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Job search strategies

Job interviews: A pro tells what to say and what not to say

A former human resources director in South Florida offers advice on what to say and what not to say during a job interview.

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Kyle Brooks began her job search in August, but the Fort Lauderdale area resident wasn't getting much practice at interviewing. Then in the past two weeks, she suddenly had five interviews.

"You have to go through the no's to get to the 'yes.' Every 'no' gets me closer to the 'yes,'" said Brooks.

She said she usually gets the jitters during an interview. But recently, the interviewer put her at ease with a joke, she relaxed and the interview went well. She starts her new administrative assistant job this week.

More job candidates are snagging interviews than in previous months, said Bob Nealon, an instructor at Workforce One. At least, that's what he has noticed in his class of job seekers.

The interview often can be the step where job seekers fail, Nealon said. That's mostly because they don't practice. To help unemployed workers prepare for interviews, Workforce One and other one-stop career centers use role-playing.

Nealon's class recently heard what *not* to do in an interview from someone who has the perspective of the job interviewer and seeker.

Adam Rosenberg, a former human resources director in South Florida, is used to being on the interviewing side of the desk. Laid off about a month ago, Rosenberg is now experiencing the job candidate side and recently shared with a Workforce One class in [Broward County](#) his recommendations for interviews:

Wear a suit. If the employer tells you not to wear a suit, then wear business casual clothes, such as a long-sleeves shirt for a man and a skirt that's not too short for a woman. Always "err on the side of being dressed professionally," Rosenberg said.

Arrive 10 minutes ahead. You don't want to arrive too early, but you don't want to risk being late.



Park your car in a spot for visitors; some companies will check.

Bring a cheat sheet. You will need former employers' addresses, phone numbers and references to fill out the application. Also bring extra copies of your resume, in case others join the interview.

Briefly explain your status. Rosenberg, like many Floridians during the recession, was laid off because of economic reasons. "Don't blame people. Don't blame Congress. There is no blame. It's just a matter of money. Move forward."

Watch your body language. Wait for the interviewer to indicate a seat for you to sit down for the interview. Sit back comfortably in the chair, instead of leaning forward. "If you lean too far, you're breaking the personal space rule," Rosenberg said.

Leave your cell phone in the car. If you bring your cell phone into an interview, the temptation is to check e-mail. And there's always the danger the cell phone will make a noise, even if on "vibrate" during the interview, distracting you.

Don't be negative about your former employer, colleagues or situation. Negative talk just reflects badly on you. "The person interviewing you is not your therapist," Rosenberg said.

Listen carefully to the interviewer. "Don't assume what the person is going to ask you. Wait until the person is finished before answering the question. It's not like 'Jeopardy!,'" he said.

Don't say "I really need this job." Focus instead on solutions you can bring to the company.

Choose a shortcoming that shows improvement. When asked about your weaknesses or shortcomings, "focus on something you can turn from a negative into a positive," Rosenberg said.

Prepare three questions to ask the interviewer. You might ask how the job fits into the company's strategy, for example. Another tactic is to note a news item about the company, which shows you're staying current, he said.

Sell yourself. Relate work you have done in the past with duties of the potential position. As a human resources director, Rosenberg is often asked whether he has fired anyone. "Yes, I have," he will say, "and here are examples of when it did go well and didn't go well."

Send a thank you note. For a small company, you might mail a handwritten note. For a larger employer, an e-mail message is quicker and might be more effective. Note an item that was discussed during the interview to stir the interviewer's memory.

Don't be a pest. If the interviewer said he will call Monday and you don't hear anything, you can send an e-mail message. But don't say anything negative, such as "I didn't hear from you on Monday."

Always keep it positive, Rosenberg said.

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