

Successful Telephone Interviews

If you are seeking a new career opportunity, chances are you will be asked to engage in a telephone interview – a screening tool favored by most employers. Telephone interviews allow hiring managers to explore a candidate’s work history and abilities, as well as evaluate the candidate’s enthusiasm and interest level before committing to a face-to-face meeting, thus saving companies time and money.

At this stage, your mission is to sell yourself sufficiently, to be invited in for a personal interview. By following the guidelines below, you will learn how to create a proper first impression, thereby greatly increasing your chances of reaching your goal.

Schedule a specific time

Suggest that you will make the call and arrange a specific time for the call to occur. You will be more prepared and more comfortable. Find a quiet place where you won’t be interrupted by possible disturbances (e.g., your boss, family members, friends, pets, TV sets, stereos, etc.)

Locating a phone next to a desk or table will be most helpful since you will need several materials in front of you. If you are participating in a phone interview at home, the kitchen is a preferred location – counter space for materials, minimal distractions and room to walk around allowing you to release nervous energy.

Be prepared for a complete interview

Job candidates often make a big mistake. They treat their first telephone interview with a prospective employer as a minor formality. Don't be fooled. Companies look for reasons not to bring people in for interviews. If you want to succeed, you must prepare for the initial "phone screen" as carefully as you will prepare later for the face-to-face interview.

In order to “sell” your skills and abilities effectively, you should keep the following items next to your phone: your resume, a list of your accomplishments, probing questions about the company, a notepad, possible interview dates and times and a glass of water.

Be prepared (even rehearsed) to answer the following questions:

1. Why are you interested in a career change?
2. What are you looking for in your next position?
3. Why are you interested in this position?
4. What is your experience related to this position?
5. What are your short and long-term goals?
6. What can you tell me about our company?
7. Tell me about yourself.

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Questions for the hiring manager could include the following:

1. What are you looking for in the “ideal candidate”?
2. What are the critical factors for success on the job?
3. What are your company’s short and long-term goals?
4. Why is the position open?

By asking questions during the interview, you subtly start taking control of the conversation

If you sense the interviewer relinquishing control, continue with your line of questions. Interject short responses intermittently to acknowledge the interviewer’s comments (e.g., “That’s interesting,” “I see,” “Great idea,” etc.). Conclude responses with “check-back” phrases such as, “Does that answer your question?” “Is that what you’re looking for?”

Project a winning image

In a face-to-face interview, your appearance and body language can help reinforce the impression you are trying to create. Over the phone, however, their impression of you will be based on your voice and your answers. Confidence and strong communication skills are a must. However, you do have an edge – you have your home field advantage, familiar surroundings with your notes in front of you.

Listen to each question carefully and respond enthusiastically with concise, fact-filled sentences. Responses should be limited to 90 seconds. Describe your ability to impact the company by using specific dollar amounts and percentages to explain your past accomplishments.

Close for an interview

As you proceed, try to get a feel for the chemistry or rapport that has been established. If you feel the interviewer is impressed with you, and you are interested in pursuing the opportunity, do not hesitate to close the conversation by pushing for a face-to-face meeting:

“(Interviewer’s name), based on the information you have given me, I am very interested in pursuing this opportunity and would like to schedule a time for us to meet in person. I’m available Tuesday through Friday over the next three weeks.”

If the interviewer agrees that the process should continue, but cannot commit to a specific schedule, suggest that both parties should coordinate their respective schedules through the company’s search consultant.

If you are not interested in the position, don’t burn your bridges. Your misconceptions may cause you to lose out on a great opportunity. Express your concerns with the consultant – he or she may be able to clarify the information due to his or her intimate knowledge of the client.

By following the Leah Yosef International guidelines for telephone interviewing, you will come across as a candidate who should be invited in for a personal interview.

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