

Interviewer Etiquette

By Gary Michael Smith

Depending on which side of the desk you've been sitting you've either heard "Nobody's hiring!" or "Nobody's hireable!" Two totally distinct observations. I've sat on both sides, having worked as a bee as well as the king. And what I've noticed in the work market lately is a dramatic shift on the employer's side. Sure, staffs have been cut and we're all made to do more with fewer resources. But this should not inure resume reviewers and interviewers with *carte blanche* to dispense with common courtesy and civility.

When I was looking for work it appeared to me that employers have become so jaded with interviewing that they've completely ignored any form of employment decorum specifically and business etiquette in general. So I'm writing my top 10 tips for "Interviewer Etiquette."

1. **Recognize the stress.** Understand that those interviewing are under great amounts of stress from being un- or under employed. While employers may not have time to care much about this in the beginning, they should not lose sight of the fact that these potential employees are applying to help with the company's work load, to ensure that the job gets done quickly and efficiently.
2. **Read between the lines.** One of my favorite jobs of all times was as managing editor of a world-renowned scientific specialty peer-reviewed research journal. I had years of experience as a technical writer and had the peer-reviewed publication and documentation management skills needed for the job. So the editor-in-chief gave me a chance, and I excelled. Within a couple years I literally wrote the book on scientific journal management. And it was all because my boss was able to see my skill base, not past jobs, as an important asset.
3. **Remember your upbringing.** Unless raised by wolves, employers should have acquired some semblance of politeness during their professional life. Take the time—usually about 5 seconds—to fire off that email reply to the interviewee, who has taken the time to

thank you for the interview, often delineating how they believe they can provide value added to the organization. An employer doesn't have to say "yes" or "no" right then nor launch into a dissertation about the job; just make contact.

4. **Answer the phone.** Even if an interviewer has administrative support, they should take calls from those who were interviewed. Granted, staffers probably shouldn't take more than one call per interviewer until a decision has been made, but many job seekers often like to make the effort to verbally thank someone for the opportunity to be interviewed.
5. **Don't lead on.** If it's a known fact that funding is not yet available for the job, or that someone else has already been selected, interviewers should not waste candidates' time and energy. Chances are they have other interviews scheduled. Also, feel free to let the candidate know that dollars just aren't available right now, the position has been closed temporarily or permanently, or that the company simply decided to hire from within. It's just good form.
6. **Plan ahead.** Be sure the job is really available before calling someone in for a face-to-face. I recently had a friend who was just about to walk out the door for a 200-mile drive across the state when he was called and told that the interview was postponed. I was even called once *on the way* to an interview to be told that the position—and salary—had been downgraded, and was asked if I was still interested.
7. **Acknowledge if the position has been filled.** So the employer has ignored voicemail as well as email, and the job has finally been filled. It's common courtesy to send notices to those who were interviewed that the position is no longer available. I have received such communications occasionally, but only rarely, and only by the classiest employers.
8. **Make it count.** Interviewers should avoid useless questions like "Where do you see yourself in 5 or 10 years?" Instead, those in hiring positions should make intelligent queries that can be beneficial, such as "How do you think you can provide value to our

team” or “What personal and professional strengths do you feel you have that would be an asset to our organization?”

9. **Review your policies.** One company I know of actually makes employees sit through an outdated and terribly produced orientation film *prior* to being interviewed. And if the candidates are not selected, it’s truly 35 wasted minutes of that person’s life. Time can be used better by both parties.
10. **Think to the future.** Recognize that, while a company wants someone who brings something to the corporate table, interviewees also have personal and professional goals as well. When the interview is winding down, interviewers may want to find out just what makes the job seeker tick. A well-designed Job Skills Matrix can be a big help as part of an interview packet.

Gary Michael Smith currently is gainfully employed as a writer, editor, publisher, and editorial photojournalist but also is the author of Gainfully Employed—A Guide to Job Hunting, Resume Writing, and Effective Interviewing.