

Dealing with Silence in Interviews

What do you do when the flow of conversation comes to a grinding halt in an interview? It's very easy to feel the weight of silence and the impulse to fill the gap can be hard to overcome. Below are some useful tips to help you deal with these wordless moments:

Less is more

During the interview, if you've fully elaborated on your answer and feel you've given it your best, then stop. If the interviewer pauses, don't feel the need to keep talking— by doing this you'll simply dilute your message and lessen its impact.

Telephone interview

On the telephone, silence is obviously more difficult to manage. As before never feel the need to fill a vacuum – if after a few seconds pause the interviewer doesn't take control, simply ask them if they'd like you to expand further on your answer. Don't forget that the interviewer may be taking notes as you speak so a slight time lag isn't unusual.

The power of punctuation

Silence can be a powerful tool, particularly in salary negotiations. A well timed pause will show your confidence, and can subconsciously remind an employer of your market value thus prompting them to more actively engage in the negotiation process.

Lost for words

What if you're lost for words in an interview and struggle to come up with a good answer? Remember, employers will always respect somebody who thinks before they speak – it shows maturity, a sense of calmness and a structured approach...so don't panic. In these situations, it can be useful to repeat the question – this can give you a few more seconds to formulate a solid answer. In extreme cases you could ask the interviewer to come back to the question at the end of the interview.

Conclusion

In today's fast paced world with a constant stream of information, we're trained to feel the need to fill silent gaps. When we hit a pause, especially in an interview setting, our instinct is to think that things aren't going well. Knowing how to effectively manage such moments of silence will help differentiate you from other job applicants and will ultimately make you closer to securing a job offer.

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of *Interview Techniques*, a leading provider of interview coaching services. She has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with *Recruit Ireland* and the *Sunday Business Post*.

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