

Interviewing Tricks That Job Seekers Must Know

In this highly competitive job market, employers and recruiters are using unconventional techniques to screen candidates. It's not enough to just be prepared for the interview; job seekers need to be prepared to be judged even when it's not clear they're being judged.

Here are some secret tricks that real recruiters and hiring managers use to weed out candidates:

They inspect your car.

Tina Hamilton, of HireVision Group, knows a corporate president who would find out which car belonged to the candidate he was interviewing. "The receptionist ... would then go outside and look in the candidate's car to see how neat and clean the car was, if there were food wrappers ... how well maintained the car was," says Hamilton. "The owner considered this a definition of the candidate's character."

They watch while you wait.

Some recruiters deliberately keep candidates waiting and have the receptionist report on how they choose to occupy their time, says career consultant Eileen Varelas, of Keystone Partners. "So if you are playing games on your phone instead of reading the Wall Street Journal on the table in front of you, you could be sabotaging yourself before you even meet the recruiter," she says.

If you choose to do something besides quietly sit and wait to be called in, take care in choosing an appropriate activity. For example, reviewing your resume or an industry publication would be a good choice. Loudly sampling songs as you download them to your phone, not so good.

They try to see your inner gossip.

Waffles Natusch, president of The Barrett Group, says a senior manager client would have other people on the hiring team do the normal interview screening. Then he would have a friendly interview with the applicant during which he'd drop a sideways comment about someone on the hiring team and ask the candidate's opinion of the person?

If the candidate agreed or added to the slam, or disagreed and defended the person, he or she wasn't hired. But if the candidate refused to acknowledge or discuss the inference, a job offer was usually made.

They mind your manners.

Many recruiters use meals as a screening tool. "I know a recruiter who passed over a candidate because of the way they cut their meat during a lunch interview," says Varelas. (The candidate cut his meat all at once, not one piece at a time.) Juliet Boghossian, a behavioral food expert and columnist for Food-ology.com, teaches execs what they can learn by the way someone eats.

"By observing an individual's eating style or food habits, you can quickly reveal their character or judgment capacity, among many other behavioral facets," she says. If your resume passes the first screen and you get called in for an interview, these are just some of the unusual strategies you may face.

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