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How to ace the phone interview: Tips for success

Part II

In part one of this series, I talked mainly about strategies you should consider prior to the phone interview. We will now proceed with some approaches to utilize during and after the phone interview.

During the interview

Speak clearly, slowly and enthusiastically. Many candidates get nervous during phone interviews and may have a tendency to mumble. Relax, be upbeat and think positively. Try not to sound rushed or anxious. It's perfectly acceptable to take a moment or two to collect your thoughts. It's also a good idea to keep a glass of water handy in case you need to moisten your mouth.

Be prepared. Create and practice a 30- to 60-second summary of your professional career. Rehearse it! Get ready to effectively answer questions as if you were in a face-to-face interview. Support your statements with examples of accomplishments when possible. It is easy for an interviewer to get distracted on a phone call, so paint a vivid picture to keep him/her interested. Of course, depending on the situation, you may want to be careful not to talk too much. Phone interviews can sometimes be simply fishing expeditions for the hiring company.

Ask questions. Have a list of questions prepared to ask the interviewer when the time is appropriate. You want to leave the interviewer with a good impression of your interest in

the job and the company. Questions such as, "What are the most important skills/qualities you are seeking in the ideal candidate?" or "What are the measures of overall success within your organization?" can provide you with valuable information, as well as a chance to sell yourself again. And, if you think of a question or comment while the interviewer is speaking, just jot down a note on your list to remember later. I suggest that you prepare to ask at least three questions; however, avoid asking ones that relate to salary, benefits, working hours, etc. There will be sufficient time to obtain this information during the in-person interview or at the time of an offer.

A few tips to consider:

- Don't chew gum, eat cough drops or candy, or eat/drink while on the phone. These actions will create noises that are amplified through your phone.
- If you need to sneeze or cough, turn your head and cover your mouth to minimize the sound.
- Use a headset to ensure good reception for you and the interviewer.
- Use the person's title (Mr., Ms., Dr. and last name) rather than using the interviewer's first name.
- Avoid shuffling your notes or papers while speaking, which can suggest you are not listening to the interviewer.

Before ending the call, ask about the next step in the process, and offer to provide any additional information needed. Remember to express

your appreciation for the opportunity and for the time spent with the interviewer. Wait until the interviewer ends the call and disconnects before you do, just in case he/she mentions anything last-minute.

After the interview

Just as with a face-to-face interview, follow up. Send a short thank-you note that reiterates your interest in the job, recaps your key selling points for the job and mentions your desire to move forward to the next step. I highly suggest you email the note within 24 hours of the phone interview.

Finally, keep in mind that the phone interview is a key step in the hiring process for many employers. During the call, interviewers can ultimately determine if you are worthy of an in-person interview. Keep in mind that few people get hired solely on the basis of a phone interview, though it is a way for both you and the interviewer to test the waters.

Bottom line: Gain the competitive edge — be prepared, be professional, and be yourself.

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