

Phone Interviews - New Skills Required

The phone interview appears to be here to stay. The idea for this article originated when three former co-workers experienced this type of interview in June. One of these co-workers interviewed with two different companies in one week: her first ever phone interview and a face-to-face interview.

Why is it Popular?

The phone interview's increasing popularity can be explained by what happened to another friend the previous November while seeking employment out-of-state. He had two phone interviews with the same company: one with HR and one with the Engineering Manager. Only then was he flown down to Florida for the face-to-face interview and the job offer. As the Internet makes it simpler to apply for jobs anywhere, the phone interview means cost savings for the hiring company...and a new set of skills for you to learn.

Do Your Homework

The Internet is an valuable resource for interview skills and when looking for sample interview questions. Use it. Look at all sites. When the information starts repeating itself, you have enough.

While researching, keep open a separate text file. Whenever you find a nugget of information on a site, cut and paste the article or set of questions into the file. Surf the web, then cut-and-paste, then surf and cut-and-paste some more. This way you don't have to read and retain all of the online content immediately. (Bookmarking a site may not be good enough because web site content changes so frequently.) Go back at your leisure and reformat the document to conserve paper and make it easy to read. When it gets large, print it and start another file. You can take the printed copies along to read whenever and wherever you please, highlighting important content.

The Interview and Interviewer

From research and discussion with people who have been "voted off the island" or "deselected," you may experience these two types of phone interviews:

- Screening Interview
- Classic Interview

The Screening phone interview may be done by someone in Human Resources (HR), so it is possible that this person may not know details of the job. Or, as has actually happened, it could be someone in HR who is new to the company - it was only her second week there!

Be aware during any interview that you may have an inexperienced or poor interviewer. In cases like the one mentioned above, you'll need to adjust responses to fit the situation. You don't want to highlight the interviewer's shortcomings or put this person, who could be important to your professional career, on the defensive. The point is that you should be aware of who you are dealing with – not just me-focused and in selling yourself.

Always treat a phone interview as a real interview. You may actually be talking with the hiring manager.

Overall, a Classic phone interview may be a disadvantage to the job-seeker compared to a face-to-face interview. There are no visual cues at all. Also, no distractions, no small talk about the office décor or “Did you find the place OK?,” etc. It is all business.

Before the Phone Rings

Have these items in front of you for the interview. You can tape them to a wall or pin them on a cork board in front of you.

- Resume
- Job Description
- Exit Statement – a carefully-worded paragraph about why you are looking for new employment. If due to a company downsizing, state that your JOB was downsized. Hopefully, you can bridge that by adding “XX positions were eliminated.”
- Description of where you are coming from. The interviewer may not know about your current (or last) company. Have the company's vital statistics (number employed, annual revenue) at your fingertips as well as a brief summary of what the company does and what your job description is/was.

Also have available:

- Questions you want to ask. List each question immediately followed by a blank space for recording the response. Use different colors for the questions; then another color when you write the responses. This way you can tell exactly what transpired during the interview.
- Blank pad and several pens for notes

Hints for the Interview

- Some recommend standing up while talking on the phone, but you may feel more comfortable sitting.
- Using a speaker phone makes it easy to write down information. Be careful to eliminate background noises, such as the furnace running.
- Be sure to have the person spell their name, title, phone number, mailing, and email address. Then you'll be able to respond with a thank-you note after the interview.
- Having researched the areas in which your experience is weak will prove a benefit during the interview. Have a list of terms and definitions in front of you that can be appropriately worked into the conversation. Knowledge of the company/industry should impress your interviewer, as long as you are careful not to overdo it.
- Smile. It shows in your voice. If you doubt this, speak to someone who can't see your face and ask them to tell whether you were smiling.

Timely Spot Interviews

Keep your research organized and separate for each resume submitted, because you might be invited to have an “on the spot” phone interview. Here is an actual experience from this type of interview. The HR person identified herself, stated that she wanted to do a phone interview, and considerately suggested that she call back in 10 minutes asking if that would be all right. How quickly could you be ready?

One last thing...when interviewing, keep in mind that for the most part you are dealing with considerate people who are trying to fill a need that they have. They are not out to get you. So, relax, but be professional.

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