10 Things You Didn’t Realize Were Sabotaging Your Interview

You may feel like you’re often the best candidate for the job, but for reasons you can’t really pin down, you find yourself going to interview after interview with no call-backs. What’s going on?

According to a substantial number of LIS hiring managers, job applicants unfamiliar with interview expectations and etiquette frequently sabotage their chances without realizing what caused the damage. These are the issues that may be harming your interview outcomes:

**Your punctuality.** There is no such thing as fashionably late in interviews, and no matter how good your excuse for lateness may be, you’ve already started things off poorly. You want to arrive about 5-10 minutes early, giving yourself enough time to breathe deeply, settle your thoughts, and review your notes about the organization and the job.

**Your interview outfit.** Arriving in clothes that are too casual for a professional meeting (e.g., a job interview) signals others that you lack respect for them and for yourself. As part of your preparation for the interview, check out what type of clothing employees wear in the library or office relative to the job you’ll be applying for. Your goal is to make clear that you see yourself as a professional, and you know how to present yourself as one.

**Your demeanor.** It’s natural to be nervous in an interview, but if you project a total lack of confidence, your interviewers will lack confidence in you as well. Hiring managers have also noted behaviors such as being too flip, too casual, seeming uninterested, or excessively passive. Your goal: be interested, enthusiastic about the job, the work, and applying your skills to said job and work, and curious to learn more about the organization (in addition to the knowledge you’ve gained during your interview prep research, see next).

**Your knowledge of the organization.** If you don’t already know quite a bit about the organization you’re applying to, you’re likely signaling the hiring manager that you’re 1) not really interested, 2) lazy, 3) not the type of self-starter, engaged professional they’re looking for, or 4) all of the above. If you’re not willing to make the effort to learn about them, then you’re sending them a pretty clear – and very damaging – message.

**Your knowledge of the organization’s customer.** Who does the organization serve, what are their needs, and what might some of their issues be? Knowing this information enables you to demonstrate your genuine interest in the goals of the organization and how your skills will support those goals; not knowing this information makes it easy for the hiring manager to dismiss you as someone of little potential value.

**Your understanding of how you could add value.** An interview is an opportunity to clearly and compellingly describe what makes you a great fit for a specific job within a particular organization. It’s not worth an interviewer’s time to have to figure this out for you; if you can’t articulate your value for yourself, no one else will be able to, either.

**Your stories.** One of the things you’ll be asked to do in most interviews is to describe a time when you applied relevant skills to situations similar to ones you might face on the job. These experiences could be on the job, via volunteer work, or, in a pinch, during a student project or leadership role. But it will be up to you to consider in advance, based on the job description, what types of “applied skills” stories you should be prepared to share. If you can’t connect your LIS skills to real-world actions and situations, your interviewer won’t be able to, either. And according to hiring managers, this is one of the worst “misses” for most applicants.
**The quality of your questions.** Questions are a great way to demonstrate how well you’ve done your homework. Thoughtful questions about the job’s responsibilities, success metrics, the organization’s challenges, new initiatives, etc. all indicate an authentic and well-researched interest in the job and the employer. On the other hand, questions that focus solely on your personal priorities, such as benefits or vacation days or flexible scheduling, send a poor message about your professional priorities in an interview.

**Your lack of questions.** The only thing worse than asking *bad* questions is asking *no* questions. Again, it leaves the impression with your interviewer that you’re passive, unprepared, and not really interested in the job or organization. Remember, your goal during an interview is to stand out as a great candidate for a specific job; if you don’t ask any questions, it will give the impression that you have nothing to bring to the position.

**Your close.** As an interview wraps up, you have an opportunity to re-emphasize your interest in and enthusiasm for the job as well as your appreciation for having had an opportunity to meet the interviewer and learn more about the position. No matter how the interview went, don’t simply shake hands and passively say “thank you,” but instead take a moment to cement yourself in the interviewer’s mind as a confident professional who’s eager to contribute value to the department and organization.