

Interviews begin when you walk in the door

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One afternoon in February 2003, Gateway Chief Executive Ted Waitt was supposed to interview a promising candidate for the top human-resources spot at the struggling personal computer-maker. But an intense session with his senior lieutenants lasted 30 minutes longer than expected.

Moments before Waitt emerged from his meeting, the contender walked out and took a company-provided limousine home. She felt annoyed "because she was kept waiting for Ted," says John Heubusch, Waitt's former chief of staff. "I remember being really shocked."

Most job applicants realize they should avoid such blatantly rude conduct during job searches. They treat support staff well, never slurp their soup and send thank-you notes promptly. But applicants often exhibit subtler forms of poor manners.

"An overblown sense of entitlement can lead to a variety of candidate misbehaviors that will kill your chances," warns Mark Jaffe, president of Minneapolis recruiters Wyatt & Jaffe, which handled the Gateway assignment. His solution? "Always act like a guest."

Your demeanor comes under scrutiny the moment you arrive at a search firm. "We are building a picture of you piece by piece," explains **Dora Vell**, managing partner of **Vell & Associates**, high-tech recruiters in Waltham, Mass.

The receptionist notices whether you read your National Enquirer rather than her employer's annual report. She may also keep tabs on your hygiene habits. **Vell** once worked for a small Boston search firm where the receptionist alerted partners if candidates using the guest bathroom failed to wash their hands. (She could hear the faucet.)

Escorted to a partner's office doorway, you march right in-- even though he's engrossed in a

confidential call. Bad idea. Wait outside until he finishes.

You chat briefly, repeatedly peeking at your BlackBerry. Another dumb move. Twice in the past six months, aspiring vice presidents have pulled out these e-mail devices during interviews with Dean Bare, a managing partner of recruiters Stanton Chase International in Atlanta. "It's time to turn that off," he sternly told them.

"I wouldn't want to recommend anyone that insensitive and lacking in social graces," Bare adds. To appear more considerate, inform the recruiter upfront that work crises require frequent e-mail checks.

He next suggests taking your car to a restaurant for lunch because yours is parked nearby. There is a hidden motive: "Assume you're being judged by how you drive," cautions Jane Howze, a managing director at The Alexander Group, a Houston search firm, who says driving habits are a good measure of character.

You also lose credibility if you are late for interviews with hiring managers--or leave too soon.

David W. Gallagher, a managing director for Boyden Global Executive Search in Atlanta, suspects many ill-mannered job seekers suffer from an excessive sense of self-importance.

"If you're going to interview for a job, interview 100 percent."

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