

Telephone Interviews

One ringy-dingy, two ringy-dingy...*“Have I reached the party to whom I am speaking?”* Unless you intentionally want to sound like the nasally obnoxious Ernestine, played by Lily Tomlin in the popular Rowan and Martin Laugh-In series (NBC: 1968-73), you need to give serious consideration to telephone interviews and prepare for them thoroughly. This is especially true today, as telephone interviews are becoming increasingly popular as a “first round” screening tool.



Follow these simple suggestions to sail through the phone vetting process and advance to the next step in the interview chain.

Listen to Your Voice Mail Recording

You will not be there to answer the phone each and every time it rings, so this crucial message delivers the first impression to prospective hiring managers.

Does your answering machine greet callers with a child’s voice giggling how *“Mommy and Daddy can’t come to the phone right now,”* or mimic a comedian’s voice with a jingle like, *“We might be in, we might be out, so leave a message and you’ll find out!”*

Don’t make the mistake that most people do by ignoring this often-overlooked part of telephone interviews - record a professional greeting asserting the call is important and will be returned within 24 hours.

Pick up Your Messages Often

Dial into your home answering machine or service several times throughout the day to retrieve messages while you are out. Returning calls to prospective hiring managers belatedly does not convey an impression of timeliness and urgency.

Charge Your Batteries & Carry a Spare

Nowadays most candidates will rely on cell phones as their primary means of telephone contact with recruiters. Make sure the battery is sufficiently charged and if you do not have the opportunity to replenish it intraday, carry a fully-charged spare.

Make Telephone Appointments

As excited as you might be when that long-awaited call finally comes in, don’t risk foundering the interview by jumping right into it. Schedule an appointment for a later time so you can prepare thoroughly. If you must, cobble together an excuse of being unable to speak at the present moment - you’re on another call, you were just on your way out for an appointment, or some other little “white lie.”

This is too important for you to jump into this crucial screening interview not fully prepared.

Listen to the Sound of Your Own Telephone Voice



Telephone interviews afford the recruiter only one sense from which to form an opinion - hearing. It doesn't matter what fragrance you used that morning because they will not smell your heady scent, nor will they be able to judge your appearance or body language by sight, or shake hands to get a feel for your firmness and determination through touch.

Consider recording a few sentences of "interview small talk" or your one minute "elevator pitch" and play it back. If you are not pleased with how you sound, rehearse and re-record until you are satisfied.

- ▶ Sit upright or even better - stand. Standing increases the kinematics of your chest wall (rib cage, diaphragm, abdomen and abdominal contents), which allows a greater volume and flow of air to come through in your speech.
- ▶ Consider dressing as though you were interviewing in-person. Sure, you can interview in your pajamas - no one will know and no one will care - but psychologists tell us that we associate more closely with characters when we role-play, much like when children play dress-up.
- ▶ Speak loudly enough to be heard easily, but not too loudly that you come across as deafening.
- ▶ Sit or stand in front of a mirror; facial expressions reflect through the sound of our voice, so being able to see smiles and frowns will help make you aware of, and control, your level of energy and enthusiasm.
- ▶ Don't smoke, chew gum, eat or drink (the audibility of these actions increases over a telephone), but do keep a glass of water nearby if you need to wet your mouth.
- ▶ Use proper grammar and complete sentences.
- ▶ Avoid long pauses.
- ▶ Refrain from using verbal crutches like "Um," "Uh," "Like," and others.

Make Sure Your Surroundings are "Library Quiet"

Eliminate all background noise.

- ▶ If you are taking the call at home, make sure you move to the quietest room in the apartment or house to allay the sounds of barking dogs, cackling children, TVs and stereos, and neighbors mowing their lawns.
- ▶ If you are out and about, find a quiet coffee shop and avoid commuter terminals with shrieking arrival and departure announcements or busy areas with honking horns.

Disable Call Waiting

Don't let intermittent beeps interrupt a job interview; it's too important. Turn off call waiting.

Ask About the Suitableness of Your Responses

Just how the interviewer cannot see your body language, neither will you have any visual clues to see if your answers hit their marks. Pause after offering a few comments in response to each of the interviewer's questions and ask if this is the kind of information they were seeking; then offer to continue. This will give you an inkling of how satisfactorily you answered their question.

Push for a Face-to-Face Meeting

Your goal is to get past this initial telephone screen, but you need to do so without coming across as impatient or arrogant. Prepare and practice some tactics to get into their office and try these when opportunities arise during the telephone conversation.

One example is to sidetrack important questions; *“That’s a great question and one that’s really important because it is so crucial to being successful in this position. Given my skills and experiences in this topic I feel this is a question that I cannot address adequately over the phone. I’d prefer to set up a meeting so I may better explain my qualifications as they relate to this critical point. I’m free Wednesday afternoon - does this work for you?”* It might work; it might not - but it doesn’t hurt to try.

Have These Readily Available:

- ▶ Your calendar.
- ▶ Notepad and pen/pencil.
- ▶ Your research notes on the organization.
- ▶ Your resume.
- ▶ The job description.
- ▶ List of your questions.

Remember to Write a Thank You Letter

Just because this was a telephone interview doesn’t mean that you do not have to send a formal thank you letter or e-mail. Make sure you get the full name and title of the interviewer because you will not have the opportunity to ask for a business card.



Finally, don’t disconnect until the interviewer has hung up, but before ending the call make sure you know the next step in the process, and offer to provide any additional information needed.

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