

5 tips for acing a virtual job interview

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Job interviews are nerve-wracking enough, but now that so many companies are working remotely they're happening on a computer screen. That brings additional layers of unease -- tech issues, unexpected cameos from family members and the awkwardness of figuring out whose turn it is to speak.

But that's our reality for the time being.

While home might be a more comfortable setting, it can also be harder to establish a rapport: there's no handshake, no light banter as you walk to the interview room and social cues are harder to pick up on.

The good news is that the preparation for a video interview remains largely the same: research the company, the industry and any competitors. Come up with thoughtful questions that will give you practical insight about the position and the company's culture. Troubleshoot your tech and audio setup before the interview starts, and always follow up with a personalized thank you note.

But there are some specific tips that apply to acing a video interview:

Be camera-ready immediately

You have about one-tenth of a second to make a first impression, according to Ian Siegel, co-founder and CEO at ZipRecruiter.

Use it wisely.

"Be smiling when you join the call, it will trigger the right response from the interviewer and also relaxes you," he said. He added that you should dress as if the interview was in person, sit up straight, be well groomed and make sure any space in the camera shot is clutter free.

Mind your background

When choosing your interview location, look for a spot that has a neutral color background with little distractions, recommended Peter Baskin, chief product officer at Modern Hire.

You want to choose a space that is well lit, but you want it coming from in front of you. Being backlit risks you looking like a silhouette and makes it hard to see facial expressions, which can make it difficult for the interviewer to relate to. Natural lighting works best. If possible, use a headset with a microphone to help filter out ambient noise.

Show enthusiasm ... big time

You should always seem excited about the opportunity in a job interview. But when you're doing the interview virtually, turn the eagerness up a few notches.

"Show your enthusiasm. You want to be memorable for how excited you are," said Siegel.

"Whether it's dating or a job interview, 50% of attraction is someone showing interest in you first."

Kick off the interview by saying something like: I am excited to be doing this interview because (fill in the blank with something specific), Siegel suggested. It could be as simple as: I love the product or, I read about the company's recent developments and would love to learn more about XYZ.

Since social cues can be harder to pick up on virtually, be a little more dramatic with things like head nods and smiles to show your interest.

Maintain eye contact

It's important to show interviewers they have your full attention, so Baskin recommended looking into the camera when giving your answers.

"This will give the recruiters a better perception of eye contact."

He recommended minimizing the window some and moving it near the camera. "This way you will more naturally appear to have eye contact while being able to react to the interviewer's body language."

You should also make sure the camera is at eye level. "Avoid making it look as if [you] might be looking up or down at the recruiter on the other end," Baskin said.

Taking notes can also show you are paying close attention, Siegel added. "Writing down something someone says, particularly when they answer your question ... it's going to make you memorable."

Embrace unexpected cameos

Yes, you want to strive for a distraction-free zone for the interview. But life happens: Your cat wanders onto your keyboard or your kid sneaks into the shot thinking it's grandma and wants to say hi. Use the moment to your advantage.

"Laugh, don't get frustrated or frantic," suggested Siegel. Everyone is having the same work-from-home struggles, and how you react can be very telling to potential employers.

"Video interviews introduce the question of how you operate under stress, you have the opportunity to show versus tell," he said.