

To clinch the interview, it will pay to impress the boss's PA

When David Flintham, was Editor of the *Northern Echo*, he always asked his secretary what she thought of job candidates. Her opinion was of great value to him, he says. "If people coming for interviews for jobs were rude, arrogant or patronising with her, I would take that into account. If they treated her badly, how would they deal with readers and the people they would have to work with to do their job?"

"The way applicants treated my secretary while waiting for their interview was an indication of how they would get on with others. It would often give me a glimpse of their 'people skills' to use the jargon - that might not be revealed at the interview. Having said that, it was clear when an applicant was making an effort to smooth-talk my secretary. That did not work either. I was looking for staff who were able to treat everyone with respect."

The value that bosses place on their secretary's opinion has often gone unrecognised by jobseekers. The nerve-racking wait in the outer office to see the boss can be a time when candidates slump and get anxious or stressed. They either ignore the secretary or come out with remarks that they would never dream of making to the person in the interviewer's chair.

"Job hunters should consider that the interview begins the minute they step into the building. Personal secretaries and PAs carry a lot of power and influence."

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days the employer's PA or secretary can be important, says **Diana Cambridge**

makes thoughtless comments to them will not come over as poised or professional," says Susie Coles-Mainwaring, a recruitment consultant.

Helen Dos Santos, PA to the executive director of Staffordshire's Learning and Skills Council, says: "If a candidate for a job can be rude to you, they could be rude to anyone. My boss would take this seriously. A lot of the time, like most PAs, I am acting on behalf of the boss, so it is important that new people can get on with me."

She is often asked by bosses for a gut feeling about a candidate. "Everything is team-minded today and new people have to fit in. I can read some signs in an interviewee, but am always aware that they will be nervous. I try to put them at their ease with a brief chat."

Marjory Mair, of the Industrial Society, has often asked her PA for informal impressions. "I tend to ask anyone the candidate has come into contact with," she says. "It is true that some people tell only what they want to hear."

have to impress is the boss and they can be rude to the PA without realising that her opinion is valued by the boss."

She also feels that it is not a good idea for women candidates to check make-up in a hand mirror in front of the secretary. "I would prefer that they freshen up in the ladies," she says.

Amanda Bedford, of the Institute of Qualified Secretaries, admits: "It can be upsetting if a candidate comes in for an interview and is dismissive or rude to you." Bad manners always get back to the boss, placing a black mark against the candidate, she says.

Mannerisms are quickly noticed by secretaries. "Even in a 15-minute wait, someone who constantly coughs, sniffs or bites their nails sets up a question mark," says Nicola Klein, PA in a marketing firm in Oxford.

"It is the sort of thing I might mention to my boss, because he always asks what I think. These might make someone less easy to work with. But it is important to look at every aspect of a job hunter's presentation - they may have skills which offset weaker points. I find my boss welcomes my views. A misjudged appointment costs him time, money and energy."

"It is vital that newcomers are up and running almost from day one, so they need to be able to get on with the rest of the team quickly."

Karen Walter, PA to the Editor of *New Musical Express*, is often invited to give her informal comments about people coming in for job interviews. "I have worked here for 18 years, under six editors, and I have learned a lot from them."

To land a job these