

Wall Street Journal

[Excerpts from] The Interview That'll Bag a Job (Sarah Needham)

April 14, 2009

In recent weeks, recruiters for Consolidated Container Co. have seen job candidates arrive up to an hour early for interviews. Other candidates have alluded to financial hardships while in the hot seat, and one person even distributed bound copies of documents describing projects he completed for past employers.

These sort of tactics aren't exactly winners.

In today's ultracompetitive job market, even getting an interview is a feat. Yet recruiters and hiring managers say many unemployed candidates blow the opportunity by appearing desperate or bitter about their situations—often without realizing it.

“People are becoming a lot more aggressive,” says Julie Loubaton, director of recruiting and talent management for Atlanta-based Consolidated Container. “They often wind up hurting themselves.”

At an interview, you want to stand out for the right reasons. To do so, you'll need to leave your baggage and anxiety at the door. For starters, wait until 10 minutes before your scheduled interview time to announce yourself. Arriving any sooner “shows that you're not respectful of the time the hiring manager put aside for you,” says Ms. Loubaton, adding that a candidate who arrived an hour early made workers uncomfortable. “Companies really don't want someone camped out in their lobby.”

Signal confidence by offering a firm handshake, adds Wendy Alfus Rothman, president of Wenroth Consulting Inc., an executive coaching firm in New York. Focus your attention on the interviewer. Avoid looking around the room, tapping your fingers, or other nervous movements.

No matter how you're feeling, keep your personal woes out of the interview process, asserts Ms. Alfus Rothman. Instead, always exude an upbeat attitude. For example, if you were laid off, instead of lamenting the situation, you might say the experience prompted you to reassess your skills, and that's what led you here. “You want to demonstrate resilience in the face of unpredictable obstacles,” she says.