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## Avoid These Interview Killers

By DIANA MIDDLETON

With so much competition for every job listing out there—there are more than 6.1 job seekers for every job opening, according to the latest job-opening and turnover data from the U.S. Department of Labor—wowing a recruiter during a job interview is even more crucial. According to a new survey of nearly 500 human-resources professionals released by the Society for Human Resource Management, there are plenty of ways to derail a job interview—and some of them may surprise you.

The basic don'ts: arriving late to an interview or trashing a previous employer. But some hiring managers say even experienced professionals have made other slip-ups.

Often, job candidates speak in a too-familiar way with hiring managers—a major problem, according to 20% of survey respondents. Mary Willoughby, director of human resources at the Center for Disability Rights in Rochester, N.Y., once interviewed someone who was so comfortable, he commented on a sty she had near her eye.

"My mind was made up at that point," she says. The candidate was not hired.

For 67% of hiring managers who responded to the survey, dressing provocatively is a major deal breaker—even more significant than having a typo in your application materials (58% found this to be an interview killer). Chantal Verbeek, head of enterprise talent at ING U.S. Financial Services, says she'll forgive a typo if the applicant's skills are extraordinary, but revealing or sloppy apparel equals an instant rejection. "You'd think that'd be obvious," she says.

Job seekers have also been blasting HR managers with questions about benefits, vacation time and schedule flexibility much too soon in the interview process, according to the survey. (Thirty percent of hiring managers say it's okay for applicants to inquire about salary in post-interview follow-up conversations.) Some 39% of hiring managers surveyed said applicants shouldn't bring up salary at all—unless the interviewer brings it up first.

"I've had candidates ask if they can work part-time from home right off the bat," Ms. Willoughby says. "Let's figure out if you're the right person for this job before we discuss how little you want to be in the office."

Using clichés like "This is my dream job" are also major turnoffs for hiring managers. Instead of telling an interviewer you think outside the box, actually do it. Ms. Willoughby recalls a job candidate for an IT programmer position who gently pointed out that the Center for Disability Rights' Web site had several programming errors. "He handled it in a way that didn't make us feel ridiculed or demeaned," she says. "It showed that he was really serious about the job."

Shawn Desgrosellier, president of Vitality Group Executive Search, coaches job candidates to go into an interview with something—anything—in their hands. The step maintains focus. (He suggested a pen, a notepad or your résumé.) "It's just awkward going into an interview with nothing," he says.

There's also some good news for people with numerous public profiles online: Although social media sites such as Twitter and Facebook are rife with clues about job candidates' private lives, 75% of HR managers surveyed don't bother to check them.

And the formal thank-you letter after the interview? More than 60% of HR managers who responded say skipping the step is not a big deal. A brief email will suffice—cards and balloons are all overboard.

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