

Calming your interview jitters

Does the thought of going on a job interview cause your palms to sweat and your body to break out in hives? Stop itching, you're not alone. The vast majority of job seekers admit to emotions ranging from mild uneasiness to downright panic leading up to their interviews. The good news is there have been no reported cases of job seekers who died of nervousness during a job interview. So relax and follow these simple tips for keeping your anxiety at bay before and during your interview.

First, take the proper amount of time to prepare for your interview. Being well-prepared will boost your confidence and lower your anxiety. Experts recommend that you spend at least three hours preparing for each interview. You should draft answers to the most common interview questions and practice speaking them out loud. You also should read up on the company with which you will be interviewing and prepare some questions of your own. This lets the interviewer know that you are truly interested in the company and the position. As a final step in your preparation, make sure you have good directions to the interview site. Some job seekers make a dry run to the interview site to ensure the directions are correct and to estimate the amount of time they will need to get to the interview on time.

On the night before your interview, lay out your interview clothes and make sure everything is clean, pressed and ready to put on in the morning. Choose an outfit that is professional and comfortable. One successful PR executive always wore a turtle neck under her suit jacket for interviews. Although she seemed calm and collected, during high stress situations her neck would become flushed with red blotches. The high-necked tops kept her anxiety undetected.

Set your alarm a little early so that you don't have to rush on your way out the door. Refrain from drinking too many cups of coffee or cola before your interview. Caffeine is a stimulant that increases feelings of anxiety. Instead, drink water, which will hydrate and energize your body and clear your throat.

Practice deep breathing exercises. Yoga beginners and experts alike agree that deep relaxation and breathing practices help the body, emotions and mind to return to their natural state of good balance. Taking a few deep breaths during your drive to the interview, once you arrive and just before you enter the interviewer's office will allow your body and mind to profoundly relax and recharge.

Arrive 15 or 20 minutes ahead of your scheduled interview time. This should give you enough time to run through your sample questions and answers one last time. You also may want to stop in the washroom to check your appearance. One interviewee always heads to the bathroom prior to an interview to run warm water on her hands. She says, "When I'm nervous my hands become as cold as ice. My anxiety would be a dead giveaway to the interviewer if she were to shake my frozen hand."

Another job seeker takes bubble wrap with her in the car on the way to her interviews. When she stops at a light, she pops the tiny bubbles, which give her nervous hands something to do and takes her mind off her anxiety. "The ride to the interview is usually the most stressful time for me. I find the bubble wrap very familiar and comforting."

To build his confidence, one job seeker pulls out copies of his past performance appraisals and reads them to boost his confidence. "My reviews have always been stellar. So when I'm in need of a confidence boost, I just pull them out and read all of my accomplishments and what my manager said about me. It's energizing!"

Finally, remember that you are already a winner. You are likely a first round finalist in the company's job search. Out of all the applicants, they picked you to come in for an interview. The interviewer thinks your qualifications are worth exploring. Now you need to believe it.

Hopefully, your initial conversation with your interviewer has put you at ease. However, if you are still feeling anxious, stay focused on the question at hand. Don't think ahead or try to anticipate the next question. Maintain eye contact as much as possible when speaking or listening. Avoid looking away or looking down; this is a sign that you lack confidence or interest. Here's a tip: Focus your eyes on the interviewer's face right above and between his or her eyes. Although you are not looking straight into their eyes, you appear to be maintaining eye contact.

Despite how nervous you feel, the interviewer will likely not even notice when you are nervous. Most feelings of nervousness are held inside, which means that no one knows they are there but you. When asked about nervous candidates, one recruiter we spoke with said that if this is your first time interviewing it's OK to admit to the interviewer that you are feeling nervous. She said, "I had one candidate that was fresh out of college who was visibly nervous upon entering my office. After a few minutes of stumbling for answers, he finally stopped himself and admitted his nervousness to me. He explained that this was his first 'real' interview since his graduation. I told him that everyone has to start somewhere and that he should just relax and pretend the interview was a conversation with a relative. After that, things went much smoother. By the way, we hired him as a financial analyst."

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