Hiring in the United Kingdom - The Irritation Game, Part 2 - Let’s Get Physical

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I am still haunted, as I expect is he, by a job interview here a number of years ago with a chap who knew so little about the relevant law that for me to ask him any further questions on it would have crossed the thin line between interviewing and vivisection.

He was not a hard one to reject, and of course I have my notes to justify that decision on objective grounds. But what about those cases where the candidate’s answers are all superficially OK, but he just irritates the hell out of you in some other manner?

We previously noted the LinkedIn list of the most teeth-grinding phrases commonly used in CVs and job applications and suggested that they alone could be good grounds to reject the candidate. But let us assume for now that they have survived
that sift and have been invited in to meet you. A study some years ago apparently showed that nearly 10% of all job interviews are decided at the point where you shake hands with the candidate in Reception. Now help is at hand for employers seeking to justify the rejection of candidates on the grounds of such physical rather than intellectual irritations. Courtesy of City AM [www.cityam.com](http://www.cityam.com) and job site Careerbuilder [www.careerbuilder.co.uk](http://www.careerbuilder.co.uk), we bring you the ten things people do which most effectively spoil their chances at interview even before they actually say anything:

- Failure to make eye contact.
- Not smiling.
- Playing with something on the table.
- Fidgeting.
- Crossing their arms over their chest.
- Bad posture.
- Weak handshake.
- Constantly playing with their hair or touching their face.
- Too firm a handshake.
- Too many hand gestures – some candidates flail about like Kermit to emphasise their points such that you think less about what they say and more about moving that coffee cup before it all ends terribly badly.

From which list we can conclude that these are such common turn-offs for employers that they could form legitimate grounds for rejecting a candidate who is on paper fully suitable, provided that the contemporaneous records note it as an issue at the time. Otherwise there is an obvious risk that the Employment Tribunal decides that reliance on such justifications is retrospective and being used as a blind for something else. Be careful also because some people have cultural or religious objections to direct eye contact or shaking hands (especially between genders) and it is not beyond possible that fidgeting or poor posture could be the product of a disability.

Subject to that, however, the most joyous thing about the Careerbuilder survey is the advice on tackling these issues which is given by its HR team to would-be interviewees – “rehearse”. Think of that poor candidate in his mirror, expression bouncing uncontrollably between Mona Lisa and Jack Nicholson in Batman while he tries desperately to fashion a stable compromise position without touching his own face. I fear that any candidate whose smile is from memory rather than nature will be concentrating too much on that and may not come across well. A good interviewer will seek to relax the applicant to the point where potentially stress-induced tics of this sort either fade away or reveal themselves as permanent annoyances. In the latter case, the careerbuilder survey seems to suggest that you would be in good company if you chose as a result to hire someone else, but do
remember those notes!

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