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# Mastering the phone interview, Part 1

Telephone interviews are becoming more and more common in the job search process. They save both the company and the candidate time and money as they are often used to screen in order to narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Unfortunately, many people think of the phone interview as simply a phone call. However, it should be treated with the same respect due a face-to-face interview.

If you are in the job market, it is important to prepare yourself for a phone interview. This two-part article provides you with the before, during and after keys to successful telephone interviewing. If you follow these simple rules, you should achieve success in one of the most important phases of the job search. Part 1 will discuss "Before" strategies:

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would a regular interview. Do your research on the company and the job; review your résumé and accomplishments; compile a list of your core strengths for the targeted position; and, of course, review your responses to a variety of interview questions.

To be at your best, dedicate a space in your home where distractions will be at a minimum — TV and stereo turned off, pets tended to, children and others in the house alerted to the seriousness of the occasion, and the door closed with a "do not disturb" sign. Have a copy of your résumé, notes, job description if available, and pad/pen handy.

Be sure to have a high-quality

phone, handset or headset when participating in a phone interview. To ensure that you are communicating clearly, avoid a speaker or cell phone. Also, if using a portable phone, make sure it is fully charged.

The following tips might seem a little extreme; however, talking on the phone isn't as easy as it seems. The key is to practice. Have a friend or family member conduct a mock interview, and tape record it so you can tell how you sound over the phone. You'll be able to hear any "ums," "uhs," "OKs," and other distracting sounds. Then, you can practice reducing them from your conversations. Practice sufficiently so that your responses do not sound scripted, and you do not fumble over important points.

Here are a few other winning telephone interview techniques to consider:

➤ Dress professionally. Dressing nicely helps you act as if you are in a face-to-face interview. It can improve your attitude and your confidence, as well as set the tone for the occasion.

➤ Stand during the interview. Many experts say it increases the enthusiasm and positive image you project and improves your overall telephone presence. Standing gets your blood flowing, improves your posture, increases your response time and makes your voice sound stronger. It's a good idea to warm up your voice while you're waiting for the call. You can do this by reciting a favorite poem, verse or singing an uplifting song. Also, have a glass of water handy in case you need to

moisten your mouth.

➤ Look in a mirror and smile. Smile, it improves your phone voice. You will find yourself coming across much friendlier, interesting and alert. Seeing yourself as you are speaking lets you know if you need to change your phone attitude to project a more positive presence.

➤ Match the interviewer's personality. As appropriate, take a crack at this strategy. Try to use the similar speaking rate, tone and pitch as the interviewer, as much as you feel comfortable with. Hearing the familiar speaking style helps the interviewer to feel more connected to you. It is an excellent way to establish rapport quickly over distance and phone lines.

➤ Speak clearly and slowly. Many people get very nervous during phone interviews and may have a tendency to mumble. Try to relax, and avoid sounding rushed or anxious.

Though these guidelines may seem a bit over the top for a phone interview, I encourage you to keep in mind the adage: "Prior preparation prevents poor performance." The time and effort is worth it. Keep in mind the goal of the phone interview is to make the cut and get asked back for a face-to-face interview.

Stay tuned for "Mastering the phone interview, Part 2" where we will discuss strategies to utilize both during and after the interview.

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