

Nonverbal Communications: Escape the Pitfalls

It begins even before you say your first word in an interview. As the interviewer walks toward you to shake hands, an opinion is already being formed. And as you sit waiting to spew out your answers to questions you've prepared for, you are already being judged by your appearance, posture, smile or your nervous look.

Look back at speakers or teachers you've listened to. Which ones stand out as memorable? The ones who were more animated and entertaining, or the ones who just gave out information? This is not to say you have to entertain the interviewer -- no jokes required -- but it does mean the conversation should be animated and interactive. If you say you are excited about the prospect of working for this company but don't show any enthusiasm, your message will probably fall flat. So smile, gesture once in a while, show some energy and breathe life into the interview experience.

And don't underestimate the value of a smile. In addition to the enthusiasm it expresses to the interviewer, smiling often makes you feel better about yourself.

Nonverbal Messages:

- **The Handshake:** It's your first encounter with the interviewer. She holds out her hand and receives a limp, damp hand in return -- not a very good beginning. Your handshake should be firm -- not bone-crushing -- and your hand should be dry and warm. Try running cold water on your hands when you first arrive at the interview site. Run warm water if your hands tend to be cold. The insides of your wrists are especially sensitive to temperature control.
- **Your Posture:** Stand and sit erect. We're not talking ramrod posture, but show some energy and enthusiasm. A slouching posture looks tired and uncaring. Check yourself out in a mirror or on videotape.
- **Eye Contact:** Look the interviewer in the eye. You don't want to stare at her like you're trying to look into her soul, but be sure to make sure your eyes meet frequently. Avoid constantly looking around the room while you are talking, because that can convey nervousness or a lack of confidence with what is being discussed.
- **Your Hands:** Gesturing or talking with your hands is very natural, but keep it in moderation. Getting carried away with hand gestures can be distracting. Also, avoid touching your mouth while talking. Watch yourself in a mirror while talking on the phone. Chances are you are probably using some of the same gestures in an interview.
- **Don't Fidget:** There is nothing worse than people playing with their hair, clicking pen tops, tapping feet or unconsciously touching parts of the body.

Preparing what you have to say is important, but practicing how you will say it is imperative. The nonverbal message can speak louder than the verbal message you're sending.