

What are the factors that impact on First Impression during an interview?

First impressions are still hugely important in the interview process – in fact nearly 60% of recruiters admit that the first couple of minutes of an interview strongly influences their decision! What I mean by first impression is personal presentation, how you walk into the room, your smile, handshake, how you engage with the interviewer..... An interview is like any other form of human interaction – we all make assumptions when we meet a person for the first time – do we trust them, do we like them, could we work with them?

How important are non-verbal and presentational aspects during interviews?

Crucial! In an interview, *what you say* and *how you say it* are both equally important. Your posture, body language, eye contact, tone of voice all take on a special significance. Let me explain what I mean - I was coaching a sales manager last week. He had everything going for him - a strong track record, good solid answers but because he interviewed in a flat, monotone voice he lacked any impact. To help him get some life and passion into what he was saying, I asked him what his interests were..... As it happens, he was a proud Kilkenny man and loved playing hurling. I suggested that he talked about his career with the same enthusiasm as talked about hurling. The difference was amazing! Everything changed – body language, inflection in the voice, a spark in the eye – and as a listener what he was saying became so much more compelling!

How has the downturn affected the form of interview itself?

The whole interview process is taking much longer. Five years ago, offers were made two to three weeks after the first round interviews had taken place. It can now take up to two months to get to job offer stage. Also, employers are becoming much more conservative in their approach. Whereas five years ago, employers were happy to train somebody into the role, now they are much more likely to select those who “tick all the boxes” of the job specification. Because there is a large supply of good quality candidates, they want the exact match – in essence a person who can hit the ground running.

What type of question do interviewers tend to ask?

Competency based questions have become much more popular – in fact over 70% of interviewers use this method during the interview process. In many cases an employer will let you know what competencies they are looking for and often highlight them on the job specification. So, from a job applicant perspective - once you know the areas they will be focusing on, you have the opportunity to prepare good strong answers.

Unfortunately three out of every four job applicants do not know how to answer this style of question. By doing some research and getting some training on competency/behavioural interviews, they could really stand out from the crowd.

Traditional questions are still very much in fashion – the top five being:

Tell me about yourself. What are your strengths/weaknesses? Why did you apply for this position?
What do you know about this company? Do you have any questions you would like to ask us?

Besides interviews, what other processes are employers or recruiters using to rank and choose candidates?

The vast majority of employers still rely heavily on interviews to select their preferred candidate. A recent survey we did showed that only 30% conduct psychometric tests, 30% require a medical and 15% get their preferred candidate to do a presentation. Interestingly, a growing number of employers (20%) are looking at social networking sites to get background information on prospective employees and almost all employers (98%) take up references on their preferred candidate.

What are the factors that make it easy for an employer to disregard or cut a candidate from the process?

Because of the volumes of CVs that employers are receiving, they only spend a couple of minutes reviewing each application. The top reasons for rejecting a CV are - spelling mistakes (81%), poor CV layout (78%) and frequent job moves (68%).

If a job applicant's experience and qualifications meet the client's requirements – they will have a strong chance of making the short list. Job seekers need to ensure that an employer does not have to search for the important information – make it clear on the CV. Obvious though it may sound - 60% of job seekers do not make the effort to tailor their CV to each job, potentially missing out on many interviews!

Nearly 70% of employers said that the optimal length of a CV was 3 pages or less and interestingly over a quarter of respondents said that CVs had become longer since the start of the economic down turn over twelve months ago.

Do HR staff tend to have training in carrying out interviews?

Most Human Resource personnel are well trained in how to conduct interviews but outside of the Human Resource arena only half of those we surveyed had any formal training. When human resources are leading the recruitment exercise job specifications are drawn up, skills/qualifications and competencies are agreed, interview questions are prepared in advance, and all job applicants are interviewed in a consistent manner.

In smaller companies with no human resource function, line managers are often too busy to spend much time on interview preparation and the whole process can become very unstructured. In a recent survey we conducted with job applicants– only 50% said that they always received a job spec and a third said that the interviewer had not read their CV properly before the interview!

About the Author

Interview Techniques provides interview coaching services. Laura McGrath , Managing Director, has spent the last 15 years in staffing and recruitment and is a regular contributor with Irish Jobs and Recruit Ireland.

For Information

Laura McGrath, Interview Techniques Ltd

Tel: 01 231 3003/ 087 669 1192

Web: www.interviewtechniques.ie Email: Dublin@interviewtechniques.ie