White Gloves, Party Manners, and Job Interview Tips

By KERRY HANNON

Say it’s so. Forty-two percent of companies expect to increase hiring in the next six months, according to a quarterly survey conducted by the National Association for Business Economics released this week.

ABC News reported that of the 35 leading economic experts their reporters interviewed, most said they expected hiring to improve over the next six months. One firm they contacted, financial consulting giant, Deloitte, said it is ready to increase its payroll by 10,000. “Holy Mackerel!,” as my late father would have said.

On Friday, the Bureau of Labor Statistics will release January employment figures, so we may have a better sense of whether hiring is gaining traction. Last month, the news was encouraging, so I’m hopeful.

If job openings are lighting up, then for boomers transitioning into a new job—whether it’s full-time or a part-time position to bolster retirement income—it’s your time.

I figure smart companies will be looking to hire talent, experience, and someone who can hit the ground running. There are plenty of you out there to cull from. They’ve cut to the bone, and they need an infusion of ready-to-roll workers.

Here’s a list of 10 interviewing tips that can help you get one of those jobs.

1. Your interview starts before you shake hands. Be early. Ten or fifteen minutes is about right.

You’re on stage from the instant you state your name at the receptionist desk. Most interviews last between 25 and 30 minutes, so your performance time is short and sweet, use every minute of it.

Don’t sit in the waiting area gabbing on your cell, for example, or tweeting. Focus on why you are there. It’s Ok to review a list of questions you want to ask.

2. Bantering sets the tone. Kick-off the first few minutes of your interview as you would a conversation with someone you have just met at a business reception. Keep it relaxed, conversational, yet professional, and not too personal. Commenting on wall décor or a desk accessory is acceptable, but saying you like someone’s shoes may be stepping over the line, is my standard advice.

I personally like to scan someone’s photographs, say, and see if I can find a common bond. A
framed image of a Labrador Retriever, or a horse, always sets an instant connection for me. These initial moments are where the chemistry between the interviewer and you can spark. Think speed dating.

3. Offer your resumé before you sit down. Presenting a resumé to an interviewer is akin to bringing a gift to a host or hostess. You’re passing along something of value in exchange for their invitation to meet and their time. By taking it out in the opening moments of the interview, it becomes an interactive asset. If there are areas or responsibilities that you want to emphasize or explain, the interview is your chance to draw attention to them. People think if something is on their resumé, that it’s clear to the interviewer what the significance of it is, but those bullet points don’t always speak for themselves.

4. Synch up with the interviewer’s rhythm. It’s important to go at their tempo. Don’t try too hard and talk too fast. Answer concisely and with a confident, relaxed manner. Pause before you respond—even repeat the question if need be—to buy yourself some moments to gather a measured answer.

No rapid off the top of your head answers. This isn’t Jeopardy. There’s no race to push the buzzer. You might come off as flip without meaning to do so. Don’t talk so much that you go on for ten minutes answering one question. Crisp and to the point answers allow the interviewer to get to all their questions and gather as much knowledge about you as they can.

Be enthused, but not fawning. You’re a pro, remember. Act interested and dignified. Interviewers really want to know what appeals and intrigues you about their company, too. It’s a two-way street. Yes, you are there to sell yourself, but they are selling the job too. It also makes them feel good about their own good fortune to work there. Even the most jaded hiring manager has a glimmer of insecurity.

5. Subtly slip into the conversation that you’ve done your background check. Set up a Google news alert for the company and the specific industry to make sure you’re au courant ahead of time. This insider knowhow will show that you’re aware of the state of their business right now. It will make it easier to respond to questions about why the job is something that’s a good match for both of you—that you have the key skills to solve their challenges today and moving forward.

6. Stick to your main selling points. It’s easy to veer off topic in an interview. Write down and practice at home three main selling points about yourself to help you stay focused. I recommend that towards the end of the interview, you click through your mental checklist to make sure you’ve covered each of your topic points during your discussion. If not, don’t leave until you have. If the interviewer is wrapping things up, and you can sense this, politely interject that you want to make sure you mention X, Y, or Z, and why.
7. Don’t be thrown-off if asked if you think you’re overqualified for a position. You might be. Here’s your canned answer: What matters to you at this stage is having the opportunity to work with outstanding people in a company whose values and products you believe in and where your skills and experience can be used in a meaningful way. Bottom line: They could only be so lucky to get someone who can bring even more oomph than they need.

8. Use your mentoring skills as a selling point. Explain how mentoring has always been a part of your work style. It’s a process that you have benefited from over the years as a mentee and a mentor and hope you can continue to give back by guiding less-experienced co-workers. And you’re open to learning from them too. Again mentoring helps both people.

9. Ask for a business card. In this age of e-mail, a business card seems a little quaint, but it’s a tangible gift exchange. You can leave them with yours, while accepting a card in return with appreciation. It intrinsically shows you’re interested in them, as well as the job. Ask if they prefer to be contacted via phone or email.

10. Good manners count. No hugs here. Go for a firm handshake, look them straight in their eyes with a warm smile, and offer genuine thanks for their time. And call me old-fashioned, but never forget to write a thank-you note to everyone you interviewed with, often you will meet with more than one person on a company visit. I’m a stickler for this in all aspects of my life. I learned the power of a proper note from the yellow-covered White Gloves and Party Manners that my mother gave me when I was a child. It’s an etiquette guide for young people, first published in 1965, that was written by Marjabelle Young Stewart and Ann Buchwald (wife of Art Buchwald).

A thank-you note is simple, classy, and just might make you stand apart among a roster of applicants. I personally like a handwritten one, but an e-mail works today, if you shoot it off within 24-hours. In many cases, the immediacy is welcomed and effective. It’s not wrong to do both, particularly if there’s additional material you’d like to share with the interviewer, or if there were any questions you stumbled on, or didn’t answer well before you left. Use your correspondence to wrap up and leave a positive impression. And while I’m thinking of it, thanks for taking the time to read my post. Good luck with your job hunt.

All my best.


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