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Telephone Interviewing

Your goal for the telephone interview is to get a face-to-face interview.

Telephone Interviews have one advantage over the other types of interviews – you can have your preparation materials in front of you while the interview is taking place. This includes not only your resume, but also a "cheat sheet" of compelling story topics that you would like to introduce. It can also include a fact sheet about the employer, including specific critical points describing both the employer and their products. So, have your materials open and available when you are preparing for a phone interview. They are there to support you and enhance your value to the employer, who will greatly respect your ability to answer questions with focus and meaningful content.

Treat the phone interview seriously, just as you would a face-to-face interview. A phone interview seems so informal on the surface that it can be easy to fall into the trap of not being as prepared for it as you would for an in-person interview. Don't get caught with your guard down. Be sure to research the company, study the job description, and practice your responses to anticipated questions, just as you would for any other interview.

It is important that your phone interview sound well-organized and thoughtful, but not rehearsed. Write down important points on paper, but not entire paragraphs or sentences to read when you are conversing with an employer. It is very easy for someone to tell if you are reading, and they may assume you do not think well on your feet.

What the interviewer needs to hear and conclude is that you can get the job done. Mentally, he or she is making the connection between the company's problems and you as a problem solver. Don't overwhelm them with facts and figures; they're only going to remember so much. You can best make your point by reciting memorable stories that document your ability to analyze a dilemma, weigh alternative responses and choose the appropriate action. By selectively highlighting turnaround situations you spearheaded, you are communicating a willingness to tackle similar problems for this company.

Employers use telephone interviews as a way of identifying and recruiting candidates for employment. There are three basic types of telephone calls that you get from employers at this stage. One of the keys to success is to be able to identify quickly which type of interview is being conducted.

1. "Information Gathering Interviews" – An employer may ask to speak to you over the phone in order to assess your interest in the company. This often occurs if you are referred to him or her through a personal contact, referral, or someone you met at a

- career fair. This kind of call should be treated formally, and you should consider it as seriously as an in-depth interview. It is a good way for you, as the potential employee, to see if you are a good fit for the company and their objectives.
2. "Screening Call" – Many companies use telephone calls as a screening mechanism in order to narrow the pool of applicants to be invited for in-person interviews. These are quick and the person calling you will most likely be someone from Human Resources.
 3. "In-Depth Telephone Interview" – In this case, the telephone is being used as a way to minimize the expenses involved in traveling for the interviewer and/or the interviewee. You may even find yourself being interviewed by a hiring committee while being broadcast over a speakerphone.

Be Prepared

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would for a regular interview. Compile a list of your strengths and weaknesses, as well as a list of answers to typical interview questions. In addition, be prepared for an in-depth conversation about your background and skills.

- Keep your resume in clear view, on the top of your desk, or tape it to the wall near the phone, so it's at your fingertips when you need to answer questions.
- Have a short list of your accomplishments available to review.
- Do your homework on the company. Go to the hiring company's website and get to know them.
- Have a copy of the job description in clear view. Highlight any questions you have regarding the duties and responsibilities, so you won't have to hunt for them when it's time for you to ask questions.
- Have a short list of questions about the job and the organization.
- Have a pen and paper handy for note taking. Be sure to write down the name of the interviewer to refer back to during the interview.
- Have a glass of water handy (without ice), since you will not have a chance to take a break during the call.
- Speaking of breaks, make sure you answer nature's call first.
- Turn off call waiting on your phone.
- Clear the room - evict the roommates and the pets. Turn off the stereo and the TV.
- Close the door.

During the Phone Interview

- Stand up, or at least sit up straight at a table or desk. There's a psychological, frame of mind aspect to consider here. But on a more tangible level, research has shown that you project yourself better when you're standing up, and you'll feel more knowledgeable and confident.
- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat, or drink during the interview.
- Smile. Smiling will project a positive image to the listener and will change the tone of your voice.
- Speak slowly and enunciate clearly.
- Don't interrupt the interviewer.
- Take your time – it's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts.
- Give tight, to the point answers. Don't waste words.

Before you hang up

- Thank the interviewer for the opportunity.
 - Get the correct spelling of your interviewer's name.
 - Get contact information for follow-up questions.
 - Remember you need a strong and confident closing. Reiterate how you can make a contribution.
 - Ask about their timeline, "When are you looking to have a decision made?"
- After the Interview:
- Take notes about what you were asked and how you answered.
 - Contact your recruiter immediately to let them know the interview took place successfully and to share your thoughts. Let the recruiter know whether you are interested in the position or not and if there were questions you forgot to ask at the interview, express them at this time. Only after we get your feedback about the interview and the company do we contact the employer for theirs. And finally, we follow-up with you regarding the employer's thoughts.
 - Follow with a thank you note, which reiterates your interest in the job.

The Screening Interview

Companies use screening tools to ensure that candidates meet minimum qualification requirements. Screening interviewers often have honed skills to determine whether there is anything that might disqualify you for the position. Remember - they do not need to know whether you are the best fit for the position, only whether you are not a match. For this reason, screeners tend to dig for dirt. Screeners will hone in on gaps in your employment history or pieces of information that look inconsistent. They also will want to know from the outset whether you will be too expensive for the company.

Some tips for maintaining confidence during screening interviews:

Highlight your accomplishments and qualifications.

- Personality is not as important to the screener as verifying your qualifications. However, it depends on the company and interviewer. Error on the side of having a great personality.
- Be tactful about addressing income requirements. Give a range, and try to avoid giving specifics by replying, "I would be willing to consider your best offer."
- If the interview is conducted by phone, it is helpful to have note cards with your vital information sitting next to the phone. That way, whether the interviewer catches you sleeping or vacuuming the floor, you will be able to switch gears quickly.

A final Concern

The interviewer may ask a salary range that you're expecting (don't introduce the topic yourself.) It's best to state that at this point you are not altogether certain what an acceptable salary would be for this position. Example: "I would feel more comfortable discussing a salary figure after meeting the key people I would be working with and knowing more about the position."

On the phone, your job is to entice the buyer, not to close a sale. Salary negotiation will fall into place at the right time. End the conversation on a positive note. Thank the interviewer for the information shared. Let him or her know again that you look forward to visiting the company.

After all, if the position discussed is not the ideal job for you, something else might be. Good telephone interviewing techniques can boost your competitive edge.