

## **Why Eye Contact Matters**

**by Rose Jonas, Ph.D.**

Interviewers interpret eye contact as, “I’m confident, I’m okay with who I am and not afraid for you to see, and I’m trustworthy.” People who don’t are seen as being afraid, having something to hide or lacking the power and charm interviewers are certain you need for the job.

What’s the problem with relying on eye contact, from the interviewer’s standpoint? You may indeed be simply shy or from another culture where persistent eye contact is considered rude. It’s important for interviewers to look for other markers or think about what the job entails. If you’re in a non-people job, the lack of that “Hi, I’m Rocko” stance might not matter.

When does it go from good eye contact to staring? When you haven’t blinked for 20 minutes and the interviewer hands you a bottle of Murine. Staring is seen as a sign of aggression and unfeeling, not good things to telegraph in an interview. Actually, while you should focus on the interviewer, you should also look away from time to time. When you’ve been asked a new question, a look away can help you marshal your answer. Neurolinguistic programming devotees say that when you look up before answering, you’re coming from your head; if you look down, you’ve gone to your heart for the answer.

What if you’re not good at the eye contact thing? You can always tell the interviewer, “I’m shy, but I’m competent at what I do.” That answers the question in the interviewer’s mind about you. You can also practice with someone else beforehand and get better at it. Pick another facial feature of the interviewer — the mouth or an ear are better than a forehead — and put your focus there. You’ll feel less pressure in your answers, and the point is for you to feel comfortable and great about yourself in an interview.