Phone Interviewing

Phone interviews are becoming a common way for employers to screen potential candidates during the hiring process. Often they are used to narrow down the pool of applicants in order to decide who will be asked to interview in person. While you are actively in a job search, it is important to be prepared for a phone interview at a moment’s notice. Most phone interviews are typically scheduled but you never know when a recruiter might call and ask if you have a few minutes to talk – the interview could begin right then! If you follow the tips below, entering the next round of interviews should be a breeze!

Practice
You should practice for a phone interview just as you would for a face-to-face interview. Practice with a friend or relative over the phone and then evaluate how you did. Did you mumble? Were you easy to understand? Did you sound excited for the opportunity? You should also try to anticipate questions the interviewer might ask and come up with examples. If you practice your answers ahead of time, you will sound much more intelligent and confident in the interview. It’s a good idea to have a “cheat sheet” with you – notes to help you remember your practiced answers so you don’t sound like you’ve been taken off guard. Other things to remember:

- Use a landline when you can. Reception is clearer and less chance at dropping a call
- Speak slower than you normally would on the phone and enunciate more clearly
- SMILE – it helps maintain a positive tone to your voice
- Stand up – it helps your voice sound more natural and authentic

Prepare
Read the job description, research the company and review your resume. Make the match between the qualifications desired in the job posting and your background. Consider dressing as you would for a face-to-face interview – it helps you project a professional image. Keep in mind that not all recruiters and potential employers schedule phone interviews ahead of time. If you keep your resume handy, you shouldn’t be caught off guard.

Some typical questions to be prepared for include:

- Tell me about yourself.
- Can you walk me through your resume?
- Why are you interested in the position we have available?
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What do you know about our company?
- Where do you see yourself in 5/10/15 years?

These questions can be difficult to answer on the spot. By preparing your answers ahead of time, you have the opportunity to think through your answers carefully.

During the Interview
If you’ve done your homework, the phone interview itself should flow easily.

- Don’t be caught off guard -- be prepared for the call to come early.
- Have your materials close by – but don’t have too many things in front of you that could become a distraction. Have a copy of your most recent resume, a copy of the job description you are applying for, questions you have for the employer, paper and pen(s), and a glass of water.
Remember to ….

- Speak clearly. The important thing is to make sure the interviewer can hear and understand you – and vice versa. Make sure not to speak too closely to the receiver.
- Sound positive, focused and self-confident.
- Be a good listener.
- Avoid interrupting -- let the recruiter complete his/her thought before you respond.
- Don’t smoke, chew gum, eat or drink (except for water periodically).
- Take your time to answer the questions. Don’t hesitate to take a moment or two to gather your thoughts!

Before you Hang up

- Thank the interviewer and ask permission to follow up with him/her should you have any questions. Get the name and contact information of the person you are speaking with.
- Ask about the next steps – and ask for a face-to-face interview. The purpose of the phone interview is to be invited for an in-person interview. “Thank you for taking the time to talk to me. I’d like an opportunity to meet with you in person. When will you be scheduling the next round of interviews?”
- Reiterate your interest in the position – let the interviewer know you are excited about the prospect of working with the company.
- Send a thank you note and send it out promptly – the interviewer may be making decisions soon about who they will call back and you’d like your name go across their desk on more time!

After the Interview

Take notes! Write down what you were asked and how you answered it. What questions did you handle well and what questions could you have answered differently? What questions did you ask the interviewer? What is the next step? Make notes of ‘dates’ regarding the next steps and be sure to be in touch with the interviewer should those dates come and go!

Remember, the phone interview is just the beginning -- your goal is to get an in-person interview. It is meant to be a screening. It can be nerve wracking but you’ll find the more you do, the easier they will become. While some phone interviews happen with little warning, in most cases you have just as much time to prepare as you would for other interviews, with the added benefit of being able to use your notes during the interview!

Don’t hesitate to schedule a mock phone interview with a career counselor for a time that is convenient for you! We’re here to help!