

These brief reminders are offered to help you prepare for a successful telephone interview. The most important points for many candidates are in the sections “Be Direct and Concise” and “Pause to Clarify.” Take a few extra minutes on those points, so you don’t inadvertently talk your way OUT of a job!

## The Objectives

Typically, there are two parties to a telephone interview: the interviewer and the candidate. Each is there with different objectives. Remember these distinct objectives when getting ready for a telephone interview.

What is your interviewer trying to learn from you? The interviewer's objectives are reflected in the following questions:

Are you qualified for the position?

- ✓ What is your work experience? What did you accomplish in your prior positions?
- ✓ Do you have good verbal communication skills? Active listening skills?
- ✓ What kind of personality do you project? How will other people respond to this personality?
- ✓ Are you a sufficiently interesting candidate to advance in the interview process, to be invited for a face-to-face meeting? (This last one is the critical one.)

As a candidate, what are your objectives?

- ✓ Demonstrate you are worth further consideration, specifically a face-to-face interview.
- ✓ Collect valuable information to help answer the question "Is this job a good opportunity for me?"

In summary, your goal is to persuade the interviewer that you have the skills, background, and ability to do the job and that you can comfortably fit into his/her organization. You should not be asking direct questions about how well the job fits *you* at this stage of the interview process. That comes later.

## A Day or More Before the Interview

Taking a little time to organize your thoughts will pay off during your interview.

### Review the company’s web site

Your conversation should show that you're not merely looking for a job; you're looking for a job with this particular employer. Most interviewers expect candidates to have visited their web site. If you haven’t, your lack of interest is obvious.

### Review the job description if it’s available

There is probably a job description on the website. If not, inquire with the person who set up your interview.

**Prepare questions.** Most interviewers will ask candidates if they have any questions. Prepare your questions ahead of time, but also be ready to ask different questions based on the interview content. For example, if your questions have been partially answered during the interview, it will appear you haven’t been listening if you ask them anyway. Preparing questions in advance frees your mind during the interview to concentrate on your responses to the interviewer's questions.

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## Successful Telephone Interviewing and Getting to the Next Level

The best questions you can ask are the ones that focus on how well you fit the job, not how well the job fits you. Remember, your goal is to get to the next level of interviews. This is a sale. You should be focusing everything you have on making the sale. Your questions should not be buyer questions (what's in it for me to take the job?) but seller questions (what's in it for you to hire me?). Here are examples of seller type questions:

- ✓ What would it take for me to be in the top 10% of performers in this position?
- ✓ What, in your eyes, what are the characteristics of the perfect candidate for this job?

### Position yourself

You can't really know beforehand whether or not you want the job, but you can be sure you want the job offer. You can't turn down a job that isn't offered to you. Once you succeed in getting to the next round of interviews, you can always get your buyer questions answered before accepting an offer. Whenever you are interviewing, your primary strategy must always be to position yourself to advance – even if you have some concerns or reservations. This strategy keeps you viable and provides numerous valuable benefits, including:

- ✓ Helps position you to get the most money possible for a potential job offer.
- ✓ Provides you with more options and/or opportunities with this prospective employer.

### 5 Minutes before the Interview

You've done your homework. Now take a deep breath and review this checklist:

- ✓ Have a copy of the resume submitted to the interviewer in front of you. This is important because it can provide information about what the interviewer is looking at and potentially will provide clues and insight about questions and the direction of the conversation.
- ✓ Have your list of questions available in an easy-to-read format. Space your questions to permit taking notes that you can review after the interview.
- ✓ Have paper and pen available to write notes about the interviewer's questions, your responses, and any other significant information. Remove all distractions, and put yourself in a quiet environment. No TV, no mobile devices, no radio, no newspaper, no magazine, no computer! It's harder to maintain concentration during a telephone interview than a face-to-face interview, and the interviewer is almost certain to hear a lack of involvement in your tone of voice.

### The Telephone Interview

This is your opportunity. Make the most of it by following these guidelines:

#### Be on time!

If you're late, no matter how valid your reason, you're making a statement about your ability to plan and prepare for the unexpected. You're also indirectly making a statement about your respect for the interviewer's time.

#### Be polite

Simple courtesies, if not extended, could cost you a job. For example, do not interrupt the interviewer. Generally, people like to be addressed by their name. These are subtle points, but can convey superior interpersonal skills far better than saying, "I have superior interpersonal skills."

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## Successful Telephone Interviewing and Getting to the Next Level

Use active listening skills. Don't plan your response while the interviewer is talking. You need only a few seconds to think about your response before giving it. The interviewer will wait for you, and there is nothing wrong with a little silence between the interviewer's words and yours. Thoughtfulness is better than glibness.

Additionally, listening increases your power. The old adage, knowledge is power, is correct. The power gained through listening is that you have more data at your disposal. Your responses can be more relevant, powerful, and appropriate. Your decisions about your interest in the opportunity will be more dynamic.

### **Be direct and concise**

Don't ramble! A major component to successful telephone interviewing is keeping your responses direct and concise. Try to keep responses to 25 words or less. Remember to listen to the interviewer's question, and then formulate a response before speaking. This process will help keep your responses direct and concise. It also conveys the impression of good or active listening skills AND indicates you have good verbal communication skills.

If the interviewer wants additional details, let him or her ask. At the same time, seldom respond with a simple "yes" or "no". This isn't a quiz, it's an interview, and the interviewer wants to know what you are thinking.

Avoid clichés and worn out expressions. Using clichés and jargon (examples: "team player", "think outside the box") is less effective than fresh, professional language. Avoid vague or abstract language; leave no doubt about the meaning of your words. Clarity, specificity, and correctness lend confidence and power to your message. Remember direct and concise.

### **Pause to clarify**

If you're not sure that your response answered the interviewer's question, use a tie down. Example: "Did that answer your question?" If the interviewer wants more information, he or she will ask for it. You may be surprised how many times the interviewer will move to another topic. This process minimizes the opportunities for you to risk volunteering unnecessary or unflattering information.

### **Pay attention to your non-verbal response**

Telephone interviewing does not provide any visual clues or body language for feedback. The meaning that is derived from your answers comes both from what you say and how you say it. In fact, the tone of your voice will account for a significant percentage of the perceived meaning. Your responses should convince the interviewer. Show your conviction, confidence, and enthusiasm through tone of voice.

Emphasize key words and concepts with your voice. Emphasize the important ideas, the ones you want the interviewer to remember. Use your voice to create contrast - high and low, loud and soft, reserved and excited. But don't get carried away and appear insincere! Sound like an enthusiastic employee that the manager will want to spend time with.

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## **Be confident**

Don't over-qualify, excessively preface, or apologize for messages as you send them. Avoid exaggeration and overstatement. Appeal to the self-interest of the interviewer, who is trying to determine what you offer and evaluating "what's in it for me?"

## **Be assertive**

Show how much you want to work for this particular company or the depth of your passion for the industry or position you're seeking.

Ask for the job. At the conclusion of every interview, thank the interviewer for his or her time and clearly state your desire for the position. Remember to mention the added value you can bring to the job. Ask what the next step in the interview process is; ask if that next step can be scheduled now. Your closing should be tailored to the position, to your personality and interviewing style, and to the interviewer.

## **After the Telephone Interview**

Here are two final suggestions for a professional touch following your telephone interview.

### **Send a thank-you note**

You'll have a better chance of making a favorable impression. The majority of employers like receiving a post-interview thank-you note, but surprisingly few applicants actually write them.

A simple email will suffice, but it's better to have an email *and* a letter. A thank-you note need not be long or fancy. Thank the interviewer for his or her time. Make it clear that you are excited about the job, that you can do it and want to do it. Be sure to carefully proof the message for spelling and grammar because this note illustrates your written communication skills.

### **Call the recruiter immediately**

If you got the interview through a recruiter, they are your advocate, so call the recruiter immediately after the interview. Discuss your perceptions of the conversation, the interviewer and your interest level in the opportunity. Mention any particularly difficult question(s) asked during the interview and give your response.

Making a post-interview call to the recruiter also reinforces your level of interest in the position to the employer. The recruiter is your advocate, and this communication serves to prepare the recruiter for important follow-up with your interviewer that may advance you in the interview process and lead to an invitation for a face-to-face meeting.

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