

Your College Graduate Personal Brand: The Most Important Things Recruiters Say You Should Do *Before* Your Interviews

As a college grad, defining and communicating a personal brand is the best way to stand out from the crowd and make sure potential employers know exactly what you have to offer. But, did you know that your personal brand is communicated not only *during* the interview, but before the interview, too?

After speaking with over 50 of the country’s top recruiters, I learned dozens of powerful tips that they suggest college grads consider during their job search. Here are just a few:

Network, Network, Network! To land an interview, you can’t just send out resumes like darts into the wind. Instead, get the inside track through people you know and meet. It’s estimated that as many as 60% to 75% of all jobs are found through networking. So, pick up the phone, make connections with anyone and everyone you can, and let them know what kind of job you’re interested in after you graduate.

Put Yourself in the Shoes of a Potential Employer. What would you think of someone who sends you an impersonal form cover letter that has obviously been sent to lots of other companies, too, like a letter that starts off with “Dear Sir or Madam” instead of a person’s name? Or how about receiving a resume with not much “meat” in it — no evidence that the grad has made efforts to achieve anything or get involved on campus or in the community?

Norman Saale, Chief Operating Officer at a multi-office accounting firm, recruits candidates on college campuses, and he says, “College students applying for jobs need to show that they’ve spent time developing themselves.” This might include part- or full-time work, internships, volunteer work, or involvement in campus government or athletics, for example. “Show that you have commitment — that you are working toward something and have thought out a longer term plan,” he says.

Make Lists for Each Interview. Prior to each of your interviews, make three separate lists:

1. List the key points you want to get across in the interview about your experience, your education, and how you “fit” with the job you’re going for.
2. Develop a second list that outlines all of the info about the job or the company that you don’t currently know. Split this list into two: (a) the information you *need* to know in order to decide if the job is right for you, and (b) the information you would *like* to know.
3. Based on your first two lists, make a final list of the questions you want to ask during the interview. Make choices! Remember: You may only be given enough time to ask one question.

Your Clothes. Actors can often immediately step into character when they’re given the right costume. So, how you dress not only impacts the way others perceive you, but it can also impact how you perceive yourself and, even more importantly, how you act. Think of it this way: If you want to “act” professionally, you need to wear the right costume for the play you’re in.

Unless you’re applying for a job as a fashion designer, you want to be remembered for your skills, not your clothes. So, make sure what you are wearing is of good quality, clean, and free of rips or missing buttons. And avoid bright colors and too many accessories. Whether you like it or not, more conservative blacks, grays, and navy blues work best in most interview situations.

In other words, dress for success — literally — as if you’re going to meet the most important V.I.P. of your life. Unless the interviewer specifically tells you to dress casually, play it smart, and don’t take chances. Beverly Friedman, Senior Recruiter at Google, says, “Business casual does not include jeans or tennis shoes. Show respect for the process and that it mattered enough to you to dress nicely.” As another recruiter put it, “How someone dresses for an interview gives a picture of how they will ‘dress up’ for important meetings once in the job.”

Positive Self-Talk. When you feel anxious, angry, or worried, you can bet those negative thoughts will affect how well you do in an interview and how well you communicate your personal brand. Psychologists say that one of the best ways to move into a better state of mind is to talk yourself out of it. Just hearing your own inner voice telling you to stay calm can take the edge off of the situation. It’s a way of soothing your mind and affirming the positive, and you can even do it right before you walk into the interviewer’s office. But it’s even better to use this method to talk positively to yourself about the interview in the days before the appointment, the same day as the interview, and again while you’re sitting in the waiting room. You’ll be amazed by how much this can help you to keep your nerves in check.

The truth is: If you just “wing it,” your chances of getting hired drop dramatically. Defining your personal brand is the first step, but being prepared to communicate it in your interviews is everything. And that means doing the best prep work possible before you even walk into that important interview.

Page 3: Your College Graduate Personal Brand: The Most Important Things Recruiters Say You Should Do Before Your Interviews

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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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