

Five Worst-Case Scenarios of Interviews

By Laura Morsch, CareerBuilder.com writer

When Diane K. Danielson, CEO of downtownwomensclub.com, a women's networking Web site, was a law student, she thought she was fully prepared for her interview for a summer job at a small law firm.

Then she walked outside on the morning of interview to find her car stolen.

She was able to reschedule, but things just got worse. This time on the way to the interview, her rental car got a flat tire in a rainstorm. While changing the hubcap, she cut her hand -- and arrived at the interview late, wet and bleeding.

She got hired anyway.

Despite our best attempts to plan ahead, sometimes life throws us curveballs at the most inopportune times. The following is a guide to help deal with some common interview disasters.

1. You're going to be late.

Conventional wisdom warns against arriving at an interview late. Tardiness tells the hiring manager you are irresponsible and don't value his or her time. Thus, preparation and avoidance are your best defenses here. Map out a route to the interview site a day or two beforehand, and be sure to allow plenty of time for traffic and other delays.

But you can't plan ahead for everything. Power outages reset alarm clocks, and traffic accidents sometimes shut down the only route to the interview site. If you absolutely must be late, call the interviewer immediately. Explain the situation, and give an estimated time of arrival. Then ask the interviewer if she still has time to conduct the interview, or if she would rather reschedule.

2. You're sick.

Your head's pounding, your nose is dripping and your stomach is wrenching. If you wake up with a killer cold or nasty bout of the stomach flu, you have two choices: Go to the interview anyway and hope for the best, or call to reschedule.

If you think coming into the interview anyway will show your dedication to the job, just imagine the hiring manager's disgust if you vomit all over his expense reports or hold out your clammy, germey hand out for a handshake immediately after sneezing into it.

Call the hiring manager as soon as you realize you're too ill to attend the interview. Tell him or her that you're feeling ill and unfortunately need to reschedule. If the company is on a tight hiring schedule, offer to conduct the interview by telephone.

3. You spill coffee on your suit.

If your pre-interview cup of coffee turns into an "accessory" on the front of your shirt, head straight to the nearest convenience store. Grab one of the many instant stain removers on the market that can be easily stashed in your briefcase. Another option is to buy a bottle of club soda and use it to dab away the stain.

Try to arrive at the interview site a few minutes early, and continue to try to dab the stain away in the restroom, using the hand dryer to dry up any wet spots.

4. You freeze up.

The employer says, "Tell me about yourself." Suddenly you can't even remember your name.

If you freeze up, take a deep breath and clear your throat or take a sip of water to regain your composure. Then, stay focused on the question at hand. If you still need another minute, smile, apologize and politely ask the interviewer if he can repeat the question.

The key is to stay focused on the question at hand. Don't get ahead of yourself -- it will only make you more nervous. Maintain frequent eye contact to show your confidence and interest.

5. The interview is tanking fast.

If the interviewer is frowning or has seemed to tune out your answers, you need to do some damage control. When the interviewer asks, "Do you have any questions for me?" use this as a chance to salvage your interview by asking "Do you have any concerns about me as a candidate?"

This turns the tables around on the interviewer, and gives you a chance to address and alleviate some of his concerns. For example, if he notes your lack of a college degree, you can point to your three years of experience boosting sales at your last position. Even if you can't change the interviewer's mind, you can walk away with valuable feedback.

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