

The Importance of Body Language in an interview

Elections have been won and lost on the back of body language. The most famous example is the 1960 US Presidential election. The popularisation of the television in the 1950s changed the nature of presidential campaigning – and history was made on 26 September 1960 when the first general election presidential debate (Nixon-Kennedy) was televised in Chicago in the studios of CBS WBBM-TV.

Nixon, not appreciating the power of image and non verbal communication, refused make-up for his first debate and as a result of a recent hospital stay and having campaigned until the last minute looked pale, sickly, underweight, and tired. Bright studio lights shining down caused him to sweat profusely, adding to his uneasiness. Kennedy, his opponent, by contrast, rested before the first debate and appeared tanned, confident, and relaxed during the TV presentation.

An estimated 80 million viewers watched the first debate. The subsequent poll results revealed the extraordinary power of non verbal communication. While most people who watched the debate on TV believed Kennedy had won; radio listeners reached the opposite conclusion believing that Nixon was the victor. Not paying enough attention to image and body language ended up costing Nixon dearly – it was to take him another eight years to win the US presidency.

It is estimated that body language forms as high as 60 per cent of the impact of all communication, the remaining being divided between voice and words. Within an interview context, where you have only one hour to present yourself; it would be foolhardy to ignore the significance of this non verbal communication.

Handshake

Never underestimate the power of a handshake. Even in today's global economy, touch is vitally important in doing business. It is the first step in developing a connection with someone, building a rapport and developing a bond of trust. When entering the interview, a nice firm, warm handshake, whilst maintaining eye contact with the interviewer can help set the tone for the rest of the interview.

Posture

Great posture projects energy and confidence. Walk confidently into your meeting – stand tall, shoulders back and hold your head high. When seated, maintain this self composed posture by sitting straight in your chair, arms unfolded.

Smile

In interview, we are often so worried about answering questions correctly that we forget to smile. Smiling throughout an interview accomplishes several things: it shows the interviewer you are relaxed, it helps you relax, and it helps you project and show enthusiasm for the job. Remember, we spend more time in the office than we do at home - so the person making the hiring decision will want to ensure that they can work effectively with you and that they enjoy working with you.

Eye contact

Good eye contact enhances a conversation and delivers our words more effectively. When you maintain direct eye contact, you present an air of confidence both in yourself and in what you are communicating; you show that you are listening intently and you are helping to build a bond of trust. Poor eye contact can be interpreted as indicating a lack of honesty or a lack of self belief. However, be careful not to go the other extreme as looking too intensely at the interviewer can come across as offensive and intimidating.

Conclusion

In interview, you are communicating your message on many different levels. By ensuring your preparations focus on both what you say and *how* you say it, will help ensure you deliver a polished, powerful and persuasive performance, worthy of any presidential candidate.

About the Author

Laura McGrath is the owner of [Interview Techniques](http://www.interviewtechniques.ie), 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*.

Go to: www.interviewtechniques.ie
Email: info@interviewtechniques.ie
Call: 01 676 8874