

## THE 5 WORDS NEVER TO SAY...

### ...During a Job Interview

Paul Powers, EdD

Job hunters greatly outnumber openings these days, so even a seemingly minor slip of the tongue can cut short your employment opportunities. The five words that can undermine your job chances...

**1 Crisis** Job applicants often trumpet their ability to respond calmly and intelligently to workplace challenges. Trouble is, when they use the word "crisis" to describe a past professional challenge, they send exactly the opposite message. Epidemics and hostage standoffs are crises—an employer's budget crunch or public relations headache is not. Calling an ordinary workplace situation a crisis will make you seem like an alarmist—the sort of employee who will blow problems out of proportion and infect those around you with panic. You'll seem more poised and reliable if you instead use words such as "challenge" or "problem" to describe these situations.

**2 People person** Interviewers often cringe inside when applicants describe themselves as "people-oriented" or "a people person." This is like saying that your worst flaw is that you work too hard—it's such a cliché that it will make you seem uninteresting or evasive to an experienced interviewer. Worse, "I'm a people person" is so general and unverifiable that it tends to be offered up by applicants who have no real skills or accomplishments to discuss. Saying something similar could cause the interviewer to subconsciously associate you with this group even if you have an impressive résumé.

If interpersonal skills are an important part of what you have to offer, find a more specific, less clichéd way to convey this. You could identify your talent as "conflict mediation," "coordinating teams" or "soothing upset customers." Cite specific examples of the times that you have used this skill successfully.

**3 Can't** Using negative words and phrases such as "can't," "there's no way" or "impossible" during an

interview could make you seem like a negative person. Few qualities turn off potential employers faster than negativity. If you must tell an interviewer that what he/she wants is impossible or that you need a larger salary or budget than he is proposing, find a way to phrase this in a positive way.

**Example:** The interviewer says that the company is looking for someone to expand its Web site, but your experience tells you that the budget or time frame being discussed is insufficient. Rather than say, "It can't be done," or "That's not going to work," you might say, "Let's discuss some of the options we would have for getting that done." Mention outsourcing certain functions...or focusing initially on only the most important elements of the project.

**4 Irregardless** It isn't really a word at all. The correct word is *regardless*. If the interviewer is a stickler for grammar, using this nonword might create the impression that you are ignorant. Another frequently misused word that could hurt your chances is "literally," which often is used by people who mean figuratively.

**Example:** "I was literally putting out fires all year." No, you weren't—unless you were a firefighter.

**5 Fired** Interviewers often ask applicants why they left their previous jobs. It's fine to say your position was eliminated in a workforce reduction or that you were laid off, but never say that you were "fired." Though you might consider "fired" and "laid off" synonymous, the former has a much more negative connotation—that you messed up—in most people's minds.

**Bottom Line/Personal** interviewed Paul Powers, EdD, a management psychologist based in Wellesley, Massachusetts, who has more than 25 years of experience in career counseling. He is former chairman of the Massachusetts Board of Psychologists and was the original "answer man" for job seekers on the job search site Monster.com. He is author of *Winning Job Interviews* (Career). [www.drpaulpowers.com](http://www.drpaulpowers.com)



▶ open-mouth kissing.

**Age.** About 95% of oral cancers are in people over 40 years old. The average age of diagnosis is 60.

**Male.** Men are twice as likely to develop oral cancer. However, women now are smoking and drinking more than they used to—the rate of male-to-female oral cancer patients was six to one in 1950, and it is now two to one.

**Family history.** If a parent or sibling developed oral cancer, you are more likely to develop it, too.

#### DENTAL AND SELF-EXAMS

Oral cancer starts as precancer—an area of abnormal cell maturation called *dysplasia*. It appears as a small white or red plaque or patch that is slightly elevated.

A thorough exam for oral cancer by a dentist or hygienist checks for signs of precancer on all the soft tissues inside the mouth—the roof...the floor...inside the lips...inside the cheeks...on the top, sides and bottom of the tongue...and at the back of the mouth, using a tongue depressor.

You should receive the exam at least twice a year, at your regular cleaning.

If you don't think the dentist or hygienist conducted the exam—ask. You might say, "You've probably already done it and I didn't realize it, but did you look today to make sure that I don't have anything that looks like a precancer in my mouth?"

**Smart idea:** If you have one or more of the risk factors for oral cancer, conduct a self-exam once a month. Using a hand mirror and flashlight, examine the inside of your mouth. If you see a slightly raised red or white patch, check for it again in two weeks. If it still is present, see your dentist immediately.

#### TREATMENT

If there is an area inside your mouth that the dentist cannot identify as normal and that looks like precancer, a *biopsy* (tissue sample) should be taken by your dentist from the area and examined under a microscope.