

Foot in the Door! Foot up the Ladder!

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There comes a time in our children's lives when that first job interview approaches. There is so much information out there it can really be confusing. What I would like to share with you, as a parent, and quite possibly as your child's first career coach, are five simple rules that provide a proven approach to our young adults' success in achieving that first career opportunity.

1. Know your skills and be able to speak comfortably about them.

The late Dr. Neal Fox, founder of the Career Placement Institute, commented, *"The most qualified applicant doesn't always get the job. It's the one who has done the best self-marketing."* Our young adults must be able to hone in on a few skills and characteristics that specifically relate to the position for which they are applying. Employers do not necessarily want to see a jack of all trades, or a grocery list of abilities, rather a targeted summary of competencies that will facilitate success on the job. And job applicants must be comfortable and confident in discussing them with specific examples as a backup.

2. The first and last impressions define the success of the job interview.

The interviewer will give an applicant a good "visual once-over" and form a crucial impression during the first 60 to 90 seconds of the interview. Your first impression, the introduction, not only sets the stage, but it determines, right from the beginning, the success of the interview. If the first impression is poor, the rest of the interview is worthless. Good eye contact, a firm handshake (not a squeeze or a pull), a smile, conservative dress, and a professional, verbal introduction are the basic, but necessary, components of a positive first impression.

Your last impression in the job interview is the icing on the cake. Whereas the initial impression yields the very first response from the employer, either positive or negative, the last impression is the last thing that the employer will remember about you. And what is the last thing that you want the employer to remember? That you want the job! So say it!

3. Employers are more interested in behaviors than they are opinions.

When presenting skills or characteristics it is easy for an applicant to say, "I'm an excellent leader," or "I have outstanding communication skills." It really doesn't say anything. A job candidate must have examples of when those mentioned skills or characteristics were applied and what the results or consequences were. Applicants do not have to have years of experience in the workplace to provide examples of when

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they used their skills. Though work-related examples are the best to use, there are other possibilities. A graduating student might refer to a current or past activity, project or situation from school. Or, someone who may have limited paid work experience could refer to examples from volunteer work.

4. Know what employers are looking for in a professional interview.

A professional-looking, well-formatted, grammatically correct resume may, given a skill match, get an applicant the interview, but a successful interview can get the job. So what are employers looking for in the interview? There are at least eight things that an employer will test in a professional interview. These include, but are not limited to, good articulation and communication skills, focus (staying on course and not rambling), rational thinking (seeing the big picture, cause and effect, problem-solving), reaction to pressure/decision-making, realistic expectations about the position, motivation/attitude, preparation for the interview and a professional demeanor.

5. Have good questions to ask.

Toward the end of most interviews the employer will invite the candidate to ask questions. Not only is this an excellent time for an applicant to get the rest of the information needed to make a decision if given an offer, but having a few questions for the employer shows preparation, interest and initiative, and helps with that positive last impression. In fact, the interviewer may actually evaluate the questions that are asked during the interview as part of a hiring decision. Questions that you ask should demonstrate both critical thought and a future focus.

By no means are the above five rules an exhaustive list, rather a foundation or platform to successful interviewing as our young adults compete for a place in the employment world.

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