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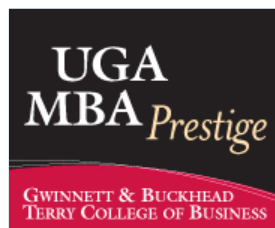
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## Five Things Not to Say On A Job Interview

**When going after the big executive title, you've got to know what to say and what talk doesn't pay. Here are five things never to say on your next corporate interview.**

by Dr. Beverly Langford, author of "The Etiquette Edge" and president of LMA Communication. Dr. Langford teaches management communication in the Robinson College of Business, Georgia State University.

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**J**ob searches can be nerve wracking and the stress level spikes in the all-important interview. Too often, our mouth starts working before we engage our brain, and we run the risk of saying things that either destroy or diminish the chances of landing that plum position.

Of course, you want to be prepared, positive, and poised. You've studied interview books that have given you the perfect answers to just about all possible questions. But sometimes, you can buy yourself some interview insurance by knowing what not to say, which may be more important than coming up with the glib answer.

Stay away from these formidable five.

### 1. Don't badmouth your former boss or company.

Your former boss may have made Attila the Hun look like Mr. Rogers. But bashing that person will position you as a whiner. If asked why you left that organization, explain that you were looking for additional challenges, a different sized company or industry, or a chance to learn new skills. If you were part of a large layoff or restructuring, be honest, but don't dwell on it. Avoid coming across as a victim.



If you dish the dirt on your former employer, the interviewer figures that you will do the same thing there when you decide to move on.

### 2. Don't ask about benefits, vacation days, and sick days, or request special hours.

A huge turnoff to an interviewer is a candidate who seems more interested in time off than in the job itself. Ask questions that expose how the company will use and enhance your skills, and how you will be evaluated, and what constitutes excellent performance in the particular job you want.

### 3. Don't get caught without a good reason for why you want the job.

"It looks like an easy (or fun) job" won't win you any points. Neither will you inspire someone to hire you with, "I just need a job," or "I want something to tide me over until I get accepted to graduate school."

Have a clear reason for wanting the job that includes an explanation of how you can contribute to the company's success. Organizations want to hire people whose performance adds to the bottom line.

### 4. Don't ask a question that's prominent on the company's website.

"So, what do you guys do?" will indicate that you haven't done your homework. Even though you are immersed in the job search perhaps to the point of obsessing over it, remember that this process isn't all about you. A company has a lot at stake when it makes someone an offer, and hiring managers are looking for ways to differentiate among the excellent, the satisfactory, and the disasters.

Do research on the company and its industry. If the company has achieved recognition for an accomplishment, be prepared to talk about it. If the firm faces challenges, some questions about its current strategies will show that you don't have unrealistic expectations.

### 5. Don't make your interviewer your adversary.

Avoid a statement such as "I want your job." That kind of aggressive interviewing had its day for a while, but most executives are looking for a reasonable blend of confidence and humility. An eagerness to learn and a commitment to be an excellent performer are much more effective.

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Besides, the interviewer may be going through some personal struggles and feel a bit insecure about his or her own position. Bringing someone on board who will pose a threat won't be appealing.

By law, the interviewer can't ask you invasive questions. Use that same rule of thumb to gauge your conversation. It's smart to stay away from questions such as "Do you have kids?" or "What kind of name is Bergenhamster?"

Stick to discussions about the job at hand. You can also address current events if you stay away from highly controversial topics that evoke strong, polarized feelings. You and your interviewer may end up on opposite ends of the political spectrum regarding a hot topic.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, "the ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." Job interviews certainly don't qualify as "moments of comfort." But with the right amount of preparation and a thoughtful perspective, they can be much less nerve wrecking. And hopefully, you can influence the interviewer's decision in your favor.



*Beverly Y. Langford is president of **LMA Communication**, a consulting, training, and coaching firm that works with organizations and individuals on strategic communication, effective interpersonal communication skills, team building, and leadership development. She also the author of "The Etiquette Edge."*

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