

Phone Interviewing Tips

Here are eight tips to help you gain the interview response you want regardless of how chaotic your environment is when the phone rings:

1. Be prepared.

Any executive conducting a comprehensive job hunt should expect recruiters to call at unexpected moments. Be ready by:

- Having a place to keep notes and files.
- Keeping paper and pencils by the phone.
- Instructing family members on how to answer the telephone and take messages.
- Preparing three to five key statements about your strengths and listing them on 3-by-5-inch index cards for easy reference.
- Reviewing questions that you can reasonably expect to be asked and preparing answers for them.

2. Sound positive, self-confident and focused.

What you say and how you say it is critical to your career future. If you're properly organized, take out your notes for easy reference during the interview.

The fact that the recruiter has called you indicates that your resume or a member of your network has given him or her favorable impression of you. You need to confirm this impression. Put a smile on your face and into your voice. You need to demonstrate your enthusiasm and interest through your voice and telephone manner, says Roy Bent, Director of Career and Life Coaching for Dynamic Resumes in Baytown, Texas.

Some people find they sound more animated if they stand while talking on the phone. Others say it helps to keep one hand free. Having a lively sounding voice makes you seem upbeat and full of energy. Check how your voice sounds by taping yourself while role-playing a telephone interview. Listen to yourself, and then decide if you would hire the voice you just heard. If not, make the necessary changes.

3. Focus on what you have to offer and can do.

Employers hire people for what they can do for them. The recruiter's mission is to screen candidates and recommend those who will best meet the employer's needs. Your goal is to be recommended for further consideration.

When describing your background, reinforce the positive and avoid the negative. You'll only get one chance to make a positive first impression, says Mr. Bent. Stay focused by reviewing and using the key points you wrote down about your strengths.

4. Be a good listener.

Avoid interrupting and let the recruiter complete his thought or question before you respond. Ask for clarification. Use open-ended questions. The more information you can gather, the better you can respond.

5. Maintain an open mind.

Work towards creating a partnership with the recruiter. Look for areas of agreement. Build on the positive. Find ways to help the recruiter explain why your candidacy will make the employer's job easier and make the hiring manager look good. This can help you create a "win-win" relationship with the recruiter.

6. Think creatively.

Prepare responses to these typical interview questions:

- What are you looking for?
- Why are you looking to change?
- Are you currently employed? If not, why?
- What are your current earnings?
- What are your salary expectations?
- Are you willing to relocate? Change industries? Travel?
- What are your strengths and weaknesses?

Andrea Alece, Corporate Outplacement Relations manager for Dynamic Resumes, believes candidates' past behaviors are good indicators of their future success. She encourages candidates to illustrate their skills with actual examples from their on-the-job experiences.

7. Write out your responses and practice reading them aloud.

This will help you to remember the response and sound natural when providing it. By knowing what to say, you'll seem more confident, in control, organized and focused, all qualities that recruiters seek in candidates, says Claudia Hernandez, Outplacement Services Director of Dynamic Resumes Outplacement division.

Most candidates usually are asked about their salary expectations during screening interviews. Recruiters and employers usually have a salary range in mind, and while often unwilling to share it at this stage, they expect you to answer.

Your objective at this point is to win acceptance and be recommended for further consideration. Accordingly, you may want to avoid providing a direct answer to this question and reply instead by saying something like, "While compensation is important, other issues are also important. If they can be clarified, then the compensation issue won't be a problem."

These issues could include non-cash benefits and compensation, scope of responsibilities, work environment, job location, career advancement and others. It's OK to ask the recruiter what the job pays, says Mr. Bent, and can help both parties in the screening process.

8. Ask about the next step.

At the end of the interview, tell the recruiter you're interested (assuming you are) and want to pursue the matter further. Ask about the next step in the interview process as well as the hiring timetable. If you don't receive a positive response and you're sincerely interested, ask the recruiter if he or she has any areas of concern. If there's a misunderstanding about you or the recruiter doesn't seem certain that you're suitable, try to clarify the problem, and then ask again about the next step and timetable. While a positive response doesn't guarantee you'll be considered further, a cooler response usually signals that you haven't been successful.

By using these eight tips, you'll be more likely to win the first five minutes of the screening interview, which is the key to reaching your career goal.