

TOP 5 LESSONS OF MOCK INTERVIEWS: DON'T MAKE THESE MISTAKES



Summary: Find out the top 5 lessons this interviewer learned by conducting mock interviews. Don't make these mistakes in your job interviews.

A few months ago, I participated in mock interviews at a local college campus. I played the role of prospective employer and the students were job candidates. The professor, whom I know to be a wonderful and capable teacher, had provided the students with the name of my company to give them the opportunity to do some advance research. Their assignment was to prepare for the interviews as if they were applying for a spot in our information technology department.

I'm not sure who got the ruder awakening – the students or me! Although I know the professor had given her students plenty of information and support, here are the results of those interviews:

- Of the five students who participated, only one brought a notebook and pen. During each mock interview, I shared ideas and recommendations for other companies, books or Web sites that might benefit the candidates. Imagine their chagrin when four out of five of the students had to borrow my pen and sheepishly ask for a piece of paper from my notebook to write down my suggestions.

Interview Lesson No. 1: Bring a pen and a notebook.

- Only two of the students had actually visited the Web site of my company. The others had no earthly idea what the company was, much less what we did there, so of course they weren't able to "sell themselves" as potential employees. Had it been a real interview, this lack of preparation would have been the kiss of death.

Interview Lesson No. 2: Do your homework on the company – or don't waste the interviewer's time.

- One young man in particular had clearly memorized his "presentation." Instead of a conversation, he saw this as an opportunity to impress me with his vast knowledge and launched into a monologue. When I gently tried to interject, he ignored me and continued his soliloquy in steamroller fashion. I finally had to tell him, "Wait! Stop talking!" We stepped out of the mock interview structure for some serious interventional coaching, in which I invited him to listen as well as talk.

Interview Lesson No. 3: Come to the interview prepared to listen – and bring some questions about the company and the position you're applying for.

- All five of the young men I interviewed had made valiant attempts to dress the part. Only one of them, however, had on the proper business suit (you guessed it – it was the guy with the pen). I know the professor had urged each student to beg, borrow or steal a suit for the interview, and the school even offered discounts at the local men's store. Alas, not everyone understood the importance of appearance during an interview. One young man had a very large, conspicuous earring on. Now, both my son and daughter have pierced parts so I wasn't judging him – but I did let him know that just by wearing the earring, he was going to lose 75% to 80% of his prospects in the job market (and that's a generous estimate from an indulgent mother). He reached for his ear and said absent-mindedly, "Oh, did I forget to take that out?"

Interview Lesson No. 4: Dress the part.

- Following the interviews, I received one formal thank-you note, although I'd given each of the students my card. The young man expressed his gratitude for my time and my ideas, one of which was for him to volunteer at our company as a way to get in the door. I had invited him to contact Pat, our IT supervisor, for an informational interview and promised I'd arrange that for him. By the time I called Pat, she said this enterprising young man was already volunteering in her department. Is it any surprise to you that he's the one in the suit who brought a pen and notepad to his mock interview?

Interview Lesson No. 5: Always follow up with a thank-you note.

In spite of the dedication of the professor, the volume of information on interviewing and the students' best intentions, most of them ignored the most basic rules of interviewing. Remember, an interview is an opportunity to learn and listen as well as to pitch yourself and your skills to a prospective employer. Cover these basics and you'll be well on your way to a **successful career**.