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## **How to Ace your Phone Interview**

**By: Dale Kurow**

Suppose you have a phone interview scheduled and you're thinking "Piece of cake!" I always do well on interviews and this one will be no exception.

Don't be so sure.

With increasing frequency, companies are relying on phone interviews to narrow the pool of likely candidates. Phone interviewing has proven so cost effective that it has become the norm and recruiters now pack an entire arsenal of tools, honed over years of experience, that are designed to quickly eliminate marginal candidates.

Consider this: A phone interviewer's primary goal is to eliminate you before wasting additional company resources.

Sound unfair? Welcome to the world of phone interviewing.

So how do you make it past the HR gatekeepers and to the next round, the face-to-face interview?

Here are excerpts from my latest e-book, *Phone Interview Skills Sharpened Right Here!*, to help you secure that crucial in-person second interview.

### **Research the Company**

Second only to lacking the requisite skills, the main reason candidates don't get to the next step—the face-to-face interview is failure to properly research the company.

Undertaking in-depth research is just as vital for a phone interview as for an in-person interview! It is a key ingredient in getting a ticket to the next round.

You should have answers to the following questions at your fingertips:

- What are the company's products and/or services?
- What is the size of the company, number of employees, and rank within the industry?
- Who are the company's primary customers and competitors?
- Where are the company's offices, plants and facilities located?
- What are the company's goals, philosophy and mission statement?

- Who are the key players (Chairman, CEO, President)?
- What is the financial health of the company?
- How was the company's performance in the last year?

### **Use a Hands-Free Headset**

One of the few advantages that phone interviews offer over the in-person interview is the ability to consult notes during the interview. In fact, use a hands-free headset so that you can look up notes on your computer if necessary. Be sure to take copious notes that demonstrate your familiarity with the company and your enthusiasm for landing the job.

### **Your Telephone Speaking Voice**

We live in an age of answering machines and voice mail. You'll probably have to make two or three calls before you get a live person on the phone. In fact, chances are, you won't get past the automated voice mail system. You will be judged by your telephone speaking voice BEFORE the actual phone interview through the messages you leave to set up the appointment. People will form an opinion of you based on these brief phone messages alone!

Here are tips to help you improve your telephone speaking manners:

- **Speak Slowly.** Don't make the recipient have to replay your message two or three times just to understand what you are saying! Slow down, especially if you have an accent.
- **Repeat Your Name and Spell it, if necessary.** Pronounce your name slowly. You don't want the recipient to have to struggle to figure out who's calling and why.
- **Repeat Your Name and Phone Number at the beginning AND end of the message.** This way, the recipient won't have to replay the entire message from the beginning.
- **Give Your Phone Number Slowly.** This is one of my pet peeves. I can't tell you how many times I've had to replay messages because the caller sped up when leaving a garbled telephone number. Recall the times when you have tried—and failed—to decipher a phone number and message left on your own answering machine. In a job search, your endeavors will end right there.
- **Tell the Recruiter When She Can Reach You.** Leave a preferred date and time to return your call and also leave the preferred telephone number. This gives the recruiter a better chance of connecting with you.
- **Do Not Leave Long Messages.** Give the recruiter the information she needs and leave the rest for a live conversation.
- **Have a Smile in Your Voice.** Speaking professionally means sounding calm, collected, and positive, even if you've just had the worst day. Your voice needs to be warm, polite and upbeat.

### **What Questions Do You Have?**

When you are asked this question, don't wing it! The subject and focus of your questions is a key indicator of your professionalism, preparedness and your enthusiasm for the job. Further, the way you respond to this question will be the final impression you leave with the interviewer. Need I say more?

Here are examples of key questions you can ask the interviewer:

- What is the company doing to stay competitive?
- Where do you see the most opportunity for growth this year?
- How are you staffing the growth?
- What is the most important contribution I could make within the first 30-90 days of my employment?
- To whom does this position report? Who will I report to?
- How does this position fit into the organizational structure?

### **A Final Note**

When speaking to a recruiter, bear in mind that her primary objective in a phone interview is to determine your viability for a position, and the potential ease or difficulty of marketing you to her client. Don't make the recruiter work hard! Make it easy for the recruiter to sell you to the client by doing an outstanding job of preparing yourself!

Dale Kurow, M.S., is an author and a career and executive coach in NYC. Dale works with clients across the U.S. and internationally, helping them to survive office politics, become better managers, or figure out their next career move. Visit her website at <http://www.dalekurow.com> for information about her latest e-book, Phone Interview Skills Sharpened Right Here!