



# What not to do at your interview

Some tips for teens facing a weak job market

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An improving but still weak job market could present a challenge for teenagers looking for summer employment this year.

"The outlook compared with last year is better, but it's still competitive," said Ann Wagner, a labor market analyst with Iowa Workforce Development.

That may mean job-hungry teens will have to work a little harder at finding a job, experts said. That could include filling out more applications, removing excess jewelry, dressing more conservatively, and sprucing up their interpersonal skills.

"If you think you want a job at a hospital, you shouldn't show up with tongue rings and nose rings," said Renee Ward, who operates an Internet site that helps teenagers locate jobs. "Take them out when you go for an interview. You can always put them back in later."

From a teen's point of view, piercings, tattoos or spiked orange hair might be their way of making a personal statement. But "if they turn off one customer because of that, an employer won't want them," Ward said.

Teens also must put effort into filling out a job application with no spelling errors, showing up on time and presenting an employer with a list of previous jobs or volunteer experience, Ward said.

"You can't expect someone to hand you a job," she said. "You have to earn it by demonstrating what you've done in the past."

Adventureland, a seasonal amusement park in Altoona, has hired about 850 workers to staff the park this summer, said Steve Anderson, personnel director. Of that, about 25 percent to 30 percent are teenagers, he said.

## Why teens want jobs

- 30 percent need the money
- 23 percent want to get experience
- 22 percent want money for college
- 14 percent want to buy fun stuff
- 11 percent just want to keep busy

## Types of jobs teens want

- 44 percent want to go into retail
- 23 percent want to go into food service
- 17 percent want to work in offices
- 10 percent want to work outdoors
- 5 percent want to go into health services

Source : The Forward Group

## On the Web

Designed for those 14 years and older who are looking for a full-time, part-time, summer or vocational jobs, [www.teens4hire.org](http://www.teens4hire.org) offers more help. Those who register can create a personal profile, then can search for jobs, apply online for jobs of their choice, be considered for openings, and mine the site for tips on getting the job.

When hiring workers, Anderson said he looks for candidates who are "showered, with clean, conservative clothes. We don't like to see pants hanging (low) and we don't want to see bellies."

The amusement park has adopted the Walt Disney Co. dress code, which does not allow visible tattoos or body piercings (women can wear one earring per ear), and collar-length hair and neatly trimmed facial hair on men.

"I am not looking for applicants to be dressed in a suit and tie, but in something appropriate," Anderson said.

Even more important is an applicant's personality, he said.

"I want to see how they are going to meet and greet the public," he said. Successful candidates will stand, extend their hand and introduce themselves before the interview begins, he said.

"I want them not to be shy. I can make a decision on a candidate in the first 30 seconds before we ever get into my office," he said.

Toni Baldwin, a 16-year-old Van Meter sophomore, is looking for a job and knows the importance of presenting a good image to prospective employers. She would like a part-time job at a mall clothing shop in Des Moines. She has never had a job and expects to work for minimum wage. The thought of having to interview makes her nervous.

"I'll act like myself and try to be outgoing to show I can talk with people," Baldwin said. "I also want to show them that I am someone they can trust."

Cody Pasa, manager of The Buckle at Merle Hay Mall, a clothing store aimed at 16- to 25-year-olds, said he is more interested in the way applicants can communicate rather than the way they are dressed.

"You can always teach fashion, but you can't always teach good communication skills," he said. "A lot of places don't like (employees) with nose piercings and other things. We allow it because it's fashionable and that's what we're about."

Appropriate behavior during an interview is imperative, said Fannie Cunningham, a jobs counselor at East High School.

"Some kids think it's OK to take a friend with them to an interview or take a parent with them because they're afraid to talk to an adult," Cunningham said. "And some think it's OK to hand in an application with scratched-out words."

Aside from acting appropriately, Cunningham encourages students to be assertive when looking for a job.

"I tell them not to just ask for an application but to ask for the manager, introduce themselves and tell a little bit about themselves," she said. "I tell them to sell themselves."

Pizza Hut stores in Des Moines employ a lot of young people, generally in the 17- to 23-year-old range, said Meg Rottinghaus. Applicants are given a questionnaire to fill out to determine if they are a good fit for the company.

"I also look at work history, if they have good eye contact, if they are clean cut and excited about working for us," she said. "The worst thing is when (an applicant) is not really into the interview."

Teens are not only vying with each other for jobs, but increasingly are competing with older applicants for jobs, said Ward, who maintains the teen job Web site. Older workers are more flexible in their schedules, are reliable, have a strong work ethic, and have work experience, she said.

In a market where jobs are not plentiful, teenagers should consider becoming entrepreneurs, Ward said, rather than wait for a job.

"Take the initiative and create a job," she said. Teens can cut lawns, tutor senior citizens on how to use the Internet and set up e-mail, or work with children.

Volunteering can also help build experience to put on future job applications, she said.

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