

How to Win the Job from a Distance

How to Win the Job from a Distance

August 2016



To reduce the glare of the TV lights, he wore a blue shirt rather than a white one.

John F. Kennedy's attention to the little things made all the difference in the first televised presidential debate, on September 26, 1960, in Chicago. The way he looked that night as he was being beamed into living rooms from Seattle to Miami helped him win over voters and get elected.

Today, in an age of webcams and Skype, it isn't just presidential candidates who must know how to interview onscreen for a job. It's virtually everyone, from those seeking full-time employment to candidates for contract-staffing positions. Everyone from hotel chains to mining companies to colleges looking for full-time professors are using onscreen-conferencing technology to interview job candidates in all parts of the world. It saves time and money.

Interviewing long distance relies heavily on video-conferencing technology. Tips for preparing for a video conference include:

- **Perform a trial run.** With a friend or family member playing the role of interviewer, a trial run will not only let you test the technology and your proficiency with it, but it will also show you how you come across onscreen. Managing the biases of a given medium can be a challenge. UCLA Professor Albert Mehrabian maintains that words convey only seven percent of our feelings and attitudes while nonverbal cues communicate the rest. So, lock up the pets and ask family members to keep their distance. Among the on-screen gaffes that talent acquisition managers have seen is a cat wandering across the shoulders of one job candidate. But even small things make an impression. The screen magnifies facial expressions, hand gestures, posture and jewelry that otherwise may go unnoticed and can distort your features if your face isn't angled properly relative to the webcam.
- **Look at the camera, not the screen.** It may feel strange to stare at the camera, but the interviewer will receive this as eye contact, and making eye contact builds trust and makes you more likable. While it may be okay to glance away every now and then while collecting your thoughts, do so only briefly, being sure to resume looking at the interviewer once you begin to speak. Those nonverbal cues Mehrabian deems so important in conveying who we are include making eye contact.
- **Choose a clean and professional setting to serve as the background.** The screen magnifies clutter, too. And detail. So, even if the backdrop for your interview is tidy, if it's too busy—a bookshelf, or a table full of Hummel figurines—it may well draw the interviewer's attention away from you.

- **Dress as if you were at an in-person interview.** You may be in your living room, but that doesn't mean you should dress like it. The screen's tendency to highlight background detail will make glaringly obvious the T-shirt you're wearing.

At MFA Talent Management, we know that finding a job can be hard enough – never mind looking for a job long distance and having to navigate the ever-changing forms of technology. We can help you prepare for an interview whether it's in person or virtual. For more information, [contact us today](#).