The Importance of Proper Body Language in an Interview

Too often we are so focused on saying the right things that we are not aware of the unintentional messages we convey through our actions. This is especially true in job interviews, where nerves may get the best of us, allowing us little room to monitor our body language. It is therefore important to pay attention to how the different components of our bodies are oriented, so that we can effectively communicate our strengths to our potential employer.

The Handshake

The handshake is an invitation to demonstrate why you are the perfect candidate for the job. A limp handshake won’t go very far in impressing the interviewer, nor will a bone-crushing squeeze. The best execution is one that incorporates a professional, yet polite firm grip and a warm, inviting smile. One might assume that initiating a handshake conveys confidence or assertiveness; in fact, this only detracts from the positive effects by suggesting a need to dominate. It is best to let the interviewee take the lead, but once they do, make sure to respond by matching their exerted pressure - no more, no less.

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Eye Contact

Maintaining eye contact is essential, for it demonstrates attentiveness, respect and honesty. There is, however, a difference between a steady gaze and a long, hard stare, which just creates awkward and uncomfortable feelings. The best way to moderate the amount of eye contact is to establish contact for a few seconds, then shift your gaze to other dimensions of the face, and revert back to the eyes.

Proper Posture

Proper posture conveys confidence, alertness and interest. It is thus important to refrain from slouching or sinking into your seat. Exhibiting proper posture lets the speaker know that you are involved with what they are saying. Leaning slightly forward is a great way to show interest, as is maintaining an “open” position. That is, sitting with arms and legs un-crossed, and exposing the palms of your hands whenever possible. This shows that you are honest, and have nothing to hide.

Facial Expressions

The biggest indicator of your true inner state is your facial expression. Try to keep your verbal and facial expressions synchronized, so your credibility isn’t undermined. Smile when the opportunity calls for it, but avoid the nervous grin, or the incessant smile, both of which will detract from the positive effects. A genuine smile is one that incorporates the whole face, including the eyes and cheeks and doesn’t look plastered on. Not only is a natural smile the best way to present yourself as a warm and friendly individual, it will instantly put you, and possibly the interviewer, at ease.

Lastly, it’s important to breathe and relax. Be yourself and let your non-verbal language complement your verbal message. With a little practice and preparation, you’ll be equipped with a repertoire of effective body language techniques, increasing your chances of acing the job interview.

Sinoun Oun
Muslim Women in the Workforce

“It is twice as hard for Muslim women to succeed in achieving their career goals” because of “hostility from institutions of higher learning, discrimination at work and struggles within their communities” according to a recent study examining the career destinations of Muslim women in Britain (Park-Jenkins, Haw, Irving, Khan, 1999).

The discrimination experienced by Muslim women within the job market is foreseeable, especially given the recent worldwide backlash against the hijab, but this study puts the problem into stark and uncomfortable relief. No matter her level of education, her professionalism, her competency, and her positive demeanour, she can be denied a position because of her faith. Discrimination and misunderstanding don’t have to be the norm. As a working Muslim woman I have a few thoughts to share on how to navigate common issue areas.

For Colleagues and Employers

Tip # 1: Ask questions!

If you don’t know why an employee’s faith requires certain types of accommodation, ask for more information! You’ll be able to better understand the situation and thereby be more sympathetic and helpful. This also lets the employee know that you’re interested and concerned, which will create a more positive working atmosphere.

Tip # 2: Be accommodating – there are benefits!

The most common requirements are a quiet space in which to pray, time off for prayers, and a respectful environment in regards to religious requirements (i.e. no derogatory comments about the hijab!) This doesn’t require large amounts of money, nor does it necessitate a loss of productivity. What it does ensure is that one’s workforce reflects the diversity of Canada, and that qualified candidates won’t be overlooked because of a rigid unwillingness to accommodate.

For the Working Muslim Woman

Tip #3: Be honest and upfront

This is extremely important, especially when introducing a new concept to the workplace. Often colleagues and employers are eager to accommodate one’s needs, but simply need the information to do so. If one suddenly starts taking extra time off for Friday prayers without notifying anyone, you may mistakenly be accused of ducking work for no reason and colleagues may become annoyed. This can be avoided with a clear and simple explanation of the religious duties upon a Muslim that require accommodation in the workplace.

Tip #4: Professionalism – Do your best!

Sugarcoating the reality of discrimination is not useful to the Muslim woman, or any minority for that matter in the job market. One shouldn’t have to be an exceptional candidate in order to succeed in one’s career, but given the realities of discrimination, it is what is often required to level the playing field. You can attempt to counter potential discrimination on the part of your employer by exceeding their expectations and excelling in the performance of your job. In this manner, if one is dismissed it can more clearly be seen to be discrimination. This way, an unfair decision cannot be truthfully attributed to your performance, leaving open the possibility of filing a complaint.

Idil Issa
The Power of Positive Attitude

Have you ever heard the phrase: “Hire for attitude, train for everything else?” It may sound a little simplistic, but it does stress the value employers place on candidates who have the “right” attitude.

So what is attitude? Why is it so important?

According to Elwood N. Chapman, the author of “Attitude, your most priceless possession”, attitude can be defined as “a mind set. It is the way you look at things mentally”.

We all know there are many things in life we cannot control; but we do have total control over our own attitude. Fortunately, it’s a very powerful tool. During the job search process, for instance, a positive attitude can mean the difference between getting the job versus struggling through one fruitless interview after another. As someone once said, “A positive attitude causes a chain reaction of positive thoughts, events, and outcomes. It is a catalyst, a spark that creates extraordinary results.” And that helps you stay focused. Employers favor those who believe in themselves and who generally have a positive attitude, because a positive attitude is contagious; it will create a positive environment for you and for people around you leaving everyone more productive and satisfied.

Of course, all this is easier said than done. How can you maintain a positive attitude when you feel you’ve hit rock bottom? This is particularly true when it comes to job hunting, a process that can be very daunting and energy consuming even for the most accomplished professional. Here are a few tips to help you maintain a positive attitude in the face of this challenge:

1. Learn to look at the bright side of everything. See a glass of water half full rather than half empty. Practice feeding your mind with positive thoughts. Even an unsuccessful interview can be viewed as a learning experience.

2. Surround yourself with supportive people. Join a professional association; attend a job-finding club. Remember, everyone needs a lift from time to time. This will help you build future contacts and involve you in human interaction – something that can taper off when out of the workplace. Keep in mind: 85% of jobs are NOT advertised. Sometimes networking is the key to getting your foot in the door.

3. Tend to your appearance. When you look good, you feel good, and you appear more confident and trustworthy.

4. Reward yourself and stay energized. It’s important you take care of yourself by celebrating small successes and treating yourself from time to time.

5. Set up a “Feel Good” folder in your email. Store all the compliments you’ve received or create a physical file where you can put all your encouraging notes, thank you cards and various tributes.


I’ve heard it said that life is 10% what happens to you and 90% how you react to it. A positive attitude can be more powerful than you realize. And now it’s up to you. What do you say? Is the glass half empty or half full?

A Word from our Director

I would like to welcome all the new and returning students to McGill. This student-produced newsletter will give you a good idea of the wide range of activities and advice that our Career and Placement Service provides to help you find jobs and internships - both part-time and full-time.

To help increase your chances, I would advise you to gain valuable “soft” skills by joining clubs, doing volunteer work, and taking on leadership roles in any context. Employers are continually asking for students with these types of skills.

As we at CAPS always say, don’t wait until you graduate! Beginning to plan ahead is the key to success. At CAPS you can take advantage out our career advisors, career development workshops, career resource library, career fairs and much more. I encourage you to drop by our office to find out more information. Our Job Listing Service (www.caps.mcgill.ca) and Workopolis Campus (www.workopoliscampus.com) are two databases that offer you hundreds of job opportunities targeted to McGill students.

But don’t just look there. Remember that most people find work in “hidden job” market through friends and contacts.

Happy Hunting!

Gregg Blachford

AIESEC McGill

AIESEC is the largest student-run organization in the world with over 50 years of experience in running a Global Internship Program and developing high-potential students into globally-minded responsible leaders.

By getting involved with AIESEC, McGill students gain valuable skills to complement the ones acquired in the classroom. The training provided by members and alumni provide soft skills that prove very helpful even outside of AIESEC, for instance while job searching and interview taking. As a member of AIESEC, you will learn to make cold calls, communicate professionally with corporate people at networking events and conduct efficient business meetings.

After being involved with AIESEC for a minimum of six weeks, you will be eligible to apply for an exchange program to one of the 91 countries that are part of our network. At McGill, applications are accepted twice a year, in the fall and the winter semesters. This is the best part of the AIESEC experience because it allows students to live and work in a different country, discover new cultures and expand their horizons.

Join AIESEC McGill to apply for an exchange as early as this fall! AIESEC at McGill, Shatner Building, Suite 407 (514) 398-3001 ext. 09939, aiesecmcgill.ir@gmail.com http://www.aiesec.mcgill.ca

Angela He
A McGill/Concordia team won a place in the Summer 2005 Behind the Wheel Program for Roadtrip Nation!

The goal of Roadtrip Nation is to interview professionals about their own career path in order to help find your own road.

This summer Laura Morris, Mike Wagman of McGill and Coby Shuman of Concordia hit the road to interview leaders from across North America. Their interviews will be part of a documentary that will be aired on public television. This is the first Canadian team to win a spot in the Behind the Wheel Program!

- The original Roadtrip Nation Crew will be visiting McGill for November Career Week.
- For more details on the Roadtrip Nation Program please visit http://www.roadtripnation.com/
- Read stories from the road! Check out the McGill/Concordia Blog @ http://www.spaces.msn.com/members/roadsidereflexions/

Top 10 Tough Interview Questions

Drop by the CAPS Office to find out how to answer these questions!

Check out section 3.24 of the Career Resource Library for more information on the Interview Process!

10. Tell me about yourself.
9. What salary range is acceptable to you?
8. What are the things that bore you the most?
7. Do you have regrets?
6. What is your opinion on the importance of academic degrees?
5. Have you heard any criticism of our organization?
4. Have you ever had a conflict with your supervisor? How did you resolve it?
3. Name three of your weaknesses.
2. If you were conducting this interview, what would you do differently?
1. Would you like to sit in my chair one day?

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Registration for the E-Newsletter Coming Soon!!

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