

## PERSONAL FINANCE

## 7 Things Not to Say During a Job Interview

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When interviewing for a job, we all want to put our best foot forward, but sometimes we end up putting it in our mouths instead.

Even though you may feel comfortable chatting and making small talk with your interviewer, it's best to leave some things unsaid.

We checked in with experts to find seven things you should never say during an interview.

### 1.) Don't Compliment the Interviewer's Appearance in Any Way

**Don't say:** "I love your skirt!"

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"Compliments on appearance are just too familiar," explains Patricia Lenkov, an executive recruiter at New York City-based [Agility Executive Search](#). "You are there for a purpose, and most interviewers want to keep that boundary. If you don't maintain a little distance, they might take it the wrong way."

If you are a man complimenting a woman, Lenkov added, it might be seen as sexist or derogatory, even if your intentions are pure. Compliments in same-sex interviews can also come across as insincere because the interviewer might think you're just sucking up or trying to get on his good side.

"You're really taking a risk by saying something even as innocuous as, 'I like your boots,'" says Lenkov. "What if the person hates those boots and only wore them because they broke a heel on their other shoes? It could really work against you."

If you're the kind of person who enjoys giving compliments, Lenkov suggests researching your interviewer's professional achievements before the interview and bring them up during the interview.

**What to say instead:** "I enjoyed reading about your [corporate](#) achievements in the paper last month."

### 2.) Don't Cry

**Don't say:** "It was the hardest thing I ever went through, and I still break down just thinking about it."

Crying the first time you meet might lead the interviewer to think you're unstable, Lenkov says. Employers look for people who can handle high-pressure situations, and crying is a sign that you can't handle the stress of being put on the spot in front of another person.

Showing a prospective employer you can manage your emotions is almost as important as showing you can manage people, adds Lenkov.

"I understand that we all cry, we are all human, but in an interview setting you have to keep composure. In most jobs, you will be asked to appear in front of executives or clients at certain

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times, and the interviewer needs to see how you handle yourself on the other side of the table," says Lenkov.

If possible, avoid telling emotional stories in interviews, Lenkov suggests. If a moving story is relevant to the interview process, practice telling it as often as possible to avoid getting choked up.

"If you tell a story 50 times and break down every time, that 51st time, you may not cry," says Lenkov. "Practice until it becomes neutral, even if it makes you sad or angry."

**What to say instead:** "It was difficult, but we pulled through."

### 3.) Don't Talk About Illnesses Unless They're Relevant

**Don't say:** "My back is killing me, and this time of year is rough on my asthma."

"If there is a gap in your resume, it may be because you were in the hospital or had a serious illness, and then it's relevant to the job," says Lenkov. "But if you're just talking about how sick you are, then it's not relevant."

Of course some medical topics can't be avoided, Lenkov says. If you walk in on crutches, offer an explanation, but keep it light.

"Don't say, 'Oh my god, I had gangrene and they almost had to amputate my leg. Keep it simple and be jovial when you can."

Steer clear of anything that invites an interviewer to give you sympathy, says Lenkov. If you detail the bad flu you just got over, the interviewer will feel obliged to offer commiseration or consolation of some sort, which weakens the professional boundaries.

**What to say instead:** "During the gap in my resume, I was recuperating from surgery, and it hasn't been a problem since."

### 4.) Don't Talk about Problems at a Previous Company Unless it's to Show How You Persevered

**Don't say:** "I had so many problems with my former boss; he was a constant headache."

"If you don't specify that you found a solution to your problems, then any prospective employer will think that all you did was have problems at your last job," says David Adams, vice president of learning and development at [staffing firm Adecco](#).

If an interviewer asks about a problem you faced at your previous employer, she is more interested in your ability to solve the problem than the actual problem, Adams says.

"A lot of times people just use the 'challenges faced question' to criticize their former boss or the team they used to work with. Even if they were horrible, you have to include that key word 'BUT,' and then move on from there about what you did to succeed in that environment."

Make sure your answer highlights how you overcame adversities and cooperated with co-workers.

"People who have those people skills go much further in their career and are hired much quicker when they can showcase that in an interview," says Adams. "They see you as someone who can bring that same mindset to the new job."

**What to say instead:** "I dealt with several problems, but worked through them all successfully."

### 5.) Don't Force Rapport

**Don't say:** "I see you have kids. I love kids!"

Don't try and force commonalities with your interviewer, advises Adams. Items in the interviewer's office might reflect his or her hobbies and interests, but it doesn't mean you have to like the same things.

"If someone has pictures up of their kids, and you comment on them but you don't have kids of your own, it feels completely fake," says Adams. "Or if someone has a tennis trophy up and you comment on it, then be prepared to answer the question, 'Do you play tennis?' If you have to say 'no,' then it's like, 'why did you ask in the first place?'"

Rapport cannot be forced. If you don't see anything you have in common with the interviewer, that's fine; stick to small talk about the weather or ask questions about the company.

And don't be scared of a pause in the conversation; it gives the interviewer time to take notes or form the next question.

One of the most important things to remember during any interview is not to lie, advises Adams. You should never put yourself in a position where you have to answer a question that you're not prepared to answer.

**What to say instead:** "Your offices are great. How long has your company been at this location?"

#### 6.) Have No Questions

**Don't say:** "Nope. I think you went over everything. See you later!"

Not having questions is the kiss of death, says Michael Neece, co-founder of career building site [JobTacToe.com](http://JobTacToe.com).

Not having questions communicates you don't have any interest in the company and are just looking for a paycheck, says Neece. If nothing else, candidates should ask something like, "What would be the three major things you need me to accomplish," or "What are the qualities of people who are very successful at your company?" suggests Neece.

Candidates who don't ask questions also come across as unprepared and unengaged.

"Interviewers are more impressed with questions you ask than with the answers you give," says Neece. "They learn something about how you think by the questions you ask, and it lets them know what kinds of things you pay attention to. If you're asking a question about trends or challenges in their [industry](#), you're really communicating, 'Hey, I'm interested in doing this job.'"

**What to say instead:** "I noticed that your company has won several awards. What do you think gives you that competitive edge?"

#### 7.) Don't Say You Were Fired

**Don't say:** "At my last job, I got canned."

"Even if you were fired you just don't want to use that word," says Neece. "It's a really loaded word."

Saying you were fired could shift the tone of the interview, and a prospective employer might start focusing on your bad attributes and wondering why you were dismissed instead of looking at your positives and focusing on your qualifications.

"The truth is, you may be highly qualified and extremely good at your job, but it wasn't a good fit at the company," says Neece. "But if you use the word 'fired,' immediately, the interviewer may not be able to see past that."

But don't lie; your prospective employer may contact your former employer for more [information](#). Find a way to explain the situation without using the word "fired."

"You can say it was not a good fit and you and your employer went your separate ways," says Neece. "Then describe what you learned from the experience and what you're focused on now."

**What to say instead:** "It wasn't a good fit at my last job, but I learned a lot about my skills and abilities and what I want to bring to my next position."

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