

Show Up on Time

By [Harrison Barnes](#)

Several years ago a friend called me and encouraged me to interview at his law firm. He told me people at the firm were involved in various movie deals and hobnobbing with movie stars. He told me all of the lawyers were driving around in Porsche convertibles and the firm represented Los Angeles as I had come to see it in movies and television shows. He told me the firm was so exciting that none of the attorneys actually practiced law, and instead spent their time "doing deals" and socializing with movie stars.

For several months I kept hearing stories about this magical [law firm](#). I discussed it with my wife on several occasions and, after a lot of soul searching, I decided to send my friend a resume. He called me back a few hours later and told me the firm was excited to see me.

I scheduled my interview with this [law firm](#) on a Monday. On Sunday night I drove from my house in Hollywood to the law firm in West Los Angeles to make sure I gave myself enough time to get to the interview. It took me about 30 minutes.

On Monday I decided to give myself 45 minutes. What I had not accounted for was the 405 Freeway interchange. Back then, this was known as the most crowded interchange in America. I sat on this interchange for at least 35 minutes doing absolutely nothing. I became increasingly nervous as the time for my interview came and went. I am sure I was sweating a lot. I may have bitten a nail or two. I started going over all sorts of horror stories in my mind about what would happen when I finally got to the interview.

I ended up arriving to the interview almost 30 minutes late. I was so late by the time I arrived the firm seemed to be debating whether they even wanted to interview me. It was one of the most uncomfortable experiences I have ever had.

Of course, I mentioned the traffic to the person who came out to explain to me that they were "changing around everyone's schedules" and would be right with me "once they figured out how to do this". I would like to tell you something: no one accepts the traffic excuse. Traffic is the oldest excuse in the book. Traffic is something you simply cannot use. When you are going to an interview remember everyone else ended up making it to the office despite the traffic. These people did not have problems with traffic and were all there waiting to speak with you. Where were you?

When the interview got underway, it went very badly. First of all, the firm was not this mecca of lawyers living a celebrity lifestyle. Instead, people were doing very hard work that was 99 percent unrelated to entertainment law. The people who interviewed me seemed like they belonged locked in a basement lab rather than in a [law firm](#). They were quite introverted. To this day I cannot imagine how they were supposed to have been people who represented movie stars.

Each of the people I spoke with started off the interview by wanting to discuss why I was late. This simply did not get things off to a good start. It put me on the defensive the whole time. I could tell all the people I spoke with seemed at least a little upset by my tardiness.

There is a dynamic that forms in the workplace when you are late for an interview – or anything for that matter. First of all, people are expecting you to be there at a certain time. If they are working, they need to make sure they stop what they are doing at a certain time and block out time to interview you. They wait for you at the appointed time to interview you, ready to speak, and anticipate you walking in the door. They may go to the bathroom before speaking with you so they do not need to interrupt the interview. They may go get coffee before the interview so they have something to drink. They may organize their office right before the interview.

While waiting for you to show up at a certain time, all sorts of things are going through the person's mind regarding the interview. They feel anticipation and excitement about speaking with you. They have also likely reviewed your resume before the interview and are ready to ask you questions about your experience. If they see some experiences they feel you might have in common, they are probably eager to discuss them with you.

When you do not show up on time for your interview, people are suddenly let down. They feel a little upset. As each minute goes by, people get angrier and angrier you are not there. This erodes the confidence people have in you. The message being sent is:

- I do not respect you
- I do not respect your time
- This interview is not important to me
- This company is not important to me

In the story I told you, there was another dynamic in play that is important to mention. The law firm I was interviewing with was considered less prestigious than the law firm where I currently worked. Therefore, the people at the less prestigious law firm were already on the defensive. By showing up late, I sent them the message I thought I was more important than them. I was not doing this intentionally; however, this is the message that was clearly received.

There is an interesting dynamic at work with employers and law firms. Employers, like people in general, have a need to feel important. In the law firm world, for example, employers will rarely make someone a job offer unless they are almost 100 percent confident the person will accept. There is also a dynamic at work when an attorney searches for a job. When an attorney is looking for a job it is often much easier for him or her to get one with a better law firm than the one he or she is currently working for rather than with a less reputable law firm. Why? Law firms are often suspicious of attorneys who are moving to law firms that are not as prestigious. They think if they are interviewing with a law firm that is not as high in the pecking order, there must be something wrong with them. Additionally, if they are not as highly ranked, law firms may be a little defensive when a person from a better law firm is interviewing because they know the attorney is from a more

prestigious "tribe." This often makes it harder for the attorney to get a job with a less prestigious firm because the firm is more sensitive to even perceived slights.

Showing up late shows potential employers you do not take them seriously or respect them. This is a huge mistake and something that sends a message you simply do not want to convey.

In show business, you notice all the time when actors start falling out of favor with studios and seeing their careers decline. Remember how popular Lindsay Lohan was just a couple of years ago? She negatively affected her career recently by showing up late repeatedly. Showing up late is simply bad business. As one person said about Lohan:

You can't show up late. It's very, very disrespectful... I think what an actor has to realize [is that] when you show up an hour late, 150 people have been scrambling to cover for you. There is not an apology big enough in the world to have to make 150 people scramble. It's nothing but disrespect. And Lindsay Lohan is not the only one. A lot of actors show up late as if they're God's gift to the film. It's inexcusable...

An interview is the first chance you have to make an impression on a new employer. It sends a message that determines whether you can be trusted and whether you will follow directions and complete work on time when you show up for the job you are interviewing for. An employer will often [judge](#) your future performance by whether you arrive on time.

Having hired hundreds of people over the years, I can say unequivocally the worst hires I made were people who failed to show up on time for an interview. The people who do not show up on time are almost always the worst hires because they get the job and do the same thing. In addition to not showing up on time, these people also play by their own rules in other ways. They do work the way they want, and when they want. They disrespect others and their needs constantly. They are the absolute worst employees in most cases and also the ones most likely to make trouble after they leave.

In addition to showing up late for interviews, many people make the mistake of showing up late for other functions. You should never show up late for anything. The reason it is so important to show up on time is it sends the message you respect others and their time. It also sends the message you take others' needs as seriously as your own. Being on time sends the message you will play by the rules, do what is expected of you, and do your best to get along with others and look out for their needs. You always need to be on time.

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