

Ace the Interview With Professional Etiquette

Proper etiquette before, during, and after the interview can help you land your ideal job

By Kathleen D. Pagana, RN, PhD

Once you have successfully applied for a job and landed an interview, give yourself a pat on the back. Now the challenge is to do well in the interview and be offered the job. Don't panic. If you know interview etiquette, you can minimize your anxiety and maximize your confidence.

Training Time

Athletes prepare themselves for a big game. Use the following tips to prepare for your big game — the interview.

View the interview as a way to find the fit between you and the organization. Find out as much as you can about the institution and position. The organization's Web site is a handy reference. The more you learn, the more prepared you will be.

Know that prospective employers may use the Internet to check you out. They may locate your Web site, blog, or social networking profile (for example, Facebook). Make sure you don't have anything posted that could embarrass you or your potential employer.

Use your inside contacts. If you know people already employed by the organization, ask for information: What kind of personalities fit into the job culture? Are there hidden job expectations? Why do people stay, and why do they leave?

Learn about those who will interview you. If you don't know who they are, call the person who scheduled the interview and ask. Politely explain that you want to be as prepared as possible. Find out the title of each interviewer and his or her role in the organization. Often you can get biographical information on the organization's Web site. See if you have anything in common. If so, bring it up during the interview. For example, perhaps you both attended the same college.

Anticipate some of the questions you'll be asked. Role-play your response in fewer than two minutes. It might be a good idea to write out your responses. Then, practice out loud so you can hear and eliminate "ahs" and "ums." Here are some questions to consider:

- Describe what attracted you to the nursing profession.
- What experiences do you have that will support you in this position?
- Contrast a good decision with a poor decision you've made.
- How do you react in stressful situations?



- Where do you see yourself in three to five years?
- What are your major strengths and weaknesses?
- Why did you apply to this particular medical center?

If you are asked a question you can't answer, think about it for a few seconds. Then, simply say, "I don't know" or "I can't answer that question." If you know where or how you could find the answer, explain that.

Manners do Matter

You're ready, now it's time to use your etiquette skills to ace the interview.

Dress appropriately. No matter what you may think, you're judged by how you dress. Clothes are never neutral; they either add or detract from the impression you're making. Wear a well-fitting suit and make sure all accessories match. Don't wear shoes that are scuffed or have worn-down heels. Even if the interviewers dress casually, job seekers are expected to dress more formally. This shows you are taking the interview seriously and that you respect the institution.

Make certain your hygiene is flawless. Food caught in your teeth, wrinkled clothes, or chipped fingernails detract from your professional appearance. Limit any visible piercings to the earlobes and keep tattoos covered, if possible. Men should be freshly shaved — even if interviewed later in the day. Women should wear a bra. No one should have any underwear showing.

Don't smoke. Smoking is a turnoff for many people. If you smoke, try not to before the interview, because your clothing will reek of smoke. Don't smoke inside or outside the facility.

Be on time, and be nice. If possible, drive to the location before the day of the interview and plan the best route to avoid potential traffic problems. You can minimize stress on the day of the interview if you know where to park and where to enter the building. Plan to arrive early enough to use the restroom and check your appearance before presenting yourself to the receptionist five to ten minutes before your interview time. Treat the receptionist with courtesy and respect. The receptionist may be asked for feedback about your manners and behavior.

Bring a folder or portfolio with appropriate materials. For example, if you were asked to bring your professional license, make sure it (or a printout if your license is online only) is in your packet of materials. Here are some items to take with you:

- A pad of paper or a notebook for making notes and recording information for follow-up.
- A pen and a spare in case the first one gets lost or runs out of ink.
- Five to 10 professional-looking copies of your résumé.
- A list of questions you want to ask.

Having a list of questions demonstrates careful preparation for the interview. Here are two good questions:

- What skills are considered most important for success in this position?

- What kinds of educational opportunities do you offer to support career growth?

Etiquette After the Interview

Proper etiquette doesn't end with the interview.

Write a thank-you note after the interview. This will help you stand out and be remembered. Ask for a business card from those who interview you so you have the proper spelling of the name, position, and address. If you forgot to get a business card, check the organization's Web site or call the human resources department. Use quality note cards to compose a short, handwritten note. Write or print neatly. You can also type a short note.

Mail the note within 24 hours after your interview. Only e-mail a note if you are following it with a mailed one. E-mail doesn't have the same impact as a written note because it takes only a few seconds of time and effort. The mailed note will be placed in your application file and will reflect positively on your manners.

Career Etiquette

Use these tips to help you prepare for an interview and to perform well during and after the interview. You can boost your chances of landing a job by projecting a positive, upbeat, confident, and mature attitude during interviews. Remember, proper etiquette is a good partner not just in an interview situation but throughout your career.

Kathleen D. Pagana, RN, PhD, is a keynote speaker and author of 21 books. These etiquette tips are from her newest book, *The Nurse's Etiquette Advantage: How Professional Etiquette Can Advance Your Nursing Career*. This book was published by Sigma Theta Tau International Honor Society of Nursing and is available at www.nursingknowledge.org/STTI/books. Pagana's Web site is www.KathleenPagana.com.

Do's and Don'ts During the Interview

Use these etiquette tips to help you succeed during the interview:

- Shake hands firmly at the beginning and end of the interview.
- Wait to be offered a seat.
- Have good eye contact with the interviewer(s).
- Maintain good posture.
- Be direct and to the point with your answers.
- Speak so your voice can easily be heard.

Here are seven etiquette blunders to avoid:

- Making negative comments about a former employer, supervisor, or coworker.
- Providing contact information that leads to an unprofessional voicemail message.
- Listing an unprofessional e-mail address (for example, "sexyRN@hotmail.com").
- Wearing inappropriate attire (for example, flip flops, plunging necklines).
- Having your cell phone ring during the interview.
- Using incorrect contact material on a résumé or application.
- Demonstrating a lack of enthusiasm by your body language.