welcome.

Career coach Roy Cohen, author of "The Wall Street Professional's Survival Guide," remembers a client flat-out bawling during an intense job interview. Losing it in the interview meant she lost a shot at the job.

"Never cry in an interview," says Cohen. "That's the lesson."

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