



National Association of Colleges and Employers

THE MASKED INTERVIEWER: PROPER MASK ETIQUETTE WHEN MEETING AN EMPLOYER

by Ihor S. Andruch

Heroes wear masks. Batman, Batgirl, Iron Man, Captain America, and many others. Growing up as kids, we would spend hours contemplating which mask we wanted to buy or make for Halloween. 2020 has offered us a different perspective on mask wearing, and if 2020 has taught us about heroism and masking up, the first thing that comes to mind are the frontline workers and how many lives they have saved—for which we are forever grateful.

The good news is that we no longer have to wait until Halloween to mask up like these superhero frontline workers. We can display confidence and heroism while wearing masks to job interviews. Over the last year, we have seen an array of masks and face coverings, but what should we wear to the job interview and how do we wear it properly (something we may not have thought of a year ago)?

Graduates and students are coming in for interviews for internships for jobs not wearing the right masks; and it has been a real turn off for many employers I have spoken to since the world paused in March.

The following article will present a listing of recommendations for proper mask etiquette based upon feedback I have received from employers. *Please note that I am not a medical professional and this article is for career education purposes only.*

CORRECT MASK WEARING – SAFETY FIRST

Let us start with the basics. A properly worn mask must be worn over the nose and over the chin. Anything below the nose and above the chin puts you and the interviewer at risk. It is important to keep in mind that you are wearing a mask for your protection and for the employers' protection. If you are both wearing masks, the chance of spreading infection decreases significantly versus only one person wearing a mask.

ARTICULATION

Before you select a mask to wear for an interview, be sure you can be heard clearly and that you can articulate through the mask without sounding muffled. You can practice at home in front of a mirror, record yourself, or practice by speaking to someone directly while wearing it, to make sure you are able to get your message across. It is important to remember that half of your face is covered and consider the following verbal and non-verbal cues:

1. Verbal - Tone of voice (should be loud, but do not scream).
2. Verbal – It is important to project and articulate.
3. Non-verbal – Keep in mind that facial expressions are harder to read (smiles, etc.).
4. Non-verbal - Consider the story your eyes are telling.
5. Non-Verbal - Use hand gestures when you can.
6. Non-Verbal – Be mindful of messages conveyed by overall body language.

OPTIONS ARE LIMITLESS

COVID-19 in some respects has helped the fashion industry turn lemons into lemonade with regard to the mask options. It is important that the mask you choose contains at least two layers of material or cloth. Masks give a job seeker the options to coordinate with what they are wearing. One may consider wearing a solid cloth or a mask with a pattern. We have also seen various designers or “out of the box thinking” individuals create masks that stand out and include designer logos. Always keep in mind to consider safety first, but a unique pattern can be a conversation starter and can help you stand out.

Masks worn to interviews can also be the disposable (surgical type) or can be cloth. Safety should always be the first priority when considering what mask to wear to an interview. When considering the disposable mask, please refrain from wearing or purchasing the N95 grade masks, as those should be reserved for frontline healthcare workers. According to The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC): “The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) does not recommend that the general public wear N95 respirators to protect themselves from respiratory diseases, including coronavirus (COVID-19). Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance. <https://www.fda.gov/medical-devices/personal-protective-equipment-infection-control/n95-respirators-surgical-masks-and-face-masks#s1>

INCORRECT TYPE OF MASK

With positive creativity comes a negative effect in terms of incorrect masks. There are incorrect types of masks, which include wearing a bandana, in which the cloth does not protect you against the spread of virus. Other types of masks include those with valves, as these masks may let in air, which is unfiltered. In addition, avoid wearing a face shield (buff), which essentially is a thin and breathable cloth that wraps completely around your neck and can be pulled up over your chin and nose. These shields do not offer the proper protection and you may get sick.

Refraining from wearing a dirty looking mask. Note that cloth masks should be crisp and fresh and washed regularly. In addition, disposable masks should be disposed of after regular use and are not intended to be worn for extended periods of time. Disposable masks need to be disposed of after use.

Consider steering away from masks that reflect your political or social affiliation. It is challenging enough to get to the interview phase and an interview with an employer is not the time or place to make a political or social statement via your mask. Sarcastic or masks that can be deemed offensive should also not be worn to an interview. Keep it professional at all times.

RELIGIOUS AFFILIATIONS

Keeping religious affiliation in mind, if you wear a Niquab, Hijab, Burka, or another face covering, it is imperative to wear at least two layers and cover the nose and mouth.

WHERE IS THAT SMELL AND NOISE COMING FROM?

Stay away from smoking prior to the interview and do not chew gum or jostle candy under your mask.

CONCLUSION

Always keep your and the interviewer’s health and safety in mind when it comes to masking up for an interview. Be courteous in these unprecedented times. There are always many things to consider even in terms of shaking the interviewer’s hand. If you are uncomfortable in doing so, it is acceptable to do a small wave or place your right hand over your heart to nod your head to share a warm, heartfelt hello.

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