

Having Fun with Interviews

Make a good first impression

First impressions are important. They create a 'filtering system' through which interviewers interpret what they subsequently see and hear. You only have one chance to make a first impression so make a good one. You can relax because ***much of your first impression is visual.***

- Walk in assertively.
- Smile and make eye contact with every interviewer.
- Repeat the smile and eye contact as you shake hands. When shaking hands, deliberately push the web of your hand into the web of the other person's hand and grip a shade tightly. (This avoids an accidental 'wet fish' handshake.)

Get your posture right

- Sit upright in the torso (you'll look taller). Sit slightly asymmetrically – for example by crossing your legs. This makes you look more relaxed and natural..
- Breathe slowly and deeply (it's more relaxing).
- Have a slight smile on your face (you'll look pleased to be there; the interviewers will take their cue from you and enjoy being there too).

Mention your stammer

If you stammer, they'll notice it and they may feel uncomfortable if they weren't expecting it. So consider mentioning it first ("I sometimes stammer") - but do so with a smile. (This helps to relax both yourself and your interviewers.) You could also say that you stammer more in a job interview situation, and especially here because you **really** want this job!

Also questions like "Have you any other managers with a stammer?" help your interviewers appreciate that they already employ people who stammer or it's about time they did.

If you want to, you can raise the issue of **diversity**. Diversity is company policy in many organisations these days not just to avoid discrimination but to ensure fresh thinking, creativity and 'richness' of different people and their views. So why not ask them how contemporary is their approach to diversity? How many of their managers are black, disabled etc? In what way will your stammer affect their judgement of the interview?

Avoid unhelpful tactics

Some people who stammer have acquired coping habits that can give the wrong impression during interviews. Sometimes they fill silences with 'er...er...er' or pretend they cannot recall the word they want to use. Interviewers are unlikely to know as much about stammering as

you do, so they can all too easily equate these behaviours with nervousness, lack of confidence, illogical thought processing or poor people skills. So, if a stuck word won't come, try an alternative.¹

Think about your strengths and weaknesses

Interviewers almost always ask about strengths and weaknesses so these are two parts of the interview you can rehearse to perfection.

- Present your strengths modestly. *“People are kind enough to say that I...”* or *“At my last appraisal, my managers said...”*.
- Present your weaknesses as more strengths! *“My stammer means I have to choose my words carefully so what I say is usually precise.”* or *“Having a stammer means I listen more. My staff have commented that I listen to them genuinely.”* or *“When I first started work, my stammer made me quite shy so I’ve had to try extra hard to do things that others take for granted. It’s given me inner strength and determination.”* or *“Having a bit of a stammer means I hope people will see beyond the impediment and recognise my abilities so I think it’s only fair that I do the same for others. It’s made me a better people manager.”* - Sounds good when you say it like that, doesn't it?

Use the “I...we...” speech pattern

This is a speech pattern that leaders use. The ‘I’ says I’m an assertive, free-thinker and the ‘We’ says I’m a team player who thinks beyond the boundaries of my job. So in response to *“What’s your opinion of customer care?”* you could say, *“I’ve always believed that retaining existing customers is more cost effective than finding new ones so I feel that we should make customer care everyone’s responsibility.”* In response to *“How would you handle relocating staff?”* you could say, *“I’ve found that when people are treated like adults they respond well so I think we need to be more open with our communication to staff, involving them in decisions that affect them.”*

Make a good last impression

Last impressions can be as important as first impressions because people tend to remember beginnings and endings more easily than details in the middle. So:

- Thank them for the interview.
- If you feel it's appropriate, thank them for how they responded on those occasions when you stammered (after all, you want them to feel good about the time they spent with you - so *help them* feel good).
- Smile and make eye contact with them all as you shake their hands (Don't wait for them to shake your hand; take the initiative. Let them see you are comfortable with people.)

¹ Note from BSA: The interview is the place where you want to make a good first impression so switching a hard word can be preferable to a severe block. Just don't fall into the avoidance trap where you constantly scout ahead for difficult words as this will destroy your concentration, and don't use replacement words when they don't precisely express what you want to convey.