
MEAL INTERVIEW DO'S AND DON'TS

You may find yourself attending a breakfast, lunch, or dinner interview (or an "eating meeting") during your company-site visit. This is usually a good sign that you are under strong consideration. Following are some of the basic do's and don'ts:

Do:

- Wait for your host to gesture the seating arrangement
- Place your napkin in your lap as soon as you are seated
- Remember everything your Mom taught you about table manners, then put them to good use
- Order light; you are there to interview--eating is only the sideline distraction
- Know what you are ordering; avoid exotic items
- Chew and swallow before you speak; no airborne food particles, please
- Be polite to waiters and waitresses, but not chatty
- Keep your elbows off the table (your mother was right!)
- Thank your host for the meal

Don't:

- Bring your briefcase; your writing portfolio is plenty
- Open your menu until your host has done so first
- Become lax in your presentation style; it is still an interview
- Drink alcohol, even if your host offers
- Be indecisive in ordering--make a decision and stick with it
- Begin eating until everyone is served
- Attempt to pay the bill or split the cost; it will be covered by your host
- Smoke, even if your host does
- Criticize the meal or the restaurant
- Order a doggy bag

Smoking or Non?

This question is usually asked when we enter a restaurant. And I will always turn to the interviewee and ask, "Which do you prefer?" Whether you smoke or not, always respond, "It's up to you." And if you do smoke, do not smoke, even if your interviewer smokes.

Smokers beware. Smoking is at an all-time low on the acceptance scale. You are not a protected minority--and you are definitely in the minority. Even the smell of smoke on your clothes can count against you. If you smoke, do not smoke the day of the interview. In fact, do not smoke after your last shower prior to the interview. And wear fresh clothes that are free of the tobacco smell. Tough rules? Possibly. But there are enough sensitive noses and prejudiced minds out there that you should do your very best to avoid any and all potential negatives. And smoking is one area that most in modern society look down upon.

If you do smoke, there will likely be an advantage to kicking the habit before you begin work--ideally, before you begin interviewing, given the potential negative impact it can have on the job search process. Many companies now force employees to smoke either in a designated smoking room or outside the building (which can be especially rough in northern climates). The amount of time necessary for even the average pack-a-day smoker to get their nicotine fix can amount to over 10 percent lost productivity. This fact is not easily ignored by the average manager. And it may eventually work against you, either in your job search or in your professional career.

If you have been looking for an incentive to quit, this may be your opportunity.