

Guide to Reading a Job Candidate's Verbal and Non-Verbal Cues

Conversational communication depends on three things:

- the actual words being spoken,
- the tone in which the words are spoken, and
- body language – the non-verbal clues people give about how they're really feeling.

Body language is especially important in job interviews, both on the part of the interviewer and the interviewee.

Except that hiring managers are probably at a disadvantage here, because there are many more resources available on the Internet for job seekers on how to act and look like the perfect candidate, than there are tips for hiring managers on how to spot the fakers

The problem is that if you have a candidate in front of you who appears just about perfect, you may have someone who is practiced at doing interviews, but not much else.

If you get the feeling you're sitting in front of such a candidate, you might ask them how many job interviews they've been on recently. Depending on what they say, you may want to discount that "perfect" body language.

On the other side of the coin, applicants are told not to fidget and never appear to be nervous.

But you might do well not to automatically eliminate a candidate who acts a little nervous at one point, since that's normal. You might ask them if there is any particular reason why they're nervous, try to calm them down and just start a real conversation. They may actually have something to offer to your organization.

What follows are the 10 body language gestures to watch for in hiring interviews:

1. Disorganization

Have someone observe them as they drive up in the company parking lot. Have them watch if the applicant frantically searches at the last moment in the car among a sheaf of documents for a copy of their resume – this shows lack of good preparation and organization.

2. Hunched shoulders

Have the receptionist observe the candidate as he or she waits a few minutes in the lobby for the interviewer to collect the applicant. Hunched shoulders while they're not sure they're being watched supposedly show lack of confidence.

The professional tipsters tell candidates to sit facing the receptionist and anticipate from which entrance the interviewer will appear so they can rise on cue to shake hands.

3. Inappropriate handshake

The pros tell interviewees to “shake it, don't brake it.” A soft, limp handshake supposedly conveys lack of confidence, while a bone-crunching strong handshake shows an excessive and undue desire to impress.

4. Inability to follow, even on a short walk

As the candidate follows the interviewer (or an assistant) to the interview room, observe how they walk. Do they easily follow the leader's pace? The pros tell people to do just that to show they'll fit right in. Aggressively walking ahead may betray someone who always wants to be in charge.

5. Gestures that are too extravagant

We all talk with our hands sometimes and hand gestures are an important part of non-verbal communication. However, if an applicant raises his or her hands above the level of the collarbone, that could indicate that the interviewee is over-amped-up, and maybe frantic.

6. Gripping the table or desk and sitting too close to it

If the applicant doesn't want the interviewer to see his or her gestures and keeps hands constantly below a desk or table, he or she is probably very self-conscious and is not in a mood to reveal his or her true self. You might ask yourself what they are trying to hide.

7. Crossing legs

Sitting with crossed legs is said to be a sign of complacency. They've heard it all before and seen it all before – do you really want to hire someone like that?

8. No eye contact

Applicants who fail to make good eye contact with the interviewer are often trying to hide something they really don't want you to find out about them. That habit can make open communication in the workplace very difficult.

9. Folded arms

Folded arms mean that applicant is closing himself or herself off from the interviewer. It's a gesture that's hard to penetrate. You might have trouble establishing authentic open communication with the job seeker to decide if you really want them.

10. Invading the interviewer's personal space

Anyone who does this may be a little too "hyper" for most workplaces. Charges of harassment often began with allegations that someone is invading someone else's personal space.

This is another huge red flag.