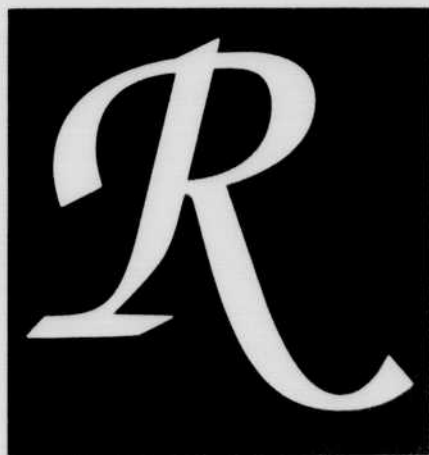


# INTERVIEWING ETIQUETTE

By Jeff B. Speck



Remember the social skills you supposedly mastered in second grade, like being quiet while others are speaking, and asking permission before going to the bathroom? If so, you're ready for your first job interview.

Company recruiters are interested in hiring intelligent, hard-working, dedicated new employees. Unless, of course, they're dorks. A sparkling GPA and record of extracurricular achievement will earn you an interview with most of the nation's top campus recruiters. But if you can't display proper social skills—I like to call it etiquette—your chances of making a good impression are nil.

While working in the college relations office of a major investment bank, one of my biggest surprises was the number of space cadets—male and female—who careened into my office for interviews. Each one sported high credentials from a prestigious university, yet as a whole, they still managed to show up late, forget my name, insult my secretary or otherwise act improperly. Each one made an impression, but not one I'm likely to remember positively.

I'm reminded of one Ivy League economics major who greeted me with a noticeably limp, clammy handshake. He would have gotten away with it; were it not for his insistence on correcting his transgression. Despite my

assurances that it wasn't necessary, he proceeded to try again. "You see," he said, wrenching my wrist. "This is my real handshake."

Chalk it up to nervous jitters, perhaps, but most interviewing etiquette errors are the result of negligence. Happily, many questions of etiquette are solved with simple common sense. They are worth reviewing here because they are so often confused or forgotten in the thrill of the moment. While understanding them won't guarantee you an offer, it will ensure that you'll stay in the running long enough to be considered seriously.

**Timing** Don't arrive late to your interview, of course, but also don't arrive more than 15 minutes early; you don't want to look like you've got nothing better to do with your time. For on-site interviews, get to the building half an hour early, make sure you can find the office, then go for a stroll. Show up at the receptionist five minutes before your appointment.

If you know that you're going to be late, the time to act is beforehand. Call the office with an apology, a beyond-your-control excuse and an estimated time of arrival. Messing up your interviewer's schedule will not ruin your chances, but keeping her waiting in the dark will.

**Secretaries:** Treat the interviewer's secretary with respect. (Even once you've gotten the job, maintaining the secretaries' favor is a key to your success with the company.) I, for one, would often ask my secretary what he thought of a candidate I had just interviewed. Besides, whether I asked or not, he'd usually tell me.

**Seating** Most interviewers will ask you to sit down, but if one doesn't, you should sit