

Non-Verbal Clues and the Job Interview

Pam Stephens

You sit in the reception area of the school district's human resources department waiting with other candidates to interview for a teaching position. As you thumb through brochures about the district, you slyly size up those who might be your rivals for the job.

Across the way a man slumps in a chair and stares blankly at the ceiling. He wears obviously expensive clothes: a collarless T-shirt, designer jeans, and the newest style of athletic shoes. Next to him is a woman who seems to have been running late this morning. She looks into a small makeup mirror while she touches up her heavily made-up eyes. Her clothes, although of a professional cut, are in need of pressing. A tattoo on her wrist peeks from under the sleeve of her blouse. The scent of her perfume has wafted across the room. A third person sits in another part of the room. With an air of authority, this person sits tall. Her hair and makeup are nondescript. Her clothes are not expensive, but the blouse and skirt are tidy and her shoes are polished. Unlike the other two candidates, by her side is a portfolio. As you scan the room, you quickly decide that only the third candidate poses any real competition for you. Why?

Assessing Non-Verbal Clues

We often make judgment calls based on non-verbal clues. Each of the candidates might possess the skills and knowledge that meet the criteria set forth for the job, but their outward appearances—the non-verbal clues—have sabotaged their chances of a successful job interview. Like you, people who serve on hiring committees are influenced by what they see. The trite expression that “you only have one chance to make a first impression” is absolutely true.

Let's review those candidates in



What non-verbal clues do Beth and Liz communicate?

the waiting room again. The man's body language suggests that he is not completely engaged with the impending interview. His clothing, although expensive and trendy, does not say “professional.” He obviously hasn't read the school district's dress code which forbids collarless shirts, jeans, and athletic shoes for most educators. The first woman also breaks rules. Too much makeup and unkempt clothes say “trendy and disorganized.” And that tattoo? The district's code clearly states, “no visible tattoos.” The second woman is well-prepared for the interview. Her clothing is not rumpled and her shoes are shined. The portfolio means that she has taken the time to collect materials that will demonstrate her abilities as an educator. Her demeanor says “professional educator” and “hire me.”

Giving Positive Non-Verbal Clues

Now look at yourself. Here are some hints for giving positive non-verbal clues when you attend the all-important job interview:

- Prepare for the interview by reading the district's dress code. Know what is considered acceptable and unac-

ceptable for grooming and attire.

- Select understated clothing that is clean and pressed.
- Select conservative jewelry. Wear a minimal amount or none at all.
- Style your hair in a conservative way. Avoid drastic cuts or unnatural colors.
- Make sure your hands are clean and your nails have a conservative manicure.
- Avoid wearing perfumes or colognes.
- Carry a portfolio or notebook that is professional looking.
- Greet the hiring committee with a smile. Be gracious. Thank the committee for inviting you to the interview.

When preparing for that all-important interview, remember that the impression you make when meeting the hiring committee is a picture that stays in their minds. Make sure that your first impression says “I am the person you need to hire.” ☺

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