

When Bad Job Interviews Happen to Good Candidates

Going through the motions of a bad interview is like peeling back the layers of an onion. Sally learned this lesson the hard way, hands-on during an interview that should have been a piece of cake. Sally applied for a position that fit her qualifications perfectly. When she received an invitation to interview, Sally believed she was a shoo-in for the job. Feeling confident, she approached the interview in a lax manner. She didn't prepare and prematurely celebrated an offer she was convinced would be extended.

The day of the interview, Sally was surprised by the level of anxiety she felt. Her apprehension began to build and she began to prepare for the interview at the last minute. By the time she arrived at the interview, she was visibly shaken.

Lesson learned: The time to collect your thoughts is prior to an interview, not on your way to one. If you arrive to an interview bewildered, the recruiter will take notice and you run a high risk that you will not get the offer.

The interviewer entered the waiting area and introduced himself. To ease the tension, he asked a common icebreaker question, "Did you have trouble finding us?" Sally has never been a smooth small talker and she answered the question candidly. She confided that she doesn't have a good sense of direction and coupled with the fact that she was anxious, she passed the building entrance quite a few times. The interviewer smiled politely and proceeded to walk towards the interview room. Realizing she goofed, Sally hesitantly followed the interviewer.

Lesson learned: Everything you say and do during an interview is scrutinized; from the instant you walk in, to the moment you walk out. An innocent question doesn't exist during an interview and a careless misstep is seldom forgotten. Choose your responses carefully.

When Sally was escorted to the interview room, she was surprised to see a panel of interviewers. She was only familiar with the "it's just you and me, kid" type of the interview - the one-on-one. At the start of the interview, she quickly realized that it was going to be a challenge to manage that interview.

Lesson learned: Interviews are unpredictable. One never knows the broad range of topics that will be covered and the type of formats that may be presented. Familiarize yourself with all interview settings.

Because she was not ready for the series of questions, Sally tripped over her answers. She focused on issues that weren't relevant and provided little information on what was pertinent. She began to ramble and appeared under qualified for the position.

Sensing that she was interviewing poorly, Sally began to lose patience with the process. She failed to maintain eye contact and began to fidget. The enthusiasm she felt for the position and the company slowly diminished as she witnessed the blank looks on the faces of the panelists. She withdrew mentally from the interview, and as a result, appeared disinterested.

Lesson learned: Most interviewers expect candidates to be nervous during an interview, and they rarely will forgive you if you fail to demonstrate a sincere interest in working for them. Most hiring decisions are based on whether the interviewer feels a connection to you. The failure to establish a bond immediately is usually beyond repair.

After the interview Sally realized that the questions she had been asked were not difficult. She had been overwhelmed by nervousness and that had clouded her ability to communicate clearly and to the point effectively.