



FIRST IMPRESSIONS...LASTING IMPRESSIONS

In a previous **Job Ready-Job Savvy** newsletter segment our *Connect, Influence Create and Achieve* segment talked about the impact of first impressions. We shared with you some do's and don'ts of interacting with potential employers and I shared some "Strange but True" stories from my experiences in Human Resources and Recruitment. This prompted one of my colleagues to offer up one of her pet peeves... misspellings on the cover letter and resume.

This is a common concern for many hiring managers and a complaint I have heard more than a few times. It's hard to get past a bad first impression and paying attention to details, following instructions and showing that presentation is important to you, can make a lasting impression on employers.

As Daryl Samuel, HR Director for New York Lawyer's for the Public Interest noted, "If an applicant can't use spell check, show attention to detail, and provide all the materials requested when they are trying to impress me, I can only imagine what unprofessional writing I'm going to see when they are tired or rushed".

Know that your character, personality and work ethic are all being displayed and interpreted in every interaction you have with an employer. If your communications are put together haphazardly, it tells the employer that you don't take pride and care with your work. If you are touting your "attention to detail" as a skill set, but botch up information in your cover letter and email communications, you've set yourself up to fail.

To add another angle to Daryl's comment, don't become so dependent upon spell check that you fail to use the good old dictionary. Remember those...the big book of words? Well, they are still in print and often are better points of reference than Dictionary.com, Wikipedia, or the spell check feature built into your MS Word software. Don't be afraid to use an old fashion dictionary. In fact, I suggest buying a pocket dictionary and keeping it right next to your blackberry...because chances are you'll never leave home without it.

Some may say one or two small type-o's are OK, because everyone makes mistakes. But take into account that humans are subjective beings and what may seem small and innocuous to you, may be a big deal to another. Keep such things in context. If you're applying for a job as an assistant bookkeeper or payroll manager, a small error could be very costly to the employer. So, a wrong keystroke or misspelled word on your resume may signal to the employer that you are not as detail oriented as the job would require.

If you're like me and have difficulty proofing your own work, have someone much more anal retentive than yourself go through the fine details. Remember that this may require you to toughen your skin and open your mind, but it's worth the sacrifice to make that ever important first and hopefully lasting impression.

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The impressions we give to others are formed in part, by our own energy (the culmination of who and what you are at any particular moment) and in part by the beliefs and experiences of those we encounter. So, bear in mind that every moment you interact with another person, either verbally or in writing has an energy, which translates into an impression of who you are (both good and bad, true and untrue). Even as I write this post, I am conscious of what impressions the reader might take away from my words. I edit and re-think and choose words based on what I intend to say in this moment (context), and how well that reflects who I am (impression) and what I want to convey to you.

Many things we do and say are misaligned with who we are and what we want to convey to others (especially potential employers), either because we have not given it thought in context or because our beliefs and experiences tell us it's OK. Here are some examples of ways we communicate that may be deceptive or damaging to a good first impression with employers.

Email Addresses: Create a business email address. Use a name that simply identifies you, preferably your name or some variation of it. Stay clear of the email and screen names that are too personal or explicit (ex: mommyofsix@xyz.com - is too personal and loverboy@xyz.com is just inappropriate). Don't give employers a reason to pass judgment on non-work related issues.

Ring Tones: While your phone should never be on, or audible during an interview, if for some reason you forget to turn the phone off, you should make a habit of having a day-time ring tone that quickly and simply alerts you. My phone has a "meeting" setting and will beep discretely once and then go into vibrate mode. Refrain from ring tones with loud striking sounds and offensive language.

Answer Tones: These allow you to customize your phone with hold music while your caller awaits your response. But again, a word of caution about the music you choose. I once called someone who had me on hold while I listened to about 45 seconds of a song with profanity and lyrics demeaning women. Not the impression you want to give a potential employer.

Social Networking Profile: Yes, employers Tweet too! And, there is a whole world of Facebookers you don't know about. Especially during your active job, search protect your profile from curious onlookers, limit access to pictures of you in social situations and be careful about the company you keep...your friends post and activities are also a reflection of you. Keep provocative, risqué and raunchy comments out of public view. Employers may not share your special brand of humor.

True story... published in the NY Daily News in March 2009, an investigative report revealed that the NYPD is using information from Facebook, MySpace and the like, to weed out recruits because of questionable content. More and more public and private employers are using social network surfing as another form of conducting background checks.

Yes, I've heard the indignant defense that employers should have no right to view your "personal" pages, or that it's not business related and should be considered your "private" information. But there is no assumption of privacy on the Internet. After all, it is a public means of sharing information. Despite those "terms of use" and "privacy policies" required to use many social networking sites, there are always means to obtain information that you'd probably prefer not to share with everyone. What's your take on first impressions? How important do you think the little details are? What are your email addresses, ring tones and on-line profiles saying about you? Are they aligned with the impression you want to give employers?