

The Top 10 Job-Search Personal Branding Mistakes

Employers want to know why you are the best choice for the job. Should they hire you or another candidate? But here’s a surprising truth: The person who best connects with the interviewer is most likely to get the job – even over someone who might be more qualified. That’s where your personal brand comes in.

Maybe you’re thinking, “A personal brand? I don’t have one or even want one!” Reality is, though, you *do* already have a personal brand whether you realize it or not. Just by being you in interviews, on the job, or wherever you present yourself, you have a personal brand. Defined as “the way you want people to perceive, think, and feel about you in relation to others,” your personal brand is alive and well and exists in the minds of other people – including interviewers. That’s why it’s important to take control of your brand, to make sure you make the impression you *want* throughout your job search.

So, learning to master your personal brand is key to success, and one way to do that is to avoid the Top 10 Job-Seeker Personal Brand Busters[®]. These, listed below, are among the most damaging mistakes that job seekers make when looking for a new position. Avoid these Busters™, and you’ll communicate a more powerful personal brand to potential employers before, during, and after your interviews.

In your job search efforts, have *you* committed any of these Job-Seeker Personal Brand Busters[®]?

1. ***Not paying attention to your personal brand on the Internet.*** Chances are, your interviewer or future boss will search for your name on the Internet prior to your interview. So, think twice before posting those wild photos from Mardi Gras on your Facebook page. If you blog or use Twitter, pay attention to what you say. Avoid writing negative comments about others (especially former employers and coworkers), and steer away from profanity and strong opinions.
2. ***Not visiting the restroom prior to your interview.*** Ok, let’s get the obvious out of the way: You definitely don’t want to squirm in your chair because you haven’t had time to go to the restroom before the interview! But you should also use a quick pop into the restroom to make sure your hair is neat, your suit hasn’t picked up any lint, and everything is in its proper place.
3. ***Answering a question without taking the time to think or before fully understanding the question.*** Let’s say you’re in an important interview, and you’re asked a question that takes you by surprise. You’re not sure how to respond, but you feel you need to say something right away to make you look confident. So, you just start babbling, spouting out whatever comes to mind. The truth is that interviewers actually prefer that you pause for a few seconds to think of a good answer before you speak. If you rush to answer every question, you run the risk of saying something you don’t really mean.

4. ***Only looking at one interviewer when there are two or more interviewers in the room.*** Job seekers tend to look at the interviewer who is most expressive or seems the most receptive. But if you’re interviewed by more than one person, make sure you look at everyone in the room when you speak. Make eye contact with one interviewer for a few seconds, then shift to another and another in order to connect with all of them.
5. ***Talking only about what you want out of the job and not what the company needs or wants.*** The employer is more interested in what you can do for the company and not vice versa. If you’re asked in the interview what you want from the job, answer the question intelligently, but don’t go on and on about all that you’re hoping the company can offer you.
6. ***Speaking negatively about your current or former employer.*** This was confirmed in a survey of interviewers and recruiters conducted by CareerBuilders.com where 49% said that the worst interview offense is speaking negatively about a former boss. Saying something mean-spirited about a former employer will leave a bad taste in an interviewer’s mouth, so find a way to shed some positive light on your current or previous company and boss.
7. ***Asking questions about pay and benefits during an initial interview.*** Recruiters say they immediately read that kind of question as a sign of someone with little experience. It’s okay to ask an employment agent or recruiter about salary and benefits, but an initial interview isn’t the right time to ask those questions unless the interviewer brings it up. You can cover those subjects once you’re further along the interview process.
8. ***Not asking questions in a way that helps sell yourself.*** Ask questions in a way that highlights your strengths. For example, you could ask something like: “Given my experience managing big projects in my current job, do you see opportunities for someone like me to take on a project manager role here, too?”
9. ***Not being prepared with good, thoughtful questions to ask at the end of an interview.*** Being prepared with smart questions about the company and the job will show you’ve done your research. It demonstrates that you want to be a part of the organization and that you’re taking the process seriously.
10. ***Beating yourself up if you don’t do well in an interview or if you don’t get the job.*** You may have done better in the interview than you think, and the company’s reasons for not choosing you may have nothing to do with you at all. The company might have decided to eliminate the position entirely, or they may have chosen someone from within. So, don’t let a less-than-stellar experience turn you into a pessimist. Stay positive! Evidence shows that people who are optimistic about their job search actually get jobs more quickly.

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Benefit from the mistakes of others, and take these Job-Seeker Personal Brand Busters® to heart. Learning to manage your personal brand will help you make strong connections with your interviewers and ultimately land a great new job.

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With an MBA from Harvard Business School, Brenda’s career has spanned more than two decades and has included developing mega brands for Procter & Gamble and Bristol-Myers Squibb across four continents and 50 countries. Now, as President of Brand Development Associates (BDA) International, she travels the world speaking, training, and coaching individuals and companies to greater success through creative, yet practical, corporate and personal brand development.

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