

practical tips for phone interviews

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For most people, getting the call for a phone interview is a real rush. It is exciting to finally get the call about the wonderful job... however, many candidates let their adrenalin take over and make fatal flaws that eliminate them from the consideration pile.

Stay focused on the employer's goals at this stage of the interview to make the most of any telephone interview...

The phone interview: Technical abilities and price range

(An excerpt from "How to Get a Job Without Going Crazy: 2nd Ed.")

Phone interviews concern the "can you do the job" and "are you the right price" issues. A phone interview is first and foremost a screening tool. Lower-level employees conduct phone interviews and gauge your answers against the given qualifications. Screeners look for the technical proficiency required for the job. Their goal is to bring you in or cut you, a judgment made within 15 minutes or less

You should always expect phone interview question like these:

1. Are you still interested?

Hopefully, the screener will give you some more information about the job, or at least remind you of the open position. With multiple candidates, verifying availability is a priority for the employer. They don't want to waste time chasing uninterested candidates.

2. Verification of your skill set

You will be asked about the skills listed on your resume. In addition to confirming the information, try to include an example, while still keeping the answer quick and to-the-point.

3. Brief summary of why you're looking

Make sure you know how to answer this in a concise way, without pussy-footing around or bemoaning your situation. Develop a simple, clear answer for this question ahead of time. It is acceptable to mention you were laid off. Refrain from disclosing too many details to keep your own tone positive.

4. What salary are you looking for?

As with your cover letter, speak only in terms of salary range. Naming your range is acceptable, but pining down a specific number at this point is not a good idea. If you aren't comfortable with stating a number first, ask the interviewer what *their* salary range is. You don't want to waste time chasing something below your goals.

One variation on the salary question is when they asked what you were making in your last job. This may seem unfair, especially if your salary expectations have changed drastically (either up or down). When answering, you can point out that your circumstances have changed. Unfortunately, because you are dealing with an entry-level person at this point, they may push back harder for a firm answer. They don't have the authority or the knowledge to do otherwise.

Phone information you should pin down

Earning an interview is exciting. Don't let your enthusiasm blind your discretion. If at all possible, ask to call them back in 10 to 15 minutes, or suggest a scheduled interview time. You want to be in the right mindset for any interview, which means taking some time to prepare.

You need to stay focused during a phone interview to capture some screening information of your own. It will help with your pre-interview research later on. Keep your questions simple: the typical phone interview is only 15 minutes, and if you drag it out longer than this, you could be annoying the screener.

Be sure to take note of this critical information:

1. Verify the company, the job title and the interviewer's name

Write it down. You can look up all of this information later. Don't take the time to conduct a quick internet search on the company while you're on the phone with someone. That is not proactive, it's rude.

2. Ask the basic nature of the job – even if you are holding the job description

The screener knows the top attributes. Listen to his answers to figure out the focus of the job.

3. Where the company is located

With internet job postings, you can't tell the location. Even local jobs might be across town and outside of your target area.

4. Their salary range

In case they don't ask for yours, you should always ask for theirs. Again, speak in terms of range, not specifics. If it's not in your acceptable range, don't waste time pursuing this job further.

Salary games: "I'm sure they'll raise the salary for me!"

Some candidates will agree to any salary range on the phone, just to achieve the in-person interview. They believe that they can convince the hiring manager to raise the salary to meet their true target.

Don't play this game with employers. You may be able to raise the salary about their initial range, but expecting to drive the salary 20 – 30% more than the salary cap is unrealistic. Plus, it's extremely rude. Think about how much time of the employer's time you wasted by going through the entire interview process. Employers hate being blind-sided by sneaky salary games. You don't have to take their first offer, but at least be in the ballpark before you step up to the plate.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Since 2004, Donna has been teaching job seekers of all levels effective job search strategies. In 2009, she published her book "Get a Job Without Going Crazy: a Practical Guide to Your Employment Search." Donna is based in Denver, and has presented workshops in Los Angeles, San Francisco and Dallas. She continues to work with job seekers across the country.