



## **FIRST IMPRESSIONS COUNT – ACING THE TELEPHONE INTERVIEW**

Congratulations! You've been invited to interview with a firm. With increasing frequency, firms are conducting first interviews by telephone. That first telephone interview is your one chance to convince the interviewer to invite you in for an in-person interview. Your sole objective should be answering, completely and succinctly, the questions that the interviewer is asking of you. This is where you make your first impression and there are no "do-overs", so concentrate on making a great first impression.

Firms want team players with:

- Solid analytical abilities
- Intellectual horsepower
- Leadership potential (that's what gets you on the partnership track)
- Stellar communication skills
- Demonstrable accomplishments and tangible results

We've never had a client ask us for a lazy, argumentative, know-it-all dumbass! Nonetheless, that's sometimes the impression we can get about a candidate during our first interview call. So, I thought it would be helpful to give you the inside scoop on how to ace a Telephone Interview (click **here** for a pdf you can use).

I also thought you might benefit from the internal list my fellow recruiters have put together of typical "First Impressions" following a phone interview, since a phone call frequently gives us the first impression of many of our candidates. I hope you don't recognize yourself!

**The Desperado** I encourage candidates to be realistic about the opportunities available to them and to look at lots of different alternatives. But, this candidate takes it to extremes. Over-anxious, he has no questions for the interviewer about the job, the people or the company. He makes it known repeatedly that things are tight and that he's interviewing for everything and anything. The problem with this candidate is that the interviewer worries that he'll a) jump ship as soon as the market improves or b) will make poor decisions in the job since he is under such serious economic strain. This candidate applies for every single job on our website, without regard to qualification, just to "get a shot". It's ok to apply for a variety of opportunities, but be realistic about your qualifications and keep your personal anxieties to yourself in a job interview.

**The Poseur** This person bluffs answers, takes credit for things that he didn't do (eg, participating in writing the ppm doesn't make you a fundraiser), uses title inflation (calls himself a "founding member" when he was a junior guy who was invited along with the senior guys spinning out into a new firm). This candidate works into the discussion

(without being asked) how much money he has made, lists deals he can't talk about and likes to drop names of people with whom he has no substantial relationship. There is a time and place to reference common alliances and compensation, but it's not the first telephone interview. It's more important to be yourself. Fit is a critical deciding factor in any hire and pretending to be someone you're not is a terrible recruiting strategy.

**The Rambler** This candidate rambles on for 20 minutes about whatever she feels a need to get out and then finally says "So, to answer your question, ..." and every question goes on the same way. Worse, when the interviewer tries to redirect the discussion, this candidate talks louder or faster to get it all out as if she was asked to give her final thoughts before a firing squad. Active listening will help you make sure your answer is responsive to the question. Asking, "Would you like me to go into more detail on this subject?" is a good way to see if the interviewer would like to further explore the brief, concise answer you gave to the question.

**The Control Freak** This candidate tries to run the conversation and "steer" the discussion to what she wants to talk about. She talks over the interviewer, doesn't let the interviewer finish before jumping in. This candidate is also known to act pre-emptively by calling in references to talk the candidate up and move along the process or find ways to "bump into" the interviewer. We know, the process is often slower than is comfortable when you are a candidate, but patience and learning to "go with the flow" can send a message of being a cooperative team player, especially at this early stage of the process.

**The Teflon Guy** This candidate tells confidential info about his firm/partners/clients as a way to demonstrate being "in the know". There is always someone else to blame for every move on his resume or deal that fell apart – nothing is ever his fault. Be prepared to briefly address why you left each job giving an example of something you learned from each experience and how you improved in your next role. Humility & loyalty are good traits to cultivate.

**The ShapeShifter** – Closely related to the Desperado. The interviewer can never pin down what this candidate is about because she is always changing her answer to match the question or comment. If I ask what she wants to do, she says X. I say, we focus on Y. She immediately says, "Oh yes, I LOVE Y! Y is my dream job." Same thing with geography, or timeline, or any question. She tries to "game" the interview by constantly being agreeable to a ridiculous point, assuming that once she is "in" she can be herself or change roles within the firm. Flexibility is an advantage, but only if you have some reasonable semblance of direction.

**The Invisible Man** This candidate makes it difficult to schedule, is unresponsive to the recruiter and/or client for follow up, seems distracted during telephone calls as if surfing the web, reading emails or engaging in another activity, goes radio silent at any stage in the process. It is key when you are interviewing that you check your voicemail and email and be responsive and actively engaged in the process. Otherwise, expect the client to interpret your lack of response as disinterest and to drop you from the process.

**Party Animal** This candidate tries to be the interviewer's best chum, uses colloquial expressions or slang ("hey man", "dude"), racial/ethnic slurs and ANY kind of profanity. Yes it DOES happen! This candidate will also repeat himself, use phrases like "yep" "believe me", "you can trust me", "can I be honest with you", etc. While it is important to build rapport with the interviewer, professionalism and competence is what will get you the next interview.

We talk to hundreds of candidates every week who are wonderful, responsive, agreeable, talented professionals. These oddballs are ones you don't want to model yourself after in conducting your job search. You want your phone interview to be memorable and to win you an invitation to meet with the company in person. You only get one chance to make a first impression, make it a good one.

**Click here** for a printable list of tips for phone interviews.

For help preparing for a phone interview or to schedule a mock interview, email me - [dpalmieri@pinnaclegroup.com](mailto:dpalmieri@pinnaclegroup.com)