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“PREPARING FOR A TELEPHONE INTERVIEW”

Don't be caught unprepared when your phone rings, and the person on the other end announces, "Good morning, Mr. Smith. This is the ABC Company. We've recently saw your profile on LinkedIn and would like to ask you a few questions. Do you have a few moments to speak with me now?"

If a hiring representative were calling only to schedule time for a personal interview, it would not be so difficult. But when this is a telephone interview, or pre-interview, you need to be mentally prepared and focused. After all, it will be this pre-screening which will determine whether or not you will be invited for a face to face meeting.

There are many reasons why an employer will pre-screen by telephone.

One reason is the sheer volume of qualified candidates who responded to their opening. It is not practical or feasible to invite twenty-five first-cut candidates in for interview. It's much too time consuming, particularly when human resources departments are now smaller and hiring manager's time is limited.

If you are an out of town candidate, you can expect that this telephone screening process will take place before the company spends money for your travel and overnight expenses to get there.

The second reason for telephone interviews is to evaluate a candidate's verbal and interpersonal communications skills. While this is important for most jobs today, it is particularly important when the open position requires a lot of phone or personal contact such as in sales, customer service, or telemarketing, and of course, leadership. The company representative can hear you as their customers, prospects would. This is an important indicator.

A third reason is to pre-qualify for your salary requirements. The hiring manager may want to know what range you are seeking to save everyone's time. Even though you may be flexible about salary, remember that the position has a designated pay range. They may expect you to provide this information now, or possibly be eliminated from consideration.

What are the advantages of a phone interview? If you are not "dressed for success" when they call, it won't matter – they cannot see you! You can answer phone queries while referencing your resume - something you cannot do in person. Phone screening can help clarify aspects of your background which may not have been clear or which may not have been included in the resume. It gives you the opportunity for extra consideration that you may not have otherwise had.

What are the disadvantages of a telephone interview? You do not have the opportunity to establish rapport in the same way you can in person...through eye contact and a personal handshake. You also cannot read the interviewer's facial expressions or body language to get a reading on his or her reaction to your responses. Another disadvantage is that this may be your only shot to speak with a company representative. This adds pressure on you to be sure your answers will qualify you for that very important goal of a personal interview.

To ensure that your telephone interviews are as successful as possible, follow these guidelines:

1. Keep a copy of your resume handy, so that it will be available to reference when a company representative or headhunter calls.
2. If you are caught off guard or the person called at a bad time, don't be afraid to ask for a more convenient time to talk. Try to make it as soon as possible: for example, within the next half-hour.
3. Stand, rather than sit while on the call. Your voice will come through stronger and more clearly, conveying confidence.
4. Listen carefully to the questions being asked. If you are not clear about what the person is asking, ask them to repeat or clarify the question.
5. Speak more slowly than usual. It is natural to speak more rapidly when we are excited or nervous. Articulate your words, speaking thoughtfully and confidently.
6. Don't get rattled by momentary silence. It's better to pause and have a solid answer than to rush a response to fill in the gap.
7. SMILE during your telephone interview. The person on the other end will be able to sense this. It will also help you to relax.
8. At the close of the discussion, ask what the next step will be. Then, follow up with a brief thank you note, in which you can (briefly) reconfirm your interest.

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