First Impressions

Studies have shown that people form initial impressions of strangers in the first 30 seconds of the encounter. First impressions are based almost exclusively on the appearance and behavior of the person. This Guide gives information on how a job seeker can make a positive first impression both in the job interview and on the job.

At the job interview

Job interviewers have only a few minutes to decide whether you are the right candidate for the job. They have reviewed your application or résumé and determined that you have the skills, values and experience that may match the job. The interviewer must now decide if you are the right person for the job. This process begins the minute that you arrive for the interview, continues through the interview and concludes with the follow-up contact. Your task as the job seeker is to make sure that nothing you do before, during or after the interview disqualifies you for the job. How you present yourself to the company and the interviewer significantly influences the interviewer’s decision. The following are areas that you need to address to assure that you make a good impression on the company and the interviewer.

Appearance

As stated above, people make an initial decision about a stranger based almost exclusively on appearance. Here are some actions that you can take that enhance your chances of making a good impression:

**Dress.** Nothing says more about how serious you are about the job than the way you dress. Dress casually and you communicate that you do not take the job seriously. Here are some do’s and don’ts:
- Jeans, t-shirts, shorts or any clothing that has writing on it are definitely not acceptable.
- Men should dress professionally. Regardless of the job for which you are applying, wear a conservative suit or sports jacket. If applying for a professional job, wear a tie.
- Women should wear a conservative dress or business pants suit.
- Never wear anything that is sloppy or revealing to an interview.
- Bare midriffs, short skirts, see-through clothing, swim wear or low-cut necklines should never be worn to an interview.

**Shoes.** Both men and women should wear dress shoes. Do not wear tennis, running or walking shoes. Wearing high heeled shoes for women is optional. If you do wear high heeled shoes, they should be conservative. Make sure that your shoes are clean and polished.

**Body appearance.**
- Absolutely no body piercing. Although wearing numerous earrings, nose studs or tongue piercing makes an individual statement, they are not appropriate when looking for a job. Only one set of earrings is acceptable.
- Cover all body art.
- Avoid any jewelry that represents a religion, group or any organization. Men should avoid wearing any jewelry.
- Use only a moderate amount of make-up. The tones of the make-up should be natural. Be sure to check your make-up just before you enter the place of business.
- Get a professional hair cut before the interview. Your hair should look natural. Like the prohibition of body piercing, your hair style should be conservative.
- If you use perfume or after-shave lotion, use it in moderation.

The day of the interview

The day of the interview you need to:
- Bathe, wash your hair, clean your fingernails, brush your teeth, shave and comb your hair.
- Apply an antiperspirant and hair spray.
- Make sure your clothes are clean and pressed. Have your clothes professionally cleaned after every interview.
- Avoid smoking after dressing. Tobacco is easily absorbed by clothing. If you do smoke, smoke in the open air, not in your car. Either brush your teeth or use a breath mint before you enter the building.
- Have someone look you over before you leave the house.
Your behavior says a lot about you

Remember, you are being evaluated by everyone in the company from the moment that you arrive for the job interview until you leave. The following are some suggestions that will help you leave everyone with a good impression of you:

- **Arrive 15 minutes early for the interview.** This will give you time to settle your nerves and check your appearance in the wash room.
- **Greet everyone with eye contact and a smile.** Always wear a smile. It is not only engaging, it is polite.
- **Greet everyone with a handshake.** Make sure your grip is firm but not bone-crushing. Pump your hand a couple of times then remove the grip.
- **Monitor the tone of your voice.** People tend to raise the pitch of their voice when they get nervous. Try to speak in your normal voice. If you speak loudly, you may be perceived as being aggressive. Speaking too softly may be interpreted as your being timid.
- **Do not smoke even if offered.** Also do not chew gum or breath mints at anytime during the interview process.
- **Be mindful of your language.** Avoid using the following phrases: “you know,” “uhh” or “like.”

Send a thank you note to everyone who interviewed you. This will definitely leave a positive impression.

Make a good impression at your new job

Your first few days on a new job can set the tone for how your supervisor and co-workers will feel about you. It is important, therefore, that you make a good impression. In addition to the suggestions offered in the JobSearch Guide Starting a New Job, the following are some ways to make a good impression when starting a new job:

- **Have a positive attitude.** Nothing will endear you to your supervisor and co-workers more then having a positive, upbeat attitude.
- **Be a team player.** Ask for assistance from co-workers and be willing to give assistance when asked.
- **Learn co-worker’s names.** Until you can remember the names of your co-workers, keep a diary. Each time you meet a new person, write down the person’s name and add a brief statement that will help you remember the person. For example, *Bob Smith, has a grey beard*. Each evening review your diary until you can name all of your co-workers.
- **Learn everything you can about the company.** Study the company handbook. Become an expert on the company’s employee policies. By knowing what the company policies are, you can avoid violating a company policy that may get you terminated.
- **Come each day prepared to work.** It is best to establish a habit of arriving to work at least ten minutes early. Make sure that your transportation to work is reliable.
- **Leave your personal life at the front door.** Do not let your personal life interfere with your work life. Avoid taking personal phone calls at work.
- **Avoid gossip.** Most work environments are fertile ground for rumors and gossip and it is easy to get caught up in it. Try not to associate with those employees who tend to thrive on gossip and rumor. If a rumor directly affects you (for example, there is a rumor that your division is to be shut down), go to your supervisor and ask if the rumor is true.
- **Get organized.** Being organized assists you to be more productive. For suggestions on how to get organized, review the JobSearch Guide Time Management at Work.
- **Keep your skills and knowledge current.** Do not assume that the company will provide the training that you need to stay current in your occupation. It is your responsibility to maintain and upgrade your skills and knowledge. Check with your supervisor to see if the company will provide financial assistance for training that you schedule.
- **Keep your supervisor informed.** Do not assume that your supervisor knows everything that you are doing. Schedule meetings with your supervisor to discuss your performance and to help establish a positive relationship. Use these meetings to express an eagerness to advance your skills and to move ahead in the company.

Internet resources

www.quintcareers.com/interview_mistakes.html -- Ten mistakes people make in the job interview.
www.quintcareers.com/first_days_working.html -- How to make a good impression on your new job.

For information on ordering JobSearch Guides for your organization, visit www.jobsearch-guides.com