

10 Clues to Decoding the Interview

By Kate Lorenz, CareerBuilder.com Editor

Wonder whether you nailed that interview? While you won't truly know until you get "the call," there are many signs throughout the process that can help you determine whether or not you'll make the first cut. Following are questions and clues to help you decode the interview.

1. What is the interviewer doing? "If I am interested in what a candidate is saying, I will nod my head, smile and likely jot down a few notes," says Inside Sales Manager Karen Nance. "I may also ask questions to probe further about what the applicant is talking about or share some thoughts on how this topic relates to the open position."

Nancy Kim-Phillips, owner of NKP Consulting in Chicago, says that candidates should observe the interviewer's body language for positive signs, "I find myself leaning forward when I'm interested in what someone has to say. I would expect the candidate to match my body language and lean in too."

Watch for negative signals as well. If the interviewer seems distracted, is checking her watch, shuffling papers or looking at his Blackberry, you're probably not captivating your audience. "I'll often put down my pen if I'm not feeling good about what the candidate is saying," she adds.

2. Were you engaged in dialogue? "An interview is going well when there is a dialogue," Kim-Phillips says. "If I don't have to refer to a list of questions, and the conversation flows smoothly, it means there's a natural exchange of information we are both interested in. This can begin from the very first question, which is usually, 'So, tell me about yourself.'"

3. Did you hear positive verbal clues? Lynn Hazan, owner of Chicago-based recruitment firm Lynn Hazan and Associates, says some interviewers may urge you on with positive words like, "Yes, go on...," "This is good..." or even "I like what I am hearing, tell me more..." These are all clear indicators that it's going well.

4. Were you reciting a monologue? "A turn-off for me is if I ask a question and it becomes a monologue with a five-minute answer," Kim-Phillips says. In prepping candidates for interviews, Hazan suggests they prepare a concise 30-second and 60-second elevator pitch. "This, in a nutshell, is the ideal response to questions like, 'Why should hire you?'" she discloses. "I encourage candidates to practice in front of a mirror. There's no better way to judge how others see you than by seeing yourself," Hazan notes.

5. Did the interviewer interrupt you? If the interviewer interrupts you or starts to look bored, it's time to change gears. Hazan suggests that candidates stop at the first sign of disinterest from the interviewer and ask a question like, "Am I answering your question?" Or "Would you like to hear more about this or would you like another example?" This may save the day and gives the interviewer a choice on where to proceed.

6. Did you ask questions? As the conversation comes to a close, interviewers inevitably ask candidates if they have any questions. Kim-Phillips says that, "When I would ask, 'What questions do you have?' and there were none... that would close things out pretty quickly."

When interviewers give you the opportunity to ask questions, this is your cue to gain a better understanding of anything discussed during the interview. Questions like, "You said you want someone with a sales background; what else does an ideal candidate need to succeed in this position?" This is also a chance for you to demonstrate that you have done your homework on the company.

7. Were you asked about timing? It's a good sign if you're asked about your availability. "I may start talking about time frame for making a decision, and ask 'How does this sound to you?' and 'How soon can you start?'" Kim-Phillips says. "If I'm interested in someone, I want to know who my competition is," Nance adds. "I will ask, 'Where else have you interviewed?' and 'Do you have any other firm offers?'"

8. Were you a good fit? The more the interviewer talks about what is going on in their company and how you will fit in, the better. Kim-Phillips says she never quite comes right out and says, 'I don't think this is a good match,' but might say 'We're really looking for the right match for this position.'

9. Were you invited to meet others in the company? Nance and Kim-Phillips both say that if it is going well they'll mention that there are some other people they would like you to meet. They may even introduce you on the spot.

10. How long was the interview? Most opinions about candidates are formed within the first few minutes. The rest of the time is spent validating these opinions. If an interview is less than a half hour, it's generally not a good sign. If you reach the one hour mark and the conversation is flowing enthusiastically and evenly between you and the interviewer, you may have hit a home run!

Copyright 2007 CareerBuilder.com. All rights reserved.