

## **PHONE INTERVIEW TIPS**

Phone interviews are becoming a common way for employers to screen potential employees during the hiring process. Unlike traditional, in-person job interviews, phone interviews are usually fairly short, require less preparation, and can even be outsourced by the employer if necessary. These features make phone interviewing an effective way to narrow down the list of candidates before scheduling in-person interviews.

Unfortunately, many people are not comfortable conducting a conversation of that importance over the phone. If the prospect of a phone interview makes you nervous, these tips can help turn an awkward interview into a confidence-inspiring success.

### **Preparation is the Name of the Game**

When preparing for a phone interview, don't forget that not all recruiters and employers schedule them ahead of time. At any moment, a recruiter could stumble across your resume or an employer could decide to call you in regards to a recent application. Your chances for success in your job search will be greatly improved if you try to always expect the unexpected.

### **Keep Your Resume Near the Phone**

Knowing that you could get a call from a recruiter or an employer at any moment, you should always keep a recent copy of your resume near the phone. That way, whether or not your phone interview is anticipated, you will have all the information you need right at your fingertips.

Your resume is not the only resource you should keep handy. Create a log for keeping track of the resumes you send out, recording each company, position title, contact name, date the position was applied for, and qualifications for the job. If you have a chance to research the company, make a file with that information, and keep it near the phone as well.

Finally, you should always have access to a notepad and pen during a phone interview, so that you can write down the interviewer's name, key questions he or she asked, and your responses.

### **Practice (and a Cheat Sheet) Makes Perfect**

Just like with a traditional job interview, you should try to anticipate questions the interviewer might ask. If you have come up with examples and practiced your answers ahead of time, you will sound much more intelligent and confident in the interview. Moreover, since the interviewer cannot see you, there is nothing to stop you from referring to a "cheat sheet" – notes to help you remember your practiced answers, so that you never sound like you have been taken off guard.

When you practice your answers and put together your cheat sheet, you should think about questions that are traditionally asked in job interviews, such as:

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?
- Where do you see yourself in 1/5/10 years?
- What is your leadership style? Please give an example of a real situation.
- Describe a situation where you had to work with others to solve a problem.
- Give me an example of a stressful situation you have encountered on the job. How did you handle it?
- Tell me about your three greatest accomplishments in your career.
- Do you have any questions?

Many of these questions are difficult to answer on the spot. By preparing your answers ahead of time, you give yourself the opportunity to think through your answers carefully. Your notes will refresh your memory if you draw a blank, and help prevent you from freezing up during the interview.

### **GIVING A FABULOUS PHONE INTERVIEW**

If you've done your homework, the phone interview itself should be a breeze. The important thing at this point is to remember to make sure the interviewer can hear and understand you – and vice versa – as well as possible.

**During the phone interview, you should:**

- **Find a quiet place.** Children, pets, televisions, and radios are all noisy distractions that should be avoided. If the phone interview is scheduled in advance, you can arrange to have a quiet room all to yourself. If you receive the phone call unexpectedly, retreat into a quiet room or suggest another time for the interview.
- **Sip water periodically.** Nervousness often causes your mouth to dry out, which can in turn change the way your voice and pronunciation sounds to the interviewer. If you know about the phone interview ahead of time, you can have a glass of water on hand, along with the other materials you have prepared.
- **Avoid eating, smoking, or chewing gum.** Excess movement of your mouth and throat will make you harder to understand, and possibly distract or even irritate the interviewer.
- **Give short answers.** Many people talk too much when they are nervous. This is especially easy to do in a phone interview, because you don't have the other person's visual cues to indicate when it's their turn to talk. To make sure you don't make this mistake, only talk long enough to answer the question. A moment of silence, while it might seem awkward to you, lets the interviewer know that you are done.
- **Speak slowly and clearly.** Speaking too fast, whether out of nervousness or habit, will hurt your chances by making you harder to understand. Instead, make a conscious effort to slow down and enunciate clearly.
- **Stand, stretch, or pace occasionally.** Standing improves the quality of your voice by increasing airflow to your lungs. Additionally, many people find

it easier to adopt a salesperson-like attitude when they are standing or moving around. As a result, changing your posture occasionally can make you sound more confident to the interviewer.

- **Smile.** Believe it or not, a smile changes the quality of your voice. If you are smiling, the interviewer will hear it in your tone!

### **Finishing Your Phone Interview on the Right Foot**

The phone interview is drawing to a close; what do you do now? These final moments are just as important as the preparation and the interview itself, as they can determine what comes next.

- **Thank the interviewer.** Verbally thank the interviewer for taking the time to speak with you. If you don't remember his or her name, ask for it again and write it down, so that you can send a thank-you note as well.
- **Suggest an in-person interview.** The whole point of the phone interview was to score a traditional job interview, so if the interviewer doesn't mention what will happen next, you should bring it up. For example, you can say, "Thank you very much for taking the time to call me. I'd like to have the opportunity to meet in person. When will you be scheduling the next round of interviews?"
- **Reiterate your interest in the position.** You want to leave the interviewer with the impression that you are enthusiastic about the job. Let him or her know how excited you are about the prospect of working with the company.
- **Send a thank-you note.** Just as with a traditional job interview, you should follow up with a polite thank-you note. You can also use the thank-you note to reiterate your interest in scheduling an in-person interview. Just be sure to send the thank-you note out promptly, as the interviewer may soon be making final decisions about who to call back!

Many people find a phone interview more nerve-racking than a traditional job interview. This doesn't have to be the case, however. While some phone interviews happen with little or no warning, in most cases you have just as much time to prepare as you would ordinarily, with the added benefit of being able to use your notes during the interview.