

Career Success 101: Dress for Success: The Optics of a Successful Interview

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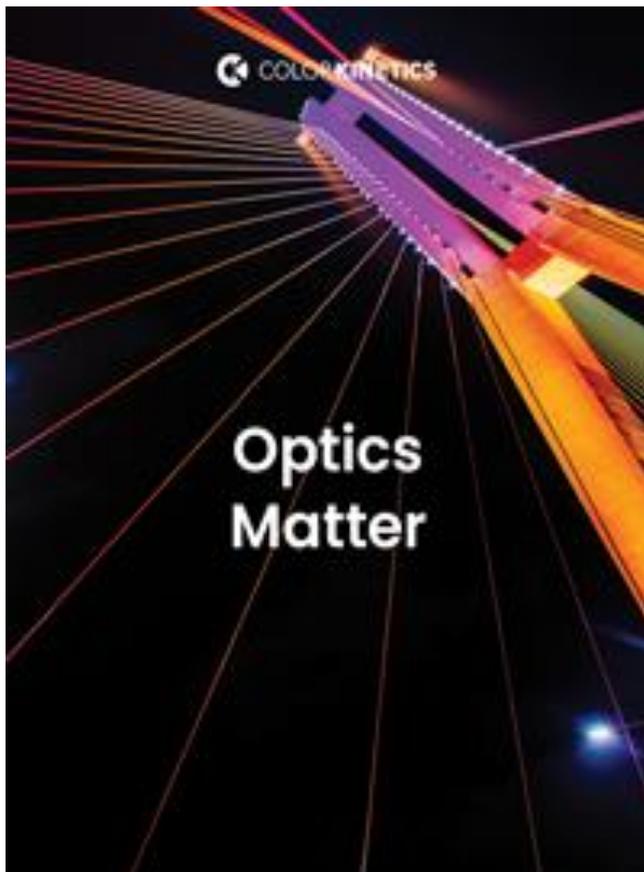


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tl; dr:

- Context.
- First impressions.
- Optics.
- Attitude (Amy Cuddy TED talk).
- Non-verbals.
- Customization.
- PRACTICE!!!

Professional recruiters and hiring managers know about the impact of the non-verbal: more than 70% of human communication is non-verbal, and humans make judgments about other humans in a split second (leading to the pitfalls of unconscious biases) (shout out to Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*).



Society of Women Engineers

Dress for Success



Let us help you become a

QUALIFIED PROFESSIONAL

Join us on April 16th @ 6 pm
Becton 205

**TO BE A PROFESSIONAL YOU HAVE
TO DRESS THE PART. JOIN US AND
LEARN HOW YOUR IMAGE CAN
AFFECT YOUR POSSIBILITY OF
OBTAINING A POSITION.**

Make sure to bring a pen, pencil or
a laptop to take notes!

Have questions? Contact us at
swe.fdu@gmail.com

PosterMyWall.com

To address the topic of dressing for success as interview mode goes into full swing at this point in the semester, the SWE (Society of Women Engineers) chapter of Fairleigh Dickinson University in Teaneck, NJ arranged a workshop on this vital aspect of career success: the importance of attentiveness to outfit and professional demeanor when interviewing, whether in person or on the phone/video. Here are a few takeaways from students:

Become familiar with the different kinds of dress

codes. There are (at least) six: Casual; Smart Casual; Business Casual; Business Formal; Business Informal; Semi-formal, Formal, Black Tie; Black Tie Optional; Tuxedo. Here's a handy starting point:

<https://www.sph.emory.edu/careers/documents/ProfessionalDressforSuccess.pdf>

Be aware of context of interview: who; where; why.

There are different dress codes for different areas of work in the company. If you are called in for multiple in-person interviews (I have had colleagues do six, or seven in-person interviews before being offered the position), ask *every* time who, specifically you will be meeting with. If you are in Construction Engineering and know you are going to meet 7 of your potential team-mates out in the field, wearing high heels or leather shoes and a suit might *not* be the best idea. **Pay attention to context.**

The phone interview.

Wear a suit. Just because the recruiter/interviewer cannot see you does not mean she cannot hear your readiness and spirit in your voice. A suit sends a signal to the brain: this is serious. See point 6 here:

<https://www.inc.com/larry-kim/17-phone-interview-tips-to-guarantee-a-follow-up.html>

Find a quiet space with high quality internet connection. Nothing sends the signal 'I don't care about this interview' than a barking dog or voices in the back (**coffee shop – no bueno**), or a cellular connection that keeps dropping. (Brandi, my very wise dog disagrees with the 'dog barking is a distraction' bit, but that's just life.)



If there is stated dress code for the interview, follow it.

Hiring managers assess a candidate's fit in many ways, spoken and implied. Read the job description carefully to see if there are insights about the company's branding. Once an interview has been scheduled, ask the recruiter or person arranging the interview if there is a specific dress code (do not ask 'what should I wear?'; ask, 'is there a specific dress code that the company prefers for interviews that I need to be aware of?'. If you **are** told to dress in a certain way, follow it. Get in and establish yourself first. Rabble-rouse later.

Body language makes your case. You are more (much, much more) than your outfit. Again, the majority of human communication is non-verbal. **Remember to practice your attitude & presentation: smile; make eye contact; sit up straight.** We can have long and interesting conversations about why and the wherefore of these (and mostly, there are reasons). Suffice it to say, the candidate (you) are in charge of the message "you want me!" You convey this message by outfit, energy, and demeanor. (Amy Cuddy TED talk.)

The interview starts the moment you wake up. This is about (a) mindset, and (b) curveballs that might come your way.

Your mental attitude will impact your physical demeanor. Wake up and practice positivity strategies and that energy will carry through your interview. **And**, interview times can change randomly. A student told me last week that her interview had been originally scheduled for 3 p.m., and the recruiter called at 12 noon to say it had been moved up to 12.30 p.m. Needless to say, the student's prep plans went awry. Fair? No. But all seasoned interviewers know that schedules can change, and cars can have flat tires.

So, start prepping for your interview the moment you wake up. (Totally random analogy but, how think of how much time you might spend planning a day trip to the beach, or for a night out to the City...)

The in-person interview starts in a 5-mile radius outside of the actual location (the world is a very small place). True story: a candidate was on the phone standing in line at a coffee shop 10 minutes walking distance from the interview site, badmouthing the company she was about to interview with. The person standing behind the candidate was the person about to interview her (the potential supervisor), also getting coffee. Needless to say, the outcome of the interview was....

Bottom line: Your professional abilities make you an asset to the company. You bring value add to the role. Be savvy about your impact as a person. Pay attention to context of the interview. Ask questions of the recruiter, your career counselor, and mentors on what to wear and the affect you present. **Manage your optics and your attitude and deliver beautiful performances every time. The outcome (getting hired) is not in your control. The input (your effort) is, 100%, every single time.**

[Other optics-based topics to follow: interview prep & practice; having relevant questions to ask the interviewers(s); sending an outstanding Thank You note; following up if you don't hear back in three weeks.]