

Tips to help you ace your next phone interview

OR

How to win the perfect job without ever getting dressed!

by Nancy Anton, *The Voice on Recruiting*

Your telephone skills will play an increasingly important role in your career success. Virtual interviews are a growing part of the job screening process, and are usually the first interview that you will be invited to. You may have an impressive resume and meet all of their criteria, but if you are awkward on the phone, you may never get the chance to show your stuff.

Telephone skills will also serve you well in other aspects of your job and career. Working virtually is also a growing trend in the way people are being asked to work today and in the future. We all need to embrace the virtual interaction, including telephone interviewing, and find new ways to make it work for us. Though only some jobs are virtual, most often at least one of your interviews for a new role will be by phone.

How comfortable are you on the telephone?

I recently was hired for a new job after only three (3) interviews. All were done by phone. The recruiter was in Florida, I was in Connecticut, my boss, Tennessee and her boss, New Jersey. How can this be? Hired without anyone seeing more than my LinkedIn profile? It happens more often now than ever.

Preparation is key to a successful telephone interview

The best part about a telephone interview is that you don't have to spend time looking for that perfect professional suit and hair style and make up. Your resume doesn't need to be printed on bond, and you won't need to get driving directions. It's very convenient. Putting all that aside, preparing for your telephone interview is extremely important. It's not just a casual conversation. It's about focusing on who you are and what you have accomplished. If you do well, you might get invited to the next step in the interviewing process. With good telephone skills, you may be one step closer to your ideal job.

Here are a few things to keep in mind when you are preparing for a phone interview.

1. **Posture matters.** Once on the call, sit up straight, smile, even put a mirror on your desk so you can see how you are presenting. Dress the part, maybe not as perfect as you would in person, but wear your professional attire so that you feel much more professional.
2. **Don't use a speaker phone.** They never sound as good as picking up the handset. Some managers may choose to use a speaker phone, especially if there is more than one person in the room. Make it easier for them to hear you.
3. **Practice with a friend.** Using the same phone, do some mock telephone interviews with a trusted friend. Ask if you sound clear and loud enough. Move around and try different spots in the room. Sometimes just sitting under an air vent can muffle your voice and create a distraction. Be aware of what is going on around you.
4. **No distractions.** Make sure there are no noise distractions in the background and silence your call notifications so other callers won't beep in. Remember, the person talking with you is listening carefully to you. The easier it is for them to hear you clearly, the better the conversation will go. I often talk with those who don't think about this. Maybe it's the wind blowing into their cell phone, or a noisy room, any of these things that make me want to get off the call as soon as I can. If you can't get to a good place to talk, ask if you can call them back.
5. **Call from a land line** or be in an area where you have very clear reception. "*Can you hear me?*" shouldn't be part of the discussion.
6. **Don't try to work around a bad connection.** If you cannot hear the person you are speaking with clearly, let them know it. You won't lose any points if you say you are having a hard time hearing them or suggest that they speak up louder or move the phone closer to them. You don't want to be caught guessing what they are saying.
7. **Take notes.** Listening skills are the most important since you won't be able to see the person you are talking with. You won't be able to see their physical cues and you won't be able to see if they are remaining interested in what you are saying. To make up for that, take the opportunity to take notes. When asked a question, write the question down in front of you, and stay on point. This will help prevent you from going off on tangents.

8. **Check in.** Stop talking or ask probing questions such as: *Would you like me to go on? Or Is that too much detail? Or Does this answer your question?* Allow the person you are speaking with to set the direction of the conversation. If they want to know more, they will ask. If they change the subject or ask another question, you probably answered it well.
9. **Listen carefully for interruptions.** Sometimes it can be as slight as a louder breath or a try at interjecting a question. If you have good listening skills, you will be able to clue into the pattern they are setting and will be able to hear when they are ready to talk. Taking those pauses is a great way to be on the give and take.
10. **Keep your answers brief.** As a professional recruiter, there have been times where people are so happy I asked a question that they want to do everything to be as thorough as possible in answering. There have been times where I can't even break in to the conversation. Don't let that happen to you. Pause, take a break, breathe, and give them a chance to say something. If they don't, then continue.
11. **Keep your resume visible.** Use your resume. It should be right in front of you. Being on the phone, you are able to have notes, and your resume and the company information right there to help you stay focused.
12. **Be prepared to ask them questions.** I recommend that you have ready a list of at least ten (10) questions that you want to ask this potential employer. Avoid generic questions. Some of your questions will be asked and answered long before you get to the part where they ask, "*What questions do you have for me?*" Don't be left without something. I often judge candidates on the questions they ask as well as the way they answered them. This shows me what they are most interested in and if they did their homework on the company.

In summary, you needn't be afraid of interviewing by phone. It's not that much different than interviewing in person. It really just makes it far more comfortable for you if you take advantage of the situation and make it work for you and your interviewer. Of course, if they suggest you video conference or Skype, that adds a big twist to all this. More to come on that topic in my next article...

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Related resources:

1. Helpful article for the hiring manager – [The Social Tester on how on how to conduct a good phone interview](#)
2. Entrepreneurs and sales professionals can relate to [the challenge of dialing for dollars](#)

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About the writer: Nancy Anton, CPC has been a corporate recruiter for over 15 years and has worked for many different industries and fortune 100 companies such as Cigna, MassMutual, Legrand and General Electric. Nancy is branded The Voice On Recruiting and is a writer, trainer and speaker in the industry. Sharing her experiences with hiring managers, job seekers and other recruiting professionals brings better understanding of the hiring process and more successes for all. Nancy has a Certified Personnel Consultant designation; a Bachelor's of Art in Economics and lives in Murrells Inlet, South Carolina. Link in with Nancy at www.linkedin.com/in/nanton2007/en



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