

Wisconsin Park & Recreation Association

Career Center Tips: Believe or Not Interview Miscues!



If you are responsible for the hiring in your park and recreation agency, the last thing you want to hear are the following types of miscues from potential applicants during an interview – comments or crying from a child that the applicant brought along, a cell phone ringing from the interviewee, and even gum chewing. Yet job seekers have committed these interview gaffes and worse.

Strange behavior isn't the only way to ruin your chances of landing a job. When I was asked to name the most common and damaging interview mistakes a candidate can make during a workshop I was presenting, here were several of my top responses: dressing inappropriately; badmouthing a former boss; appearing disinterested; arrogance; insufficient answers; and not asking good questions were my top answers.

I have identified ten real-life mistakes that I have encountered during my 34 years in this profession to illustrate what not to do when you sit down for your next interview:

1. Interviewee answered cell phone and asked (me) the interviewer to leave my own office because it was a "private" conversation. **Do you think I gave them the job!!*
2. Applicant told me she wouldn't be able to stay with the job long because she thought she might get an inheritance if her grandfather died -- and her grandpa wasn't "in great shape."
3. The job seeker asked me for a ride home after the interview.
4. The applicant smelled his armpits on the way to the interview room.
5. Candidate said she could not provide a writing sample because all of her writing had been for the CIA and it was "classified." **I know, hard to believe...but it's the truth!*

6. Candidate told me he was fired for beating up his last boss because he broke too many of the park maintenance tools and equipment.

7. When the applicant was offered holiday cookies before the interview, he declined saying he didn't want to line his stomach with starch before going out drinking.

8. An applicant said she was a "numbers person" not a "people person" – in her interview for a Recreation Supervisor.

9. During a phone interview the candidate flushed the toilet while answering several questions.
**I know, I know...this interview went right down the!*

10. The applicant took out a hairbrush and brushed her hair.

To ensure your interview is free of obvious errors (and certainly smoother than the examples above), follow these five tips:

Do a background check: When you walk into a job interview, knowledge of the park and recreation agency's history, goals and current activity proves to the interviewer that you are not only prepared for the interview, but also that you want to be a part of the organization. Obtaining the agency brochures, program booklets, or checking their website should all take place.

Don't fabricate your responses: If the conversation drifts to a topic you're not knowledgeable about, admit you don't know the answer and then explain how you would go about finding a solution. Displaying your problem-solving skills is better than attempting to talk about something you don't understand.

Always keep it professional: Although interviewers often try to create a comfortable setting to ease the job seeker's nerves, professional decorum shouldn't disappear. Avoid offering personal details that can be controversial or have no relevance to the position, such as political and religious beliefs or stories about a recent break-up.

Do your homework and plan: Expect to hear the typical interview questions: "What's your biggest weakness?" "Why do you want to work here?" "Tell me about yourself." "Why did you leave your last job?" These open-ended questions are harder to answer than they sound, so think about your responses, and more importantly, practice before the interview.

Present a positive attitude: The interview is not the time to air your grievances about being wronged by a past boss. How you speak about a previous employer gives the hiring manager an idea of how you'll speak about him or her once you've moved on.