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Qualified on paper, but clueless about etiquette

Paper qualifications may not be all to landing a job

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SHE turned up for a job interview with a GI Jane haircut. Others wore tops with plunging necklines or mini-skirts. Worse, some have overslept and shown up late for an interview.

Given the current volatile job market, possessing the right paper qualifications may not be enough to get that job.

Human resource consulting firms told The New Paper on Sunday that while many young Singaporeans possess some of the best qualifications, some are clueless about basic etiquette during interviews.

Indeed, as many as eight out of 10 commit some form of gaffe during their interviews, said job consultants.

Ms Agnes Koh, 38, an etiquette and image consultant, said she has had clients with first class honours who have no idea on how to present themselves at interviews.

One woman with a degree in business marketing showed up with a crew cut.

Not suitable

Said Ms Koh: "I told her the GI Jane hairstyle was not suitable at job interviews.

"She wasn't upset, but said it was her personal style. However, she agreed to grow her hair a bit longer and project a more feminine appearance."

Added Ms Koh: "Some of them are academically inclined and studious to the point that they overlook aspects of their dressing and lack social skills."

Miss Claris Liew, a personnel consultant in her 20s, recalled one candidate who showed up for an interview in 2007 with his eyes red and bleary.

"I asked him a question and to my surprise, he had fallen asleep right in front of me," she said.

"I called him a few of times but he did not wake up until I raised my voice."

He apologised and explained that he was moving house and it went on late into the night.

An area manager in a recruitment firm, Miss Joyce Lim, also in her 20s, remembered one woman with an “out of this world and truly unforgettable” dress sense.

Miss Lim recalled: “Her blouse had all sorts of buttons and safety pins, each in a different design. Worse, her skirt was torn. It was a very weird and mismatched interview outfit.”

Miss Yue Yin Mun, 42, a strategic accounts director with Adecco Personnel Pte Ltd, said that she has seen all sorts of job seekers in her 19 years in the recruitment industry.

Said Miss Lim: “Some show up for their screening interview at our company dressed in denim mini-shorts and tank-tops. Others turn up with big shopping bags.”

She revealed that often the assessment of the candidate may not begin in the interview room, but from the moment he or she steps into the office.

“We do check with our receptionist on the behaviour of the job candidate. Some are rude to the receptionist, but treat the interviewer differently,” she said.

“But in hiring personnel, especially in the service industry, we are looking for candidates who treat everyone with equal respect.”

Going overboard

Miss Lim noted that while more candidates these days do prepare for their interviews, some go overboard by using “model answers”.

She said: “I have come across candidates who often describe themselves as ‘friendly’, ‘enthusiastic’ and ‘lively’. These are common answers to questions on their personality.

“But when you see them in person, their personalities do not reflect these qualities.

“While it is important to be yourself, you should not appear too relaxed.”

She also recalled how a candidate kept swinging in a swivel chair throughout the interview.

“When my colleague asked her if she was nervous, she replied ‘No, the chair is very nice’, and continued to swing from side to side,” said Miss Yin.

Cover letters and resumes also matter in making an impression.

Said Mr Josh Goh, a senior manager with recruitment firm The GMP Group: “The most common mistake by most job seekers is sending the same resume to all employers regardless of the job positions.”

Not tailoring resumes to the requirements of the advertised job shows that the candidate either has a lack of understanding of what is required for the job or could not be bothered to put in the extra effort, he said.