

The Telephone Interview

Review this tip sheet in preparation for your next telephone interview. Topics covered include:

- Creating an interview area
- Gaining time
- Questions to ask
- General preparation tips and tricks

Telephone Interview Area

The telephone interview, while typically used as a screening tool by HR Managers, is still a very important interview and, quite possibly, your one chance to get invited for a face-to-face meeting. To ensure you make your best impression, consider the following:

- Develop a well-organized, labeled file that contains your current résumé(s), cover letters and/or applications attached to job postings, and a list of key words or phrases that succinctly state your skills and qualifications.
- Pen and sticky notes to write down any questions or notes, as well as the name and contact information of the company representative to whom you're speaking.
- Water to drink in case you experience "dry mouth" during the interview.
- A list of anticipated questions and your answers for each job for which you applied. (If you're interviewing in a field with which you have experience, you should be able to anticipate many of the basic screening questions you'll be asked.)

Need More Time?

Sometimes you're simply not ready when you get "the call." Here are a few techniques to buy you minutes or hours.

- Ask for a minute to close the door to your home office and take that time to (quietly) pull together your thoughts.
- Ask if you can call the interviewer back on your land line if you expect to encounter signal interference.
- Explain that you are just getting ready to go into a meeting or need to finish a project on a deadline and ask if you can call back within 30-60 minutes. Be sure to tell the interviewer that you want to be able to meet your current responsibilities but that you are very interested in speaking to him or her and want to be able to give your full, uninterrupted attention.

Make sure you are being honest and be careful about pushing for any more time than what's noted above (unless there is a legitimate reason to do so). The HR manager can just as easily move on and interview many other willing and able candidates.

Questions to Ask the Interviewer

Like any other interview, this type of interview should be treated as a dialogue. As such, you should be prepared to ask a few questions to demonstrate your interest and knowledge. Following are some sample questions, although the course of the interview may also drive your questions.

- How would you define/describe the ideal candidate for this job?
- What are the top 3-5 priorities in the next 3, 6, 9 or 12 months?
- How does this position fit into the company's long-term strategy?
- How did this position come to be available?

Other Tips and Tricks

- Listen closely. Close your eyes to avoid distraction temptation and force yourself to hear everything that is being said and implied.
- When the speaker quits talking, provide some type of verbal acknowledgement that you are there and heard what was said.
- Stand up while you're interviewing. This helps you breathe better. Additionally, you will not be tempted to fiddle with items on your desk, check your e-mail, or get distracted by something else.
- Don't offer more information than what is asked of you. Volunteering too much can make your answers less succinct and focused, as well as elongate the interview unnecessarily.
- Take notes so you can ask informed questions and follow up.
- Thank the interviewer verbally at the end of the interview and ask if you can provide any additional information to help him or her in the decision to bring you in for a meeting.
- Make sure you send a thank you note to the interviewer as soon as possible, outlining any key strengths or reinforcing important concepts.
- Use a good quality headphone set if possible to keep your hands free for note taking.