

The logo for the New York City Bar, featuring the text "NEW YORK CITY BAR" in a serif font, centered between two horizontal blue bars.

NEW YORK CITY BAR

Interviewing: Presenting a Positive Persona **By Linda E. Laufer***

Approaching a job interview in a positive frame of mind is key. Everyone knows that. After all, why interview if you are feeling negative? But are you leaving interviewers with a positive impression, one that makes them want to hire you?

Ask yourself whether you are using positive language. Negativity can creep into interview answers, even when you are feeling positively about the topic. Especially when you must respond to a perceived weakness, the heightened pressure to dispel a possible negative impression can sometimes lead to greater use of negative language. In casual conversation, where nothing is at stake, a negative sentence or two is not likely to matter. But in an interview, your discussion of one experience in a negative way can become much more memorable than your many accomplishments.

Negative statements can be turned around and expressed in a positive way. As you prepare for an interview, consider how you can remove negativity from what you plan to say. Pay particular attention to areas of inquiry that you perceive to be your weak spots.

First, consider how you can eliminate any form of “not” from your conversation. Usually, you can change the sentence with a simple rephrasing. For example, as you read this article, you may be thinking or saying to yourself: “I don’t use negative language in an interview so I don’t think interviewers have a negative impression.” You can change that sentence in many different ways. Most simply, you can remove “don’t” and replace “negative” with “positive” so you could say: “I use positive language in an interview so I think interviewers have a positive impression.” Or you could do a more complete overhaul and say: “I choose positive words in my interviews and think that interviewers view me favorably.”

Another potential pitfall is the use of “but,” or its stand-ins, “however” or “although.” Each of those words has the potential of becoming a disclaimer. For example, when asked about your experience in a particular area, consider the impression left by this response: “I had coursework and a year of training in that area, but no hands-on experience.” The word “but” serves as an eraser of all that comes before it. So an interviewer is likely to focus on your lack of hands-on experience and forget about your extensive background. If the position calls for someone with knowledge and not necessarily experience in the area, then you have diminished your accomplishments. Focus on what you have to offer and let the interviewer determine whether it is enough. And remember that the employer reviewed your resume and, having some idea about your experience, decided to invite you to interview for the position.

Sometimes, though, you can make “but” work in your favor. For example, you can turn the sentence around: “I haven’t had hands-on experience yet, but I had coursework and a year of training in that area.” You have erased or at least diminished the impact of your lack of hands-on experience and drawn attention to your assets. To make it more memorable for the interviewer, you could follow up with a brief discussion of your training and courses.

Lapsing into negative language is easy. Think about what you say in everyday conversation. For example, when you have been asked to go somewhere or do something, you may have said: “I don’t mind doing that.” Or you may have used a double negative: “I don’t see why not.” You seem to be approving the activity or action but without a wholehearted endorsement or commitment. Maybe you are communicating that you would rather go elsewhere or do something else. In any event, you are not expressing yourself in a positive way.

Start to think of ways to say “yes.” Practice using positive language in your everyday conversations so that it becomes your natural way of speaking and easier to incorporate into interviews. As you prepare for interviews, think about how you can positively discuss every aspect of your background and experience. If possible, practice your skills in a mock interview with individuals who can give you helpful feedback. Default to positive at every opportunity.

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