

## Twelve Ways to Blow a Job Interview

In a helpful *Chronicle of Higher Education* article, Robert Sternberg (Oklahoma State University) draws on his experience to steer us clear of some common mistakes. The italicized phrases and sentences show the attitude or thinking behind what is said in the interview.

- *Good question, but now let me answer the question I wish you'd asked.* This is the politician's trick of briefly touching on the question that was asked and then "bridging" to the point you really want to make. While this may work in journalistic interviews, it's a dud in job interviews.

- *I have no clue, but I'll be damned if I'm going to let you know that.* Actually, search committees will give a candidate more points for admitting ignorance than giving a poor answer. But saying "I don't know" too often may indicate the job is not a good fit.

- *I'm so glad you asked.* Enthusiastically going on and on in answer to a question annoys committees. "Overly long answers suggest a lack of self-control, uncertainty about how to answer, or, sometimes, an outsized ego," says Sternberg.

- *I'm going to keep that face smiling and that head nodding.* There's a tendency to speak to committee members who are giving you encouraging body language – but it's the people who are frowning or sitting stony-faced who need to be persuaded.

- *A little embellishment never hurt anyone.* Candidates need to resist this understandable tendency since it's so easy for the committee to fact-check on the Internet, and any undermining of your credibility will kill your chances for the job.

- *You can count on me to please everybody.* Faculties have diverse opinions, and you run the risk of appearing wishy-washy or being unwilling to stand up for your principles if you're too ingratiating. "Show who you are," advises Sternberg. "If the committee members don't like who you are, you don't want to go to their institution, and you should thank them if they reject you."

- *Weaknesses? Me?* "Someone who is unaware of his or her weaknesses – or not savvy enough to have thought about a good answer to such a standard question – is not going to be effective on the job," says Sternberg. "Just make sure that, whatever they are, your weaknesses are not fatal for the job."

- *I've got this great new technology for my talk.* "Don't use an interview to experiment for the first time with a new technology," he advises. "If you do use technology in your talk, try to ensure that it will work, but have a backup plan in case it doesn't."

- *We really know how to handle the problem at my school.* If you give the impression that your current school has the answer to every problem, committee members may wonder why you're leaving.

- *Here's a long list of what I need for the job.* "You have to be careful about specifying conditions of employment too soon in the process," says Sternberg. "You will be in a bargaining position after you're offered the job, but not really before."

- *I'll teach you never to ask such a stupid question again.* Sternberg remembers that in his first job interview, he gave a snarky, put-down answer to what seemed like a lame question from a scruffy-looking guy in the audience. Turned out he was the committee chairperson and Sternberg didn't get the job. "I have never given a snarky answer since, no matter how weak I thought the question was," he says ruefully.

- *That will never work.* If a committee member talks about an idea about which you're skeptical, a job interview is not the time to say that. Better to say you'd like to think about it.

These are twelve things not to say. What's some more positive advice? "Be yourself and speak honestly," says Sternberg. "If the institution does not hire you, be glad you avoided landing at a place where you would not fit, and your role in the process is to ensure that when you do take a job, it is at a place that is a match for you. Bad romances are painful not only in one's choice of partner but also in one's choice of jobs."

"12 Bloopers to Avoid in Job Interviews" by Robert Sternberg in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, Mar. 1, 2013 (Vol. LIX, #25, p. A31-32),