

Phone interviews are becoming more and more popular in today's fast-paced and, often fiscally conservative environment. It is the method for hiring officials to find the right candidate for the position while containing the high costs associated with the hiring process. Many employers use the phone interview as an opportunity to screen candidates before a face-to-face interview or they may use it as the first step to the interview process. It is critical to remember that the phone interview is just as important as the other aspects of the job search process and often more difficult. The goal of the phone interview is to obtain an on-site interview. You'll prepare the same way for this interview as you would a face to face interview. You may want to refer to our handout "Successful Interviewing Strategies" for more tips.



Since you will not be face to face with the employer, this interview affords you several advantages and disadvantages. You have the luxury of having an "open book test" style interview. You'll want to gather materials near the phone that you can quickly refer to during the interview. Items you may want to consider having handy include:

- ◆ Resume;
- ◆ Pen and paper to jot the interviewer(s) name(s) down immediately and to take notes during the interview;
- ◆ Company research (with relevant information highlighted);
- ◆ Questions to ask about the company and position;
- ◆ A loosely written outline of points to make or items to cover as you talk about the position;
- ◆ A list of the major job responsibilities with your related skills and experience for each one;
- ◆ A list of your greatest strengths as they relate to the position, with solid examples that prove you have those skills and experiences;
- ◆ Comfort items - a glass of water, tissues, etc.;
- ◆ Have a list of several thoughtful questions to ask the recruiter.

It is important that you don't sound like you are reading from a list in front of you - so practice and preparation will be key in using these items effectively.

Timing:

Often, employers will call you to arrange a time for an interview. If this is the case, you have ample time to prepare appropriately. A few tips to help you prepare:

- ◆ Dress the part. Experts say if you are dressed in a professional manner, you'll speak that way;
- ◆ If you have call waiting, turn it off. Your telephone book will have instructions on how to do this on a per call basis. If you can't, ignore other incoming calls;
- ◆ Stand up and talk. Your position affects the quality of your voice. If you are sitting down relaxing, you don't project the same readiness and intensity as you do standing up;
- ◆ Turn off distractions. Have your phone in a quiet room - away from radio, television, family, roommates or anything else that may make noise or take your attention away from your task;
- ◆ Avoid running a faucet - some phones will make a faucet sound like a waterfall;
- ◆ Do not use a speaker phone if your phone has that capability - your voice will sound hollow and echo;
- ◆ Do not use a cell phone or cordless phone - you'll want the best connection possible with no distractions or interruptions;

- ◆ Try not to shuffle your papers around loudly.

If the employer surprises you and you need some time to prepare (or you are in the middle of another important task), ask if the recruiter can call back in 15 minutes or arrange another mutually convenient time. You'll want this time to refresh your memory about the organization and the points you want to make about yourself. If re-scheduling seems inappropriate, you may still wish to have a brief "stall tactic" ready to gain you a few seconds to prepare, such as "Let me shut the door" or "Let me switch to a quieter room."

Phone Etiquette:

- ◆ Make sure you are able to receive voicemail and that your message sounds professional - no singing, music, etc.
- ◆ Be aware of tone, pitch and delivery speed - these are all magnified on the phone and there are no "nonverbal" cues to slow down the pace.
- ◆ Avoid nervous laughter and repeated phrases. Ask other people their opinion of your phone "voice." Practice with a friend first.
- ◆ Smile and gesture. In face to face situations, we use nonverbal gestures to further enhance what we are expressing verbally. While the interviewer can't see this, you will benefit by articulating more clearly what you mean to express. Smiling makes your voice sound confident, positive and upbeat.
- ◆ Attempt to keep the phone at a consistent distance from your mouth and speak clearly.
- ◆ Respond succinctly, but avoid yes or no responses to questions. Be aware that on the phone, many people answering a question tend to ramble.
- ◆ Do not eat, drink, or smoke during the phone interview.
- ◆ Let the recruiter end the interview. You should say thank you for your time, reiterate your interest in the position, and try to establish the next step in the recruiting process.

Quirks of Phone Interviewing:

- ◆ Be aware that the employer may be on a speaker phone with more than one interviewer listening and asking questions. If the speaker phone keeps you from hearing the questions being posed, do not be afraid to ask the interviewer to repeat the questions.
- ◆ You don't have the benefit of reading body language and you can't develop a rapport or a good first impression through eye contact, or a hand shake. You may try to visualize the interviewer sitting across from you to put you more at ease.
- ◆ Since you don't have the benefit of nonverbal cues to guide the timing of the interview, you have to be careful not to interrupt the recruiter. Be sure he/she is finished with the question/comment prior to answering, paying close attention to voice tone and inflection.

Follow Up After the Interview

You would send a thank you note to the recruiters after a face-to-face interview, and this is no different. Refer to our handout "Thank You Notes" for specific guidelines and tips. Be sure to reference specific topics or issues discussed, reiterate the major strengths of your candidacy and once again state your interest and enthusiasm for the organization, the position and the next step in the recruiting process.