



## Tips for a Successful Job Search - Winter 2009

### Phone Interviews

With economic conditions steadily improving and hiring activity showing signs of life, many companies will be faced with the challenge of filling positions with fewer internal resources and reduced budgets. Around the country, organizations' human resources and recruiting departments have both been affected by the recession in recent times. As competition for talent intensifies, employers will have to be resourceful in order to win the war for talent, while keeping their cost-per-hire low. As a result, many organizations are increasingly using phone screens as they interview prospective employees. Once viewed as a perfunctory step in the interview process, phone interviews have now evolved into a critical component of the hiring process and merit as much preparation as a face-to-face interview.

Below are five tips that will help you perform your best on your next phone screen:

1. **Confirm Details:** In order to adequately prepare for your future phone screens, you must ensure that you know about the dates and times of your interviews, the lengths of the calls, and the titles and names of all interviewers. Also, in order to be well-prepared for possible face-to-face interviews in the future, you should not only take notes during your phone interview, but also ask for clarification on any items that were not clearly defined on the phone.
2. **Prepare:** Without a doubt, you must prepare for your phone interview as you would a face-to-face interview. Prior to the interview, adequately research the company and the individual(s) who are conducting the interview. Are there individuals in your network that can provide insight into the culture of the organization? View this stage of the interview process as your opportunity to gather information that will differentiate you from other candidates.
3. **Rehearse:** For a phone interview, you need to practice on the phone. Unlike face-to-face interviews that occur in controlled environments, phone screens are subject to variables like barking dogs, kids or roommates, and poor cell phone reception (always use a land line). Not only should you be prepared for noise distractions, you may also

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want to practice at the same time your interview is scheduled in order to gauge your energy level at all times of the day, whether the interview will occur at 8:00 a.m. or at 4 p.m. Finally, eliminate the use of empty phrases such as 'like' and 'you know' as you rehearse in order to be well-prepared for a successful interview that will not only lead to face-to-face interviews, but future employment opportunities as well.

4. **Project Confidence:** Even though you are not interviewing face-to-face, your body language still affects your tone and delivery. During the interview, you should be seated in an area, like your home office, that is free from distractions so that you can focus completely on your interview. Also, answer questions in a calm, consistent manner and avoid verbose responses. Attention spans tend to be shorter on phone interviews, so keep it simple.
5. **Close:** During the end of your phone interview, you will likely have an opportunity to summarize what you have learned, reiterate interest, and inquire about next steps. Essentially, you have an opportunity to create a value statement about yourself and to convey that you were an active listener who took notes and gained greater insight into the position and the company. You should craft a closing response based on keywords from the job description, information shared during the interview, and answers that received positive feedback. Avoid generic responses such as, 'I think I would be a great fit' or 'I am really interested'. Why are you interested? What makes you a great fit? What did you actually learn during the interview?

As budgets tighten and time lines for hires shorten, employers will seek alternatives to traditional interviewing and hiring methods. The five tips above, if incorporated and practiced, will make each phone interview more productive and will increase the likelihood that you advance to the second stage of the interviewing process. Give yourself a competitive advantage by preparing for a phone screen in the same manner in which you would prepare for a face-to-face interview. If you do, phone interviews will likely convert into job offers for meaningful positions within the scientific industry.

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