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Master your Skype interview: 10 essential steps

Part I

Niklas Zennström, a Swedish entrepreneur best known for co-founding several high-profile online ventures, including Skype Technologies, points out, “If you can use a web browser, you can use Skype.” Basically that may be true, but when you are scheduled for a Skype job interview, there are specific steps that will lead you down the path to success.

After researching the advice of experts and based on my personal experience, I will share with you 10 essential steps to consider. This article is the first of a two-part series and includes the first five steps.

- Set up in advance. Prior preparation prevents poor performance; that’s my motto. Your Skype setup is very important, so first of all, make sure you have the latest version and your username is professional, perhaps simply your name and a number.

If you’re using a laptop, you may want to elevate it so you can nicely frame your face and easily look into the camera. The interviewer should be able to see at least two-thirds of the upper part of your body so when you are gesturing your hands can be seen. Though this frame of you is small, the background can be seen; make sure it is clutter-free and looks professional.

Use a good-quality headset, and make sure your microphone is operating properly. Also, turn off all computer programs that might interfere with Skype.

Now, set the scene. To be at your

best, dedicate a space in your home where distractions will be at a minimum with cell phone, TV and any music turned off, pets tended to, children and others in the house alerted to the seriousness of the occasion, and the door closed.

As in photography, lighting is important with Skype. Lighting should be as natural as possible. Adjust your camera settings, cover windows that may create glare and set up lamps by your computer. You want to be able to present your best professional image.

- Prepare, prepare, prepare. Now that you know about the technological aspects, the rest is a bit easier. In essence, you prepare for a Skype interview the same as one in person. Do your homework: research the company, the interviewer and other key staff. Review the job posting, and prepare for both common and specific questions that target the position for which you are applying.

- Dress to win. An old saying in human resource circles is the hiring decision is often made in the first 30 seconds of the interview, and the balance of the time is used to justify that decision. Dr. Joyce Brothers, a pioneering TV psychologist, referred to this as the “30-second hurdle.” In other words, you never get a second chance to make a first impression. The same goes for a Skype interview. So, beginning with the obvious, pay attention to your appearance with appropriate attire and grooming from head to

toe, the same as you would in an on-site interview.

- Create digital chemistry. First impressions really matter. Paul Bailo, a digital marketing technology executive and author of “The Essential Digital Interview Handbook,” points out, “The first five seconds will make or break your digital interview. It is those few seconds when the hiring manager sees you and you see the hiring manager that the digital chemistry is created.” Bailo suggests you should exhibit a “slow, confident, professional, firm nod” with a slight shoulder bend and eyes forward. He calls this movement a “digital handshake.” It’s a simple gesture that shows you are excited to be there and are ready for the interview.

- Exude energy. As you might imagine, it’s a bit difficult to continually be energized when you are sitting in a chair and looking into a camera for 45 minutes or more. One strategy is to make sure you are actively listening. Nodding and interjecting listening sounds such as “yes,” “hm” and “I see” can help. Smile, be pleasant, keep your voice tone upbeat and use nonverbal communication cues as you would in an in-person interview. I’ll talk more about this along with steps 6-10 in Part 2 in the October issue.

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