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How to Ace Your Job Interview

By Dr. Kathleen Begley
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Note to Readers: *This free e-newsletter, sent only upon request, comes from Dr. Kathleen Begley, owner of Write Company Plus communications training. She writes weekly on topics connected to business and personal success. Dr. Begley recently launched a new blog called "Meandering to a Different Drummer." Click onto the website address at the end of this article to read her one-paragraph musings on life, death, and how to communicate as well as your dog.*

Years ago, while living in Seattle, I received an invitation to interview for a job for a prominent women's organization in Washington, D.C. The group sent me a ticket to fly to Miami where the hiring committee was talking to candidates. At the time, I was running behind on several projects with my existing employer. To clear my calendar for the cross-country trip, I stayed up around the clock for two consecutive days and nights.

By the time I got to Florida, I was utterly exhausted. So what did I do? I bought a package of No-Doz in an airport store. Unfamiliar with the caffeine-laden pills, I assumed an over-the-counter product would give me, at best, a modest boost. But I was drooping and needed a massive shot of instant energy. So I swallowed the entire package.

By the time I got to the interview, my hands were visibly shaking. My already-fast speech pattern was revved up to triple speed. Most bizarre of all, my eyelashes were moving up and down like a feather duster in the hands of an already energetic housecleaner gone wild.

Simply put, No-Doz had taken over my body. During the meeting, all I could think about was trying to regain control of my hands, my voice, and especially my vision. Through the strobe-light eyesight created by my fluttering eyelashes, I vaguely remember several committee members staring at me in open-mouthed astonishment. Need I mention that I did not get the job?

Since that debacle, I have become much wiser about job interviews. Rule number one: No-Doz is a no-no. As the economy gets better, please God, I'm hoping that people who lost positions in the current downturn, perhaps you, may start getting called for interviews. The good news, of course, is that such a summons means you're being considered for a job. The bad news is that you have to go on the interview – one of the most unequal situations in life. In my opinion, there's nothing more stressful – except a blind date set up by your sibling – than being judged by total strangers regarding your career worthiness.

Now, it may seem strange for me to offer interview advice – considering my No Doz story. But then, as you probably know, some of the best lessons in life are learned from mistakes, in my case a colossal and humiliating one. Here's what I suggest to ace your next interview:

Bone up. With the amount of information available on the Internet, there's no excuse for showing up clueless about the organization you're talking to. At the very least, you should be familiar with the company's history, products, locations, marketing, sales, and leadership. If I were you, I'd go beyond the organization's own website and search Google for articles giving objective views, including negative publicity. Knowing both sides of any story is always an asset.

Case out the joint. To make yourself comfortable, drive a few days ahead of time to the location of your interview. Identify the exact door you'll be using as well as any security issues. Most



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importantly: look at the way people in the parking lot are dressed; you don't want to show up in an old-geezerish gray flannel suit if the employees all are wearing knit tops and chinos.

Greet with enthusiasm. As a job-seeker, you've undoubtedly heard the old saying that you never get a second chance to make a first impression. Several surveys have shown that many interviewers decide within the first 10 seconds of meeting if they'll offer you the job. Use this information to your advantage by taking the initiative in smiling, moving forward, and shaking hands.

Listen, then talk. If at all possible, try to get the other person talking about his or her career background and achievements. Keep your own comments short and sweet, trying not to fill natural pauses. Confident men and women are comfortable with brief interludes of silence.

Stress benefits. Going on a job interview is a sales function. So, using the best techniques of the selling industry, focus on how you'll help the organization increase profits, improve its image, and achieve long-term viability. By all means, remember the benefit of hiring you – from the company's perspective -- is not to enable your kids to stay in private school or to permit you to buy a bigger house.

Make yourself memorable. Of all these tips, I suggest this one is trickiest. To be sure, you can easily make yourself memorable by wearing, doing, or saying something inappropriate. So use your common sense. Before the interview begins, I highly recommend making comments on photographs, awards, or other memorabilia in the person's office. During the conversation, try to create rapport, possibly by mentioning that your sister went to the same college as the interviewer. Afterward, follow up not just with a thank-you note, but with something no one else will do such as sending an article on an athletic team the interviewer mentioned. Thank you, Sports Illustrated.

Get plenty of sleep. Artificial stimulants never make up for eight hours of shut-eye when you want to make a good impression. Note: go back and reread the first few paragraphs of this column. I may be wrong, but I suspect that it's rarely an advantage to show up for a job interview with weirdly moving body parts. As I discovered, the most expensive mascara will not compensate for wildly fluttering eyelashes.

Dr. Kathleen Begley has written seven books and gives corporate seminars on topics such as writing persuasively, presenting confidently, and managing positively. You can call her at 610-429-1562 or e-mail her at KBegley@writecompanyplus.com. She responds to everybody. If you feel you've become too busy to ever read this free, opt-in blogletter, please tell us to remove you from our mailing list. Although our feelings will be deeply hurt, we'll cheerfully delete you.