

How To Master Telephone Interviews

By Leslie Plotkin

Don't be afraid to pick up the phone! The telephone interview is by far becoming more and more popular. Many job hunters still get that adrenalin rush even with the phone interviews. But following the tips and advice in this article will help you master the phone interview and get you to the next step - the face-to-face interview.

Often, the first step in the hiring process is the telephone interview.

Companies and the recruiters they employ use the telephone interview to develop a pool of candidates to look at closer, and to pare down the number of applicants for a job opening.

The advantages to the company are:

- the cost is less.
- the list of questions can be standardized.
- the interview can be delegated to a lower level (cheaper) employee.
- it can be done quickly.

The aims on both sides of the telephone are limited. The caller wants a selection of qualified candidates, and the process screens out many candidates. If the call is a straightforward screening call, the caller will likely ask about your experience, availability and salary requirements. Your strategy is to provide facts that support your resume, with some context about your performance. Try using numbers and facts to be effective, however, you don't want to volunteer anything that could disqualify you. Make every effort to sound professional but not personal, as this call is not to establish rapport. Since you are unlikely to win the job from a telephone interview, your goal is to secure an in-person interview with the person who has the authority to hire. Approach the call with that attitude.

Managing the Telephone Interview

Try to reschedule surprise interviews. Say that you have a conflict and suggest a time you can call back. When you call back, be prepared for the call just as you would for a full-dress interview.

Have ready:

- pen and paper, a calculator
- the job ad and the resume and cover letter which you sent in response to the ad.
- a list of your accomplishments which relate to the job you are discussing.
- research you have done on the company.
- a short list of questions about the job.
- your calendar.

The Techniques of a Pro

- Smile - it comes through in your voice.
- Speak directly into the phone.
- Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or drink anything. It all telegraphs to your listener.
- Stand up. Your voice sounds stronger.
- Avoid ah, er, hum. This habit is especially noticeable on the telephone.

This takes practice. So practice.

For a winning performance

- Confirm the caller's name and company. Get the caller's telephone number.
- Be aware that the caller can't see you - can't see your hand gestures, can't see you taking notes.
- Pace the call. Let the caller do most of the talking, without interruptions.
- Do use the technique of repeating or re-phrasing questions. It tells the caller that you listened carefully, and gives you time to think about your answer.

- Avoid the simple yes or no; add selling points at every opportunity.
- If you need time to think, say so - as in radio, silence during a telephone conversation is dead air time.
- Re-affirm your qualifications; express your interest in the job and the company.
- Say you would appreciate the opportunity to talk about the job further - in person.