

The Telephone Interview

Advice for the Job Seeker: The Telephone Interview

Telephone interviews are becoming more common and can be sprung on you anytime. Take a few seconds to prepare yourself. If you are at work, put the caller on hold in order to close your office door or to take the call in a more private location. If you are at home, make sure that children, pets, or other distractions are away from your interview area. If the time is not convenient, ask if you could talk at another time and suggest some alternatives.

Be Prepared

Employers are using telephone interviews as preliminary assessments of candidates. Be sure to have a folder readily available that contains your resume, a list of your professional accomplishments, “success stories” that relate to your competencies, a list of questions you want to ask the interviewer, and information about the organization.

- In addition to your success stories and list of accomplishments, be prepared to answer the “tell-me-about-yourself” question early in the conversation. Since many jobs involve conference calling as well as other forms of telephone work, the interviewer will also be assessing your ability to be professional and credible on the phone.
- It is important to show that you have done your homework by asking intelligent questions based on information you have on the organization and the job opportunity. Before the telephone interview, it is helpful to become familiar with the organization by gathering background information; including their mission, size of the organization, competitive companies in the market, and recent press releases. If the organization is public, finding such information is simple. For example, Hoovers.com offers statistics, brief history information, and current employment profit records. In addition, referring to the employer’s web site is always resourceful.

Practice Makes Perfect

- Talking on the phone is not as easy as it seems, but with practice, you can go a long way. Have a friend or family member conduct a mock interview and tape record it so you can see how you sound over the phone. Any cassette recorder will work. You will be able to hear your “ums”, “uhs” and “likes” and you can practice reducing them from your conversational speech.
- Familiarize yourself with the types of questions interviewers ask and practice well thought out answers with a friend or using a tape recorder.
- Rehearse responses but do not memorize them.
- Overcome any discomfort in discussing your strengths.
- Be prepared to articulate your weaknesses. Try to focus your weaknesses on job inexperience rather than on personal limitations. Explain what actions you are taking to correct the weakness.
- Remember that during the phone interview your primary objective is to demonstrate how you can meet the needs and goals of the employer.

During the Phone Interview

- Candidates should approach a telephone interview with the same seriousness as they would an in-person interview.
- Consider standing while you talk. This can improve the quality of your voice. Speak slowly and clearly.
 - Turn call-waiting off so your call is not interrupted.
 - Unless you are sure your cell phone service is going to be perfect, consider using a landline rather than your cell phone to avoid a dropped call or static on the line.
 - Consider dressing for the interview just as if it were a face-to-face interview; you will perform more professionally.
 - Do not smoke, chew gum, or eat.
 - Do keep a glass of water handy, in case you need to wet your mouth.
 - Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
 - Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
 - Use the person's title (Mr. or Ms. and their last name.) Only use a first name if they ask you to.

- During the interview be upbeat, enthusiastic, and forthcoming, but do not dominate the conversation or interrupt the interviewer.
- If you need a moment to think about an interviewer's question, say so. Long silences can be especially uncomfortable over the telephone.
- Since you will not have the visual cues from the interviewer to guide the conversation, keep your

answers concise. Check back with the interviewer with phrases such as "does that answer your question?" or "is that what you're looking for?" This keeps the dialogue on track for you and interviewer.

- Due to the lack of visual cues, remember to intermittently interject short responses such as "That's interesting", "I see", or "Good idea" to acknowledge the interviewer's comments.

Sell Yourself

The goal is to be invited in for a face-to-face interview with the employer. To be successful, assume the role of "seller" during the interview by efficiently referencing your skills and abilities. Describe the contributions you can make to the organization.

At the end of the interview, feel free to ask questions about the next step in the process. However, this is not the forum to ask about salary, training, holidays, vacation time, or other details. Remember the telephone interview is usually the preliminary round.

If you feel the interviewer is impressed with you, do not be afraid to "close the deal" by asking for a face-to-face meeting. Here's an example; "(Ms./Mr. Interviewer's name), based on the information you have given me, I am very interested in pursuing this opportunity and would like to schedule a time for us to meet in person. Is there a time that this would be convenient for you?"

Final Steps

If you are invited to an interview, make sure you write down and repeat back all the details-it is easy to misunderstand or forget information when it is conveyed over the phone. Even if the interviewer begins to close the interview with the line, "We will be back in touch", an immediate follow up is appropriate with either a thank you note or e-mail. This will demonstrate professionalism and also gives you the opportunity to mention a skill or ability that you may have failed to mention during the interview.

Realize that activities and decisions may be delayed during holiday and prime vacation periods.

If you receive a rejection from an employer for whom you would like to work, follow up with another letter reiterating your interest in the organization and expressing your desire to be considered for other positions in the future.

Evaluate

Make it a point to learn something from your interview experience, even one that did not go as well as you had hoped. Analyze your performance immediately after each interview, asking yourself:

- Was I properly prepared?
- Was I able to keep the interviewer's attention?
- Which questions were particularly tough?
- Did I learn enough about the job? Did the interviewer learn enough about me to decide whether I am right for the job?

Take Advantage of Resources

Meet with a career counselor/advisor to discuss difficult questions or issues about the phone interview.

- Check out the on-line resource www.jobsearch.about.com/cs/interviews/a/phoneinterview.htm, which provides useful tips and insights for phone interviews.