NEWS LESSON

Should You Finish Your Coffee Before the Interview?



BEFORE YOU READ

1 Warm up

Talk about these questions with a partner.

1. Would carrying a coffee into an interview change your first impression of someone?
2. What tiny detail makes someone seem confident?
3. Which interview rule do you find hardest to explain?

2 Key words

These words are in the article. Write the letter of the meaning (A to H) in each box.

1	**recruiter**	☐
2	**impression**	☐
3	**relaxed**	☐
4	**candidates**	☐
5	**workplace**	☐
6	**generations**	☐
7	**criteria**	☐
8	**structured**	☐

A	groups of people born around the same time, such as young and old people
B	a person whose job is to find people to work for a company
C	calm and not worried or serious
D	the rules you use to decide if something is good
E	the idea or feeling you get about someone when you first meet them
F	people who are trying to get a job
G	the place where people do their jobs
H	planned in a clear and organised way

3 Read

Read the article and underline the key words from task 2. The paragraphs are numbered.

A recruiter said that bringing an iced coffee to a job interview looks too relaxed. Is she right, or is the rule unfair?

1 Imagine preparing carefully for a job interview. You choose your clothes, research the company and practise your answers. You buy an iced coffee. Could that final decision damage your chances of getting the job? In September 2026, a discussion about this simple drink became a huge argument online. A recruiter in Florida suggested that young people who arrive at interviews holding iced coffees can look too relaxed. Some people agreed with her. Others thought the idea was ridiculous.

2 The recruiter, Caitlin Wehniainen, has worked in recruitment for 16 years. In a TikTok video, she explained that turning up with a drink might give the impression that the interview is just another activity in a busy day. She was mainly talking about formal office jobs, not every kind of workplace. Later, she said her advice depended on the company and the situation. She wanted candidates to make a good first impression.

3 For some younger people, the reaction seemed unfair. They pointed out that coffee has nothing to do with someone's ability to do a job. Older employees also take drinks into meetings, so why should an iced latte be a problem? Supporters of the recruiter replied that an interview is a special occasion. They believe small choices can show whether someone understands the workplace and takes the opportunity seriously.

4 The debate is about more than coffee. Different generations do not always agree about professional behaviour. In some offices, smart clothes and formal greetings are still expected. In others, trainers, relaxed language and flexible hours are normal. Young applicants may find it difficult to work out which rules apply, especially when advice on social media is often contradictory.

5 There is another issue: fairness. The professional body CIPD recommends structured interviews, where candidates answer the same questions and are judged using clear criteria. This can reduce the influence of personal opinions. Someone's skills and experience should carry more weight than whether they are holding a plastic cup. First impressions matter, but they can also be misleading.

6 So what should an applicant do? It makes sense to learn about the company, arrive on time and be ready to explain what you can offer. Finishing your coffee beforehand might avoid an unnecessary distraction at a traditional workplace. But the bigger question is for employers: are they hiring the person who can do the job, or simply the person who follows their unwritten rules?

Sources: BBC World Service. Picture: AI illustration.

4 True, false or not given

Circle **T** (true), **F** (false) or **NG** (the article does not say).

1. The CIPD recommends structured interviews with clear criteria. T F NG
2. She said the rule applies to every kind of workplace. T F NG
3. Her video was removed from TikTok. T F NG
4. Caitlin Wehniainen has worked in recruitment for 16 years. T F NG
5. Older employees never take drinks into meetings. T F NG

5 Vocabulary

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed.

behaviour **contradictory** **distraction** **influence** **occasion** **ridiculous** **unfair**

1. Some people laughed at the idea because it was so silly that it seemed _____ .
2. A wedding or a graduation is a special _____ when people dress carefully.
3. Advice on social media is often _____ , so young people do not know which opinion to follow.
4. Friends can have a strong _____ on the choices we make.
5. A phone that keeps ringing is an unnecessary _____ during a meeting.

6 Verb forms

Write the correct form of the verb in brackets.

1. Imagine _____ carefully for a job interview. (PREPARE)
2. A recruiter in Florida _____ that iced coffees look too relaxed. (SUGGEST)
3. She _____ in recruitment for 16 years. (WORK)
4. In some offices, smart clothes and formal greetings are still _____ . (EXPECT)
5. Many young people _____ the rule unfair. (FIND)

7 Language focus: linking words

Complete the sentences with words from the box. Two words are not needed. Use although or however to show a surprise or a contrast, because to give a reason, so to give a result and unless to mean 'if not'.

although	because	despite	however	instead	so	unless

1. _____ the recruiter has years of experience, some people disagreed with her.
2. I always arrive early _____ I don't like to be late.
3. The coffee was cold. _____ , he still drank it before the interview.
4. He wanted to look professional, _____ he left the drink outside.
5. You should leave the drink outside _____ the company says it is fine.

SPEAK

8 Talk about it

Discuss in pairs or small groups. Give reasons for your answers.

1. What should an interviewer notice before judging someone's manners?
2. Could a relaxed candidate make a better colleague than a polished one?
3. What would you change about a typical job interview?

9 Role-play: the iced coffee at the interview

Work in pairs. Read your card, then have the conversation. Swap roles and do it again.

Student A · the recruiter

A candidate has arrived for a formal interview with an iced coffee. You think it looks too relaxed. Explain your worry, ask two questions, then decide what happens.

Student B · the candidate

You've brought an iced coffee because you're nervous and thirsty. You think it's unfair to judge you for a drink. Explain why, and suggest a solution.

Useful phrases

I'm afraid it might give the wrong impression.
I didn't think it would be a problem.
Would you mind leaving it outside?
I'd rather keep it, if that's all right.
That's hardly fair, is it?
Shall we start the interview and forget about it?

Afterwards, tell the class: who won the argument, and was that fair?

ANSWER KEY

2 Key words

1 B · 2 E · 3 C · 4 F · 5 G · 6 A · 7 D · 8 H

4 True, false or not given

1 T · 2 F · 3 NG · 4 T · 5 F

5 Vocabulary

1 ridiculous · 2 occasion · 3 contradictory · 4 influence · 5 distraction

6 Verb forms

1 preparing · 2 suggested · 3 has worked · 4 expected · 5 found

7 Language focus

1 Although · 2 because · 3 However · 4 so · 5 unless

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