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How to ace the phone interview: Tips for success

Part I

Telephone interviews are the name of the game in today's technology-oriented world of work. Phone interviews save both the company and the candidate time and money, as they are often used to screen and narrow the pool of applicants who will be invited for in-person interviews. Unfortunately, many applicants think of the phone interview as simply a phone call. However, it should be treated with the same due respect as a face-to-face interview.

If you are in the job market, it is important to prepare yourself. This two-part article provides you with before, during and after keys to successful phone interviewing. If you follow these simple tips, you should achieve positive results in one of the most important phases of the job search. Part I will discuss "before" strategies.

Prepare for a phone interview just as you would a regular interview. Do your research on the company, the job and the interviewer. Review your résumé and accomplishments, compile a list of your core competencies for the targeted position, and prepare and practice your responses to a variety of common interview questions.

To be at your best, dedicate a space where distractions will be at a minimum — TV and music turned off, pets tended to, children and others in the environment alerted to the seriousness of the occasion, and the door closed. Have a copy of your résumé, notes, job description (if available) and pad/pen handy. I also suggest you use a headset with your cell phone so

you can be hands-free to take notes when necessary.

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

Dress professionally. Dressing as you would for an in-person interview helps set the tone for the occasion. It can improve your attitude and your confidence. I realize this strategy may seem a bit strange to some, but it actually works.

Stand during the interview. Many experts say it increases your enthusiasm and positive image you project, as well as 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, singing a favorite song or whatever works for you. Also, have a glass of water handy in case you need to moisten your mouth.

Practice looking in a mirror and smiling. This will improve your phone voice. You will find yourself com-

ing across as 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 a similar speaking rate, tone and pitch as the interviewer, as much as you feel comfortable with. Hearing a 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. 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 tips 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." Remember: The goal of the phone interview is to make the cut and get asked back for a face-to-face interview.

Stay tuned for "How to ace the phone interview: Tips for Success, Part II."

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