

IT'S TOUGH TO AVOID INTERVIEW TRAPS IF YOU DON'T KNOW WHAT THEY ARE. HERE ARE A FEW TO WATCH OUT FOR.

1. Confusing an Interview with an Interrogation

Most candidates expect to be interrogated. An interrogation occurs when one person asks all the questions and the other gives the answers. An interview is a business conversation in which both people ask and respond to questions. Try to establish a rapport with the interviewer. Use their questions to develop a relationship and adapt to their individual interview style. Candidates who expect to be interrogated avoid asking questions, leaving the interviewer in the role of reluctant interrogator. Thoroughly researching the company in advance will enable you to offer strategic answers and ask informed questions.

2. Making a So-Called Weakness Seem Positive

Interviewers frequently ask candidates, "What are your weaknesses?" Conventional interview wisdom dictates that you highlight a weakness like "I'm a perfectionist," and turn it into a positive. Interviewers are not impressed, because they've probably heard the same answer a hundred times. If you are asked this question, highlight a skill that you wish to improve upon and describe what you are doing to enhance your skill in this area. Interviewers don't care what your weaknesses are. They want to see how you handle the question and what your answer indicates about you.

3. Failing to Ask Questions

Every interview concludes with the interviewer asking if you have any questions. The worst thing to say is that you have no questions. It shows that you are not interested and not prepared. Interviewers are more impressed by the questions you ask than the selling points you try to make. Before each interview, make a list of five questions you will ask. "I think a good question is, 'Can you tell me about your career?'" says Kent Kirch, director of global recruiting at Deloitte. "Everybody likes to talk about themselves, so you're probably pretty safe asking that question." For more information on appropriate questions to ask during an interview, read Drake Infosheet 4: "Asking the Right Questions".

4. Researching the Company But Not Yourself

Candidates intellectually prepare by researching the company. Most job seekers do not research themselves by taking inventory of their skills, knowledge and experience. Formulating a "talent inventory" prepares you to immediately respond to any question about your experience. You must be prepared to discuss any part of your background. Creating a "talent inventory" refreshes your memory and helps you immediately remember experiences you would otherwise have forgotten during the interview.

5. Leaving Your Cell Phone On

We may live in a wired, always-available society, but a ringing cell phone is not appropriate for an interview. Turn off phones and pagers before you enter the company.

6. Waiting for a Call

Time is your enemy after the interview. After you send a thank you email and note to every interviewer, follow up a couple of days later with either a question or additional information. Contact the person who can hire you—not the HR department. They are very busy and often cannot return your call in a timely fashion. Additional information can be an update on any recent achievements, a current competitor's press release or industry trends. Here's an example, "I saw an article that featured your company as a leader in the industry. I thought you would be interested." Your intention is to keep everyone's memory of you fresh.

7. Arriving Late

It is extremely important that you arrive to the interview on time. Even better though, try to be 5 to 10 minutes early. Arriving late shows disorganization and immediately gives the interviewer a negative first impression.

