

### 3. First Impression Management: How to Handle the 30 Seconds that Set the Tone for Your Entire Interview

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We all know that first impressions matter. For better or for worse, our brains are designed to make snap judgments about the people we encounter. Scientists say that this tendency probably comes from our ancient ancestors, who, without a common language to fall back on, often had to rely on their instant impressions to determine whether a stranger posed a threat.

In casual social settings, negative first impressions can be overcome if we're afforded extra time to get to know someone. But within the time constraints of a job interview, it's unlikely that you'll be able to completely reverse a hiring manager's negative first impression. That's why it's vitally important to do everything you in your power to make sure your interviewer's first sense of you is a positive one.

#### Micromanage the First 30 Seconds

Every hiring manager and interview situation is different, and there's no way that you can control the way that someone else will respond to you. But what you can do is to assess and fine-tune every variable that is within your power to manage. Here's a checklist to help ensure that the first thirty seconds of your next interview will be the first thirty seconds of your new career!

#### 1. Timing really is everything.

It goes without saying that you should arrive early to the interview, but that's only one aspect of getting the "timing" part of your first impression down pat. Get there 10 minutes before your meeting is slated to begin, and be organized and prepared to start the interview as soon as you are called upon. Stay focused, and take care to eliminate any distractions -- such as cell phones -- that could unexpectedly throw you off track.

2. Make sure your appearance is professional, down to the smallest detail. Choose business-appropriate attire for your interview, and make sure your clothing is neat and composed. Also pay close attention to your hair, jewelry, shoes, and accessories. You don't have to spend a lot of money to look professional for your interview - just set aside some extra time beforehand to attend to all of the little details. Have a trusted friend or family member give you a last-minute once-over just before you leave the house.

#### 3. Have a brief opening script prepared.

A big part of first impression management is saying the right words at the right time. During the Q & A part of the interview, you'll want to go with the flow and let the interviewer take the lead. But it's still a good idea to plan out what you want to say when you first meet the hiring manager in advance. In the days leading up to the meeting, practice introducing yourself in a strong and confident tone of voice. This is a great way to demonstrate poise and professionalism in those crucial first 30 seconds.

4. Pay close attention to your body language.

Now that you've planned out the words you'll say during the crucial first 30 seconds, don't let them be drowned out by awkward or stilted body language! Experts in non-verbal communication say that a firm handshake, good posture, and a confident, purposeful walk are all important parts of making a good first impression. As the interview progresses, maintain eye contact and try to avoid fidgeting.

You only get one chance to make a first impression, so it's true that the first 30 seconds can make or break your interview. But with close attention to detail, careful planning, and a bit of luck, you'll be able to parlay a positive first impression into a job offer!