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Salvage an Interview Disaster • A Blogger at Work

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WHAT'S THE WORST THAT COULD HAPPEN?

No matter how much you prepare for an interview, things can go wrong. Still, you can turn it around and get hired.

BY TAMEKIA REECE

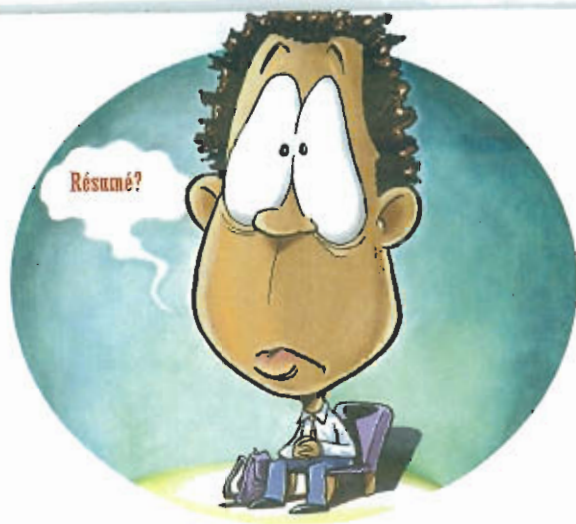
IF you had your way, job interviews would be a breeze. Your attire would be clean and professional, you'd arrive early, you'd have brilliant answers for every question, and the interviewer would be so amazed, you'd be hired on the spot.

Unfortunately, life doesn't always go so smoothly. You may be late, forget important documents, or do other things that could make you memorable to an interviewer—but not in the way you'd want to be.

Here's how to salvage your chances of landing the job when the worst that could happen does.

The worst: You got directions off the Web and planned to arrive 15 minutes before the appointed time. Instead, you find yourself lost, sitting on the side of the road with a flat tire, or waiting for a bus that's extremely late.





Salvage it: “Be on time.” It’s a job search tip that’s repeated over and over. So if you’re going to be late, what should you do? What you shouldn’t do is show up late without calling in advance or assume because you’re tardy there’s no point in showing up at all. Those things are inexcusable, and they show a lack of courtesy or respect for the employer’s time, says Rachelle Canter, author of *Make the Right Career Move*.

“If you’re running late, the best thing is to call and give advance notice and make sure the employer doesn’t want to reschedule,” advises Canter. If the employer does wish to reschedule, apologize and be sure you’re early next time. “If you’re given permission to come in late, apologize again—briefly!—when you get there, and then focus your efforts on making the best impression in the interview that you can,” Canter says.

The worst: When she called about the interview, the manager specifically said, “Bring a résumé.” So you typed one up, proofed it, had others look it over, made corrections, and then printed two clean, crisp copies the morning of the interview. However, three blocks from the building, you realize you left your résumé at home.

Salvage it: What many people, especially prospective bosses, respect more than anything else is integrity, says Nancy Irwin, a Los Angeles-based psychotherapist who offers counsel on career direction. “Be honest and

straightforward and simply say, ‘I don’t have my résumé on me. May I e-mail it to your assistant, or would you prefer I drop it off or mail it to you directly?’” she suggests. Don’t repeatedly apologize, get into a long explanation, or state how dumb you feel. If you do, the manager may not hire you for fear you’ll crumble under even the smallest amount of on-the-job stress. “It’s not about your feeling bad or like an idiot,” Irwin says. “It’s about recovering and moving on to get hired.”

A strategy for safeguarding against this issue is saving your résumé and other important documents on a small USB flash drive. Keep the drive in your bag or on your key chain. If you forget your résumé, the interviewer can plug the drive into his or her computer and print a copy.

The worst: You’re the total package: neat, clean, and well-groomed. But minutes before entering the building, you’re splashed with mud, you spill coffee on your shirt, or your pen explodes in your pocket.

Salvage it: No time to borrow or buy a new outfit? Try to get rid of the stain, or hide it with a sweater. If that doesn’t work, it doesn’t mean your chances are shot. Laugh at yourself to lighten the situation, suggests Catherine Palmiere, president of Adam

Personnel and an adjunct

instructor at Grace

Institute, a busi-

ness training

school, both

in New York.

“Go into the

interview

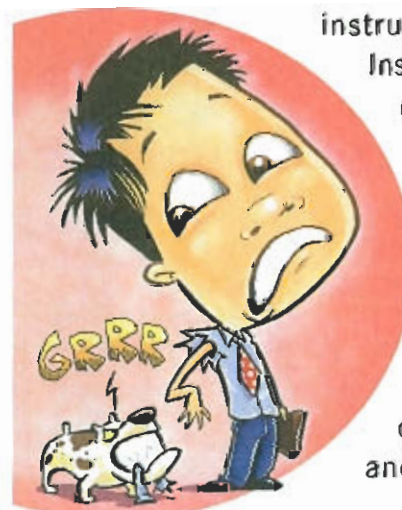
just as you

are, look at

the recruiter,

chuckle a bit,

and say ‘I was



clean until 10 minutes ago,” she says. Then apologize and briefly explain what happened.

Or, use the stain to your advantage. “Simply point out the stain, laugh, and say something like: ‘I was not about to let *this* stop me from meeting you and learning more about the company,’” Irwin says. That little tidbit of information shows the employer you really

want the job and won’t let minor setbacks stop you from going after and achieving your goals.

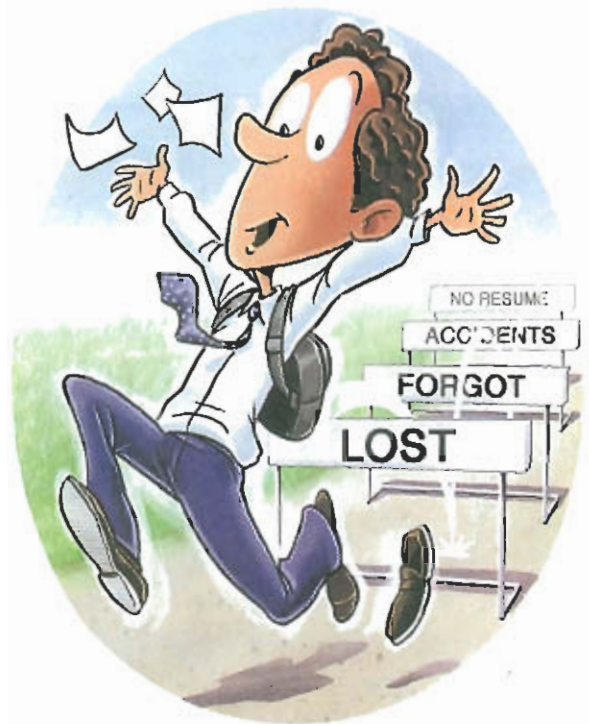


The worst: You studied the company’s Web site and prepared answers for the most common job interview questions. Once in the interview, though, you draw a blank or you’re asked

a question you have no idea how to answer.

Salvage it: If you don’t understand the question, ask the interviewer to clarify or rephrase it. Nothing still? “It’s OK to ask for a minute to think about the question and then compose your thoughts,” Canter says. If you’re still stuck, she recommends you ask whether you can have more time to think about it and call or e-mail your answer later that day or the next. That shows the employer you won’t simply give up if there’s something you don’t know or understand on the job. It also gives you a reason to follow up and stay on the recruiter’s radar!

Although your goal is to go in and slam-dunk the interview, things do happen. Employers understand that. “When recruiters have a job to fill, they’re looking for reasons to hire peo-



ple, not reasons to not hire them,” Palmiere says. So as long as you haven’t committed too big of a blunder, if you’re apologetic and sincere, odds are you’ll be given a chance to redeem yourself.

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No U-Turn Allowed

Sometimes “oopses” are impossible to turn into “ups.” So avoid these at all costs:

- **Dissing past employers.** Bad-mouthing former employers will make the manager wonder what negative things you’d say about the company if you were hired. And who knows, your “idiotic supervisor” at the last job may be the manager’s brother!
- **Using your cell.** Turn it off! If you text or call someone, or if there’s even a slight rrrring during the interview, you can forget it.
- **Using foul language.** Just don’t.
- **Lying.** If you’re caught in a lie, the employer won’t trust you. No trust, no hire.
- **Arguing.** No rudeness, bickering, or trying to force your opinions on the recruiter. If you turn the interview into a debate, expect to “debate” yourself out of a job.