



INTERVIEW TECHNIQUE

Laura Stewart examines how best to put yourself forward for a job

Why is it that some people sail through interviews, securing positions above scores or even hundreds of others with the same qualifications and experience, while the rest of us are left on the career shelf, languishing in jobs we've grown to loathe or worse still, unemployment?

If you're in the former camp, get back to your work! But for those of us who can't understand why we keep missing out on that dream job, the issue is probably our communication skills.

Former *Fair City* actress and businesswoman Carol-Anne Lowe says the importance of body language can't be overstated. Despite an unemployment rate of almost 15 per cent, the Managing Director of Blue Moon communications says most Irish people still don't invest enough time and energy on the way we present ourselves in interviews.

"Body language speaks volumes about a candidate," she explains.

"Eye contact is the first thing people look for when they meet someone for the first time and good eye contact gives a feeling of warmth straight away. Maintaining good eye contact shows respect and interest in what they have to say."

It's alright to lose direct eye contact

momentarily though – Irish people tend to keep eye contact around 60 to 70 per cent of the time, which is fine, according to Carol-Anne.

"By drawing the eyes away occasionally or looking at different areas of the face around the eye area, you create the impression of eye contact without making people feel uncomfortable.

"And remember, don't just look at the person sitting in the middle of the interview panel or the one you perceive to be the most important. If there are three or five or six people on the board, all of these people will have an input into the decision of whether or not to hire you, so direct your conversation to each member in turn as you speak. Don't leave someone out because you don't think they're as important as the others – this looks like you wouldn't make a good team player, that you're not inclusive."



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KNOW THE SIGNS

Worryingly for those who might be prone to spinning a yarn in interviews, Carol-Anne claims to know instinctively if someone is lying: "They'll look up to the left or down to the right, or cross and uncross their legs – there are so many giveaway signs."

Other interviewers might not be so tuned in to the signs, but they will know that a person looks uncomfortable and will be less likely to believe them if they do.

".....All very well in theory, but how do you create the impression of Zen-like self-assurance when you're really a nervous wreck?"

"Getting your posture right will automatically make you feel more confident," says Carol-Anne.

"And when you feel good, other people pick up on that. If you're slouched over with your shoulders drooping, you're restricting the air to your chest, you can't breathe properly, and this will make you more nervous. A straight back opens up the rib cage and gets more oxygen into your lungs."

Keeping your head level, both horizontally and vertically, when you're answering a question makes you look more self-assured, like you believe in what you're saying.

Conversely, tilting it to the side slightly when the interviewer is asking a

question shows interest and respect.

Ideally, says Carol-Anne, you want to match the style of the people interviewing you. "If they're smiling, smile; if they're serious, be serious. Be conscious of the way they express themselves and reflect their tone in the way you put your points across."

Your arms can give away a lot away about you in terms of how open and receptive you are to those you interact with. "Italians use their arms a lot and to great effect. This kind of dramatic gesturing can give the impression that you're very comfortable in your own skin and that you can command attention and hold an audience, which is perfect if you're going for a job that involves making presentations and leading a team."

If however, the role would involve taking instruction most of the time and working as part of a team, then loud arm movements might put off a prospective employer.

"In general, you need to strike a balance. And never cross your arms in an interview as this can be interpreted as aggressive or closed to suggestion."

Even our mouth movements can speak volumes about us. "We purse our lips and sometimes twist them to the side when we're thinking. A full smile with the lip coming above the teeth shows genuine joy, whereas a



"You've got to prove you have the right experience to do the job"

tight lipped smile implies shyness, but a shy that doesn't reach the eyes isn't a smile at all but a manipulation."

Hand gestures too, can give away clues about our personality, it seems.

"Palms turned slightly up and outward are seen as open and friendly," says Carole-Ann, "whereas palms turned down can give the impression the person is dominant and possibly aggressive."

Carol-Anne recommends speaking to people in the same industry who work at the level or grade you're hoping to join, so that you can learn to sound and look like them.

When it comes to questions, most

will be aimed at sussing out whether or not you have the right skills for the job, so in the days before your interview, you should sit down with a pen and paper and make a list of the skills you have that will help you to do the job you're applying for.

"No matter how confident you are, you've got to prove you have the right knowledge, talent and experience to do the job. "If you're going for a position that involves being a member of a team, have examples of how you're a team player."

"If you're going for a management job, think of all the ways you've shown leadership in the past. And don't be afraid to mention something in your personal life too if it's relevant in terms of showing your strength of character. But all in moderation – it's your actual work experience ultimately that they want to know about."

Direct answers also go down well with interviewers who may be spending a day or more listening to meandering anecdotes from prospective candidates.

"Don't off on a tangent!" says Carol-Anne.

"We call it a global answer – going around the globe to get to the point. Specific, concise answers are always a breath of fresh air – they also shows

you're listening to the question and not answering the question you want to be asked."

FINISHING UP

At the end of the interview, if you have questions, make them sensible questions.

"A person can do really well in an interview but lose points right at the end by having poorly thought out questions for the panel, or worse still, no questions at all.

A good one might be to describe the responsibilities of the position if they haven't already done so. Or is it a results driven role?"

"When hiring new people, most employers fear that the new employee will take all the training their company provides and then leave after a short period of time, so asking about the likelihood of the position being made permanent shows that you plan to be there for the long term. Inquiring about the opportunity to grow and develop your long-term career does the same."

At the end of the day though, most employers simply want to know that a person can do the job, so try to relax, believe in yourself and don't think about how many other people are being interviewed for one measly job! **WW**

Good luck for anyone looking for work and going for interviews

CAROL-ANNE'S CV TIPS:

- Keep the job advert beside you so that you can check that everything you write makes you sound like a good fit for the job description.
- Keep it to a minimum of three pages – it's not a novel so keep it brief and to the point.
- Keep it specific and remember that what you're selling is your potential for the future backed up with your experience of the past.
- Make sure the skills you have that match the 'essential criteria' for the job are on your front page.
- Know what your personality traits are so that you can list the ones that are advantageous to the job. Clearly there's no need to mention the bad ones!

PHRASES TO AVOID OR LIMIT:

- Excellent communication skills
- Strong work ethic
- Personable presenter
- Detail-oriented

It is much more effective to write a description that is action-based and demonstrates these abilities rather than just laying claim to them. For example, rather than just stating you are a "fantastic presenter," you could say "Developed and presented over 30 multi-media presentations to clients, which resulted in 22 new accounts, totalling euro 500,000 in new revenues."

PERSONAL INFORMATION

Unless specifically requested, there is no need to include personal details such as date of birth, marital status or whether you have children. This information is typically used to exclude candidates from consideration in the hiring process rather than include them.

PASSIVE VOICE

Many people write in the passive voice because that is how we've been taught formally in school composition. The problem with the passive voice, however, is that it is just that passive! A CV needs to have punch and sparkle and communicate an active, aggressive candidate. Passive does not accomplish that.

TAKE YOUR TIME

A CV is a marketing document for your career just as a brochure is a marketing document for a product or service. Companies put careful thought and consideration into the job advertisement so you should do the same in your CV. These words need to showcase you in a powerful way. **Good luck!**