# **The 4 Interview Red Flags Hiring Managers Say Concern Them Most**

by [Eva Chan](https://hbr.org/search?term=Eva%20Chan), [HBR](https://hbr.org/2024/10/the-4-interview-red-flags-hiring-managers-say-concern-them-most?ab=HP-hero-for-you-text-1)

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**Summary.**

*If you’re being called in for interviews but don’t get the job, it’s possible that something you’re doing is raising red flags, causing the interviewer to question your suitability for the position. A recent survey found that the most concerning red flags range from obvious mistakes like lying, to more subtle slip-ups that job seekers might not even be aware of. The most concerning behavior from job candidates — by a significant margin — is dishonesty, with 63% of hiring managers saying they view it as the biggest red flag. Hiring managers see rude language or behavior as a red flag in potential hires. Despite your technical skills being strong, hiring managers are often also judging your interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence. Criticizing or badmouthing previous employers is also a red flag with 62% of executives viewing badmouthing as a deal-breaker. Lastly, being unprepared can harm you in more ways than simply not knowing about the company’s background. For example, being inadequately prepared can cause some people to panic during interviews, leading them to overtalk and fill the silence with unnecessary details. Use these tips to support your interview preparation and have a better chance at getting an offer.*

You applied for a new role and made it through to the interview process. You worked hard to prepare and put your best foot forward — but in the end, you didn’t get hired. Throughout your job search, this pattern keeps seeming to repeat itself. Now, you’re left wondering, “Why does this keep happening to me?”

If you’re being called in for interviews, your resume likely speaks to hiring managers and reflects the skills and experience needed for the role. So, why can’t you make it past the interview stage? It’s possible that something you’re doing is raising red flags, causing the interviewer to question your suitability for the position.

A [recent survey](https://resumegenius.com/blog/job-hunting/hiring-trends-survey) of 625 US-based hiring managers from 10 different sectors — including IT, education, arts and entertainment, and manufacturing, among others — sought to understand what hiring manager believe makes a great job candidate, and what doesn’t. The survey found that the most concerning red flags range from obvious mistakes like lying, to more subtle slip-ups that job seekers might not even be aware of.

By recognizing these four red flags and knowing how to navigate around them, you can present your best self in your next interview.

## Red Flag #1: Dishonesty

The most concerning behavior from job candidates — by a significant margin — is dishonesty. 63% of hiring managers said they view it as the biggest red flag.

Job seeker dishonesty manifests in different ways. Sometimes it’s obvious, like lying about your job title — for example, saying you were a team manager when you simply weren’t. Other times it’s more subtle, like an interviewee presenting an image of themselves that comes off as inauthentic, which can be similarly destructive.

Many people today have online and offline personas. While we have control over how we come across online, it’s important not to detach these personas too far from each other, so you don’t accidentally give off the impression that you’re lying about yourself to a hiring manager. [Social media screenings](https://www.businessnewsdaily.com/2377-social-media-hiring.html) are increasingly gaining popularity, and if your profiles are public, it’s not uncommon for recruiters to score them. A [2023 Harris Poll](https://www.prweb.com/releases/social-media-integral-to-recruiting-as-most-businesses-use-it-to-source-research-and-screen-candidates-828377504.html) found that 70% of American companies will review candidates’ social media profiles, and a majority of hiring managers report they currently use it to source, research, and screen applicants. Consequently, any inconsistencies between job applications, interview responses, and what’s shared online could reflect poorly on you. Especially with the rise of AI content, employers are more cautious than ever about whether you’re accurately representing your qualifications during the job application process.

[Geoffrey Scott](https://resumegenius.com/author/geoff-scott), a senior hiring manager at Resume Genius, for example, shared an experience where a candidate initially seemed impressive based on their application materials. When asked to explain certain figures on their resume, however, the candidate couldn’t provide convincing answers or elaborate on their results and accomplishments. “The interviewee wasn’t outright lying,” Scott noted, “But the inconsistencies made it hard to trust their words.”

### How to avoid this red flag:

If there’s a big gap between what’s presented on your resume or LinkedIn profile, and what interviewers can gather about you during an interview, you may come across as untrustworthy, which can seriously hurt your chances of landing a job. For example, inflating numbers, like saying you brought in more revenue than you did or managed a bigger team, can backfire when interviewers dig into the details.

With social media and LinkedIn becoming central to job hunting, make sure your resume and online profiles tell the same story. Dates, job titles, and accomplishments should match across your resume, LinkedIn, and any other professional platforms. Also, decide which parts of your digital life should be public and which should be private. A professional networking platform like LinkedIn can stay public-facing as it’s a strategic place to showcase your qualifications and experience, while personal accounts on platforms like Facebook, TikTok, or Instagram might be better shared with select people.

Next, be honest and realistic about your skills. Going back even before the interview, carefully review your resume to ensure you can confidently speak to each skill and accomplishment listed. It’s tempting to include every skill you think might catch a recruiter’s eye, but this approach can create problems if you can’t back it up when asked about it in the interview. Always be sure you have specific examples or stories to demonstrate how you’ve used each skill. For example, if you list a programming language you’ve only dabbled in but claim fluency, you could quickly get caught if technical questions or a coding assessment reveal the truth.

Before the interview, ask yourself: “Which specific stories or examples demonstrate this skill in action?” If not, reconsider including it on your resume. This preparation will ensure you’re confident and prepared to speak to every point during the interview.

## Red Flag #2: Rude Language or Behavior

53% of hiring managers see rude language or behavior as a red flag in potential hires. And who can blame them? With limited information to work with, hiring managers need to pay close attention to your behavior the second your interview begins. These real-time moments — from the first hello to the final goodbye — provide clues about your professionalism as a candidate.

In addition, a [study by Leadership IQ](https://www.leadershipiq.com/blogs/leadershipiq/35354241-why-new-hires-fail-emotional-intelligence-vs-skills) found that 46% of new hires fail within 18 months, and 89% of those failures are due to poor attitudes or interpersonal skills rather than technical competence. This means, despite your technical skills being strong, hiring managers are often also judging your interpersonal skills and [emotional intelligence](https://professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/emotional-intelligence-is-no-soft-skill/). Your behavior helps them assess how well you’ll adapt to a team and work environment.

Being openly aggressive, such as raising your voice to make your point or arguing with the interviewer, is an obvious red flag to a hiring manager. But even small mistakes can hurt your chances and signal to hiring managers that you might be difficult to work with. For instance, crossing your arms and legs or not leaning into the conversation can give the impression that [you’re disconnected or not genuinely interested](https://www.helpguide.org/relationships/communication/nonverbal-communication) in building rapport with the interviewer, and in turn, the team.

Another commonly seen sign of disrespect during an interview is showing up late. From a hiring manager’s perspective, tardiness indicates that you might not be committed to the job opportunity or have problems managing your time. Even if your lateness is because of unforeseen circumstances — like an accident on the highway or an emergency — failing to communicate the circumstances to your interviewer beforehand may lead them to believe you’re unreliable or not serious about the opportunity.

### How to avoid this red flag:

Always check traffic schedules beforehand and aim to arrive at least 15 minutes early. If the circumstances are out of your control, and you know you’re going to be late ahead of time, let the interviewer know as soon as possible. Shooting them an email or phone call that includes a sincere apology and an estimate of what time you expect to arrive, such as, “I’m so sorry, I’m caught in traffic and expect to arrive in 10 minutes,” shows respect for the interviewer’s time and helps soften the negative impression of being late.

When faced with tricky questions, respond calmly and respectfully. If you’re asked about a skill you don’t have, for instance, don’t respond with aggression. Instead of saying, “That’s not something I saw in the job description!” try, “I haven’t had much experience in [skill] at this stage of my career, but I’m a fast learner and I’d be very interested in picking it up.” This shows a willingness to learn and reflects your adaptability, both of which leave a positive impression.

Also, during the interview, focus on keeping your body language positive by smiling, sitting up straight, and making regular, natural eye contact. However, body language can vary significantly based on individual communication styles, especially for [neurodivergent candidates](https://academic.oup.com/bmb/article/135/1/108/5913187). If maintaining eye contact or smiling constantly feels challenging for you due to conditions like autism, ADHD, or social anxiety, it’s completely your choice whether to [address this upfront](https://careerhub.csp.edu/resources/interview-tips-for-neurodivergent-job-seekers/). You can make this decision easier by researching whether the company is on the [Disability Equality Index report](https://disabilityin-bulk.s3.amazonaws.com/2023-DEI-Top-Scoring-Companies.July_11%2BTH%2BUpdated%2B%281%29.docx) or if they have resources or initiatives for neurodivergent job seekers.

If you decide to disclose your neurodivergence, it may be easier to ask for accommodations before the interview. For instance, if you have trouble processing spoken questions, you might ask for them to be written down instead. If the interviewer knows ahead of time, they can type out the questions during a video call or provide written questions before the meeting.

Mentioning your neurodivergence can also help the interviewer understand your situation better and possibly be more empathetic. While interviews can be high-pressure, being open about your needs may help you feel more comfortable and avoid the stress of having to “mask” your challenges.

Also, you can simply focus on your strengths without needing to highlight the behavior specifically. You might say, “I’m really passionate about this opportunity and eager to contribute. I tend to concentrate fully on my conversation, so if I seem focused, it’s because I’m fully locked in.” This approach subtly explains your communication style in a way that keeps the focus on your enthusiasm and qualifications, rather than on body language. At the same time, if there are other ways you feel comfortable expressing engagement — like nodding, speaking clearly and confidently, or using thoughtful responses — lean into those strengths during the interview.

## Red Flag #3: Criticizing Past Employers or Coworkers

Most people have disagreed with coworkers or worked jobs they didn’t enjoy at some point in their lives. However, being critical of ex-colleagues and past work experiences during an interview can hurt your chances of getting a job offer, with 31% of hiring managers viewing such critiques as red flags in candidates. A [survey by The Creative Group](https://www.prnewswire.com/news-releases/research-reveals-five-job-interview-deal-breakers-300067847.html) also revealed that 62% of executives view badmouthing a former employer as a deal-breaker.

Hiring managers want to see that you can handle challenges professionally and move forward with a positive attitude. If you start criticizing a previous job or colleague, you may come across as difficult to work with or unwilling to adapt to new environments. Examples of negative criticisms include:

“My last boss wasn’t very open to feedback.”

“I often had to pick up extra tasks because my team wasn’t as organized as I would’ve liked.”

*“*The company I worked for didn’t value their employees.”

While it’s understandable that you want to express your frustrations or bond with a new hiring manager over difficult past experiences, some hiring managers maybe worry you’ll bring that same negative energy to their team. This is true even if you have legitimate gripes about your past employer. In addition, the hiring manager is only getting half the story, and it could leave them skeptical about what truly happened in your previous work environment — particularly because you haven’t had a chance to build trust with them yet.

### How to avoid this red flag:

To ensure you’re not raising red flags for employers, focus on the positive aspects of your previous jobs — even if there weren’t many. Try to discuss what you accomplished, or how you overcame a challenge. If asked about a difficult experience or a failure, it’s okay to talk about it, but you should steer the conversation toward what you learned and how you’d approach a similar situation differently next time.

If you have faced challenges that stemmed from a lack of clarity or communication challenges from a manager, focus on what *you* did to improve the situation, such as explaining how you learned not to hesitate in asking questions when necessary. You could mention how being proactive allowed you to clarify expectations and ensure tasks were completed more efficiently.

When discussing teamwork challenges, focus on what you did to maintain collaboration. Try saying: “In a previous role, I worked closely with a coworker who had a different communication style. To improve our workflow, I made an effort to understand their approach and find ways to complement it. I also introduced a shared task-tracking system, so we could both stay on top of our responsibilities and minimize any confusion. Overall it improved our communication and also helped us complete our projects on time and meet the team’s overall objectives.”

By focusing on how you took action, you’ll show the interviewer that you’re resourceful and capable of solving communication gaps without being negative or blaming others.

## Red Flag #4: Lack of Preparation

Hiring managers invest significant time vetting candidates and setting up interviews, and they expect you to make a similar effort to show you’re truly invested in the role. Preparation is key, and 20% of hiring managers consider a lack of it to be a red flag.

Being unprepared can harm you in more ways than simply not knowing about the company’s background. For example, being inadequately prepared can cause some people to panic during interviews, leading them to overtalk and fill the silence with unnecessary details. Scott said, “We’ve had candidates who just rambled on — it was obvious they had no idea how to answer the question they were being asked.”

Besides being nervous, when candidates apply to too many positions without clear intent, it can lead to [looking unprepared and having a poor understanding of the specific role](https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/warning-signs-recruiters-reveal-biggest-turnoffs). Further, Catherine Pylant, a senior corporate recruiter at Walmart, mentions [it becomes difficult for candidates to keep track of their applications,](https://www.shrm.org/topics-tools/news/talent-acquisition/warning-signs-recruiters-reveal-biggest-turnoffs) and they often forget important details about the company or position. Pylant also mentions that she often encounters candidates asking her to remind them of the position they applied for, simply because they’ve applied to so many roles.

Being well-prepared can help you stay on track and communicate more effectively, which can make a big difference in how you’re perceived. “Candidates need to realize that every interaction is a test of professionalism,” said [Jena Dunay](https://www.linkedin.com/in/jenadunay/), founder at Recruit the Employer. She explained that if a candidate doesn’t enter an interview prepared — by understanding the company, the role, and the industry, and having a few examples prepared to showcase their skills — it sends a signal to hiring managers that they probably won’t come prepared for the job itself. For instance, if the company values innovation, be ready to discuss a time when you introduced a new process or tool that increased efficiency. If collaboration is key, share an example of how you worked across departments to achieve a company-wide goal.

**How to avoid this red flag:**

Before the interview, take a moment to outline the main points you want to highlight about your experience and professional skill set. Consider which of your qualifications align best with the role and be ready to discuss examples of how you demonstrated them in previous jobs. You should also be prepared to discuss how you overcame a challenging or stressful situation at work, as this is a [common question](https://hbr.org/2021/11/10-common-job-interview-questions-and-how-to-answer-them) during most interviews. Practicing your responses can help you stay focused and keep your answers on point.

Dunay also noted that job seekers should “stop thinking like historians and start thinking like marketers.” She said that while doing basic research on the company, it’s better to go a step further by considering why the company is hiring for this role, what gap or need the position is filling, and how their skills and experience fill those gaps. To understand these aspects of a company, read up on its mission, values, and recent projects so you can tailor your responses and ask more thoughtful questions after your interview. For example, “How do your team’s goals this year align with the company’s mission of doing X?”

Finally, you should do a little research during the interview itself to show you’re thinking seriously about what it would mean to work at the company. For example, aim to understand what it takes to excel in the role. A question like, “What are some qualities that define a top performer at your company?” signals your interest in working well with the existing team and understanding how success is measured.

If you want to build a more personal connection during the interview, you can also ask, “What do you personally enjoy about working here?” This question invites the interviewer to share their own experiences and feelings, creating a natural moment of rapport. It helps them see that you’re not just interested in the role, but also genuinely curious about what makes the company a great place to work on a personal level.

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Don’t let your interview preparation go to waste by trying to present a version of yourself that doesn’t truly reflect you. By being honest, preparing well, watching your behavior, and sharing concrete examples of your experiences and challenges, you can give hiring managers a clearer picture of your dedication and passion for the role.

[***Eva Chan***](https://hbr.org/search?term=Eva%20Chan&amp;search_type=search-all)*is a Lead Career Expert and Senior Digital PR Writer who currently oversees PR content and communications initiatives at*[*Resume Genius*](https://resumegenius.com/)*. Passionate about researching and discussing the latest trends in the career space, nels this enthusiasm into supporting professionals of all experience levels. Eva’s insights and career advice have been recognized by global platforms, including CNBC, Fortune, The Times, The Globe and Mail, Forbes, Business Insider, and Entrepreneur.*

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