



How to Not Get the Job: Recruiters' Biggest Turnoffs

The candidate looks great on paper, but the recruiter has a nagging feeling he just isn't right for the job. What's behind that hunch?

Here are some of the most common practices and behaviors that trigger alarm bells during the interview process, according to talent acquisition professionals.

Being unprepared. Simply stated, candidates will be judged on the amount of effort they put into the interview. "If they show up prepared, ready, open to new ideas, conversations and opportunities, and can go with the flow, they will go far," said Erin Stevens, SHRM-CP, corporate recruiter with MasterBrand Cabinets.

She compared the interaction between job seekers and recruiters to dating—with each party responsible for setting the mood: "If one of them shows no interest, or is rude or unprepared for the journey, the relationship will not form properly and is doomed from the beginning."

Not showing any interest. Arriving for an interview without showing any awareness of the company or its mission is another turnoff. "The single greatest thing a candidate can bring to a

conversation is enthusiasm," said Lindsay Mustain, a recruiter for Amazon.

Being hard to pin down. When people are challenging to work with throughout the interview process, it's usually an early sign of what it will be like to have them as part of the organization. "If they have a [slow] response, making it difficult to schedule the interview steps, or [are] constantly changing what they are looking for in regard to compensation and responsibility, a recruiter needs to really take a step back and uncover what is really motivating them to make a move," said Catherine Pylant, senior corporate recruiter at Wal-Mart.

Having a scattered focus. It's another red flag when people apply to nearly every open position in an organization. "Candidates cast a net so wide that they lose focus and come off as less than knowledgeable, as well as unprepared," Pylant said. "At least a few times a month, I have candidates that ask me to refresh their memory as to what the company is or what the position is because they've applied to so many roles."

Not telling the truth. Not being truthful is a surefire way to make a negative

impression on recruiters. "If I feel like candidates are giving me something inauthentic, like talking in generics or talking about accomplishments they didn't own themselves, they lose credibility and my trust," Mustain said.

Telling the unvarnished truth. The other extreme—being too truthful—doesn't bode well. "Sometimes I have candidates who can be extremely honest to a fault, letting me know they left a role because they couldn't stand a former boss or they were fired for attendance [issues]," Stevens said. "If you left because you couldn't get along with your supervisor, how will you handle your next boss?"

Being inappropriately friendly. Some people mistake a recruiter's friendliness for something more and cross a professional boundary. That includes flirting, getting overly chummy and otherwise acting inappropriately. "I've never had to end an in-person interview but have had phone interviews with [applicants who demonstrated] really questionable behavior," Mustain said. One incident that still makes her laugh is when a candidate began serenading her on the telephone. "It was just wrong place, wrong time."

—Roy Maurer