



Telephone Interviews – Prep Sheet

Phone calls are different than Face to Face Interviews ...

Many of our clients prefer to start the interview process with a telephone screen. While this seems conceptually easy, it is not. In many ways, it can be much more challenging than an in person interview since you have to convey your personality and interest without the benefit of non verbal communication like body language and personal charisma.

What we have found from the countless debriefs we have done is that that at least 50% of the time, when one of our clients decides not to pursue one of my candidates it's because the candidate dominated the call and did all the talking. A lot of candidates over answer questions and give TMI. The thing to remember about phone interviews is that you have limited time and you cannot read your audience. You are unable to tell how engaged the hiring authority is. Therefore, you need to make sure you are answering each question concisely and check in with your audience regularly. Very often a person excels not in the content of their answers, but on the quality of their questions. Open-ended, thought provoking questions that show that you've done some preliminary research and have reflected on this opportunity are ideal.

The second significant reason clients pass is because the candidate comes off as unenthusiastic and disinterested. Again, you are relying only on your verbal ability so try to develop rapport.

Keep in mind that the goal of the phone interview is for both parties to learn enough information to move on to another round. If you were ever set up on a blind date you know that a phone call with the prospective “date” is invaluable. It is a two way street and hopefully there will be mutual chemistry to set up a physical meeting.

Here are some tips for you to consider:

Scheduling the Phone Interview

Think about where you will be and how much time you will have for the interview. Try to allow yourself a half hour or more prior to the call so that you can compose yourself and review your notes in preparation. You only get one opportunity to make this first impression and you should treat it like any important presentation.

1. **ONLY** use a cell phone if you are stationary and **KNOW** you will have good reception. Do not risk being mobile and dropping the call. Have paper and be prepared to take notes on the conversation.

2. Believe it or not we have had candidates take the call at Starbucks, not a good idea. So select a quiet place and make certain there are no distractions (i.e. emails popping up, barking dog, screaming kids, espresso machines, traffic, etc).
3. Confirm the time zone of the call and the caller. Missing the call because you didn't have the time zone correct is inexcusable.

Preparing for the Phone Interview

1. Know your background in depth and be prepared to talk about it extemporaneously – not using the same verbiage as listed on your resume. Review your resume; does anything need to change on it? Have you left your job but the resume says “current”? Prepare yourself to discuss your entire job history, including dates and earnings, a brief answer on why you left each role, the main skills you learned from each job and how they apply to this job, specifics of transactions you show on your resume. Do you have any gaps in employment to explain?
2. Think about the key functions of this job... where have you had experience and SUCCESS in similar responsibilities in your past? Be prepared to offer specific examples of what you've done that will make you successful in this role and will show you can be a contributor to the firm from Day 1.
3. Use prepared notes rather than a script, a highlight film.
4. Research the firm, the interviewer and the members of the team in depth. Know something about deals they have worked on, firms they worked at before, and their personal activities. Don't be constrained by the firm's website, use all the resources at hand to be prepared to demonstrate ways that you will fit into the firm's culture and deal structure. **Be careful however in using word of mouth as a resource, you don't want to create competition for yourself in this job by letting others know you're interviewing at this early stage.**
5. Practice interviewing with a friend, your recruiter and, if possible, record your practice so you can hear how you sound and the mannerisms you display in your phone demeanor.

Immediately before the Phone Interview

1. If your call is in the morning, make sure you are up and active at least 1 hour prior. Exercise your voice – talk to people, sing, get your speaking voice ready.
2. If your call is mid or late day – give yourself a half hour or so prior to the start of the call so you can clear your thoughts, shake off the other experiences of the day and compose yourself to be your relaxed, confident, best self.
3. Check your phone reception, if you are using a cell phone.
4. Clear the area of distractions – TV off, computer email program off, kids out of the area, not in traffic areas. Make sure others know you are not to be disturbed. Do not read email or surf the web while on this call. The interviewer can always tell if you're doing something else.
5. Review your outline and the most important points/questions you want to cover.
6. Have a glass of water handy in case you need it to clear your throat.
7. Have paper and be prepared to take notes on the conversation.

During the Phone Interview

1. Stand up or sit up straight - you will be less nervous and will project better.
2. Enthusiasm and passion are all you have to sell. Dale Carnegie suggests a mantra, “ACT ENTHUSIASTIC AND YOU’LL BE ENTHUSIASTIC that you repeat 5 times before a presentation or in this case an interview. If you can do it out loud and forcefully you will see it is hard not to be up (much like a basketball team getting psyched to go out on the court)
3. Have a copy of your resume in front of you. Unlike personal interviews you can have a cheat sheet in front of you so take advantage and it will help you see what the hiring authority is seeing.
4. Start by thanking the person for taking time to speak with you.
5. Be an active listener – watch the flow of the conversation, is there a balance of who is talking and who is listening?
6. Be sure to avoid cutting the other person off (one hint is to count to 3 when they pause).
7. Watch colloquial language (“Man”, “mm-hmm”, “nope”, etc.) Do not swear or use slang.
8. Do not complain about your current or prior employer, have a concise explanation for why you intend to leave or have left each opportunity, rambling explanations raise lots of questions and “personality conflict” or “lack of opportunity” usually trigger an assumption that you are the one with the difficult personality or are unwilling to pay your dues.
9. Remember, nothing is “off the record” or “just between us” in an interview. If you share confidential information about a current or former employer, the interviewer will assume you’ll do the same about them.
10. Have some questions ready. What do you really need to know to determine if this opportunity would be right for you and that, if invited by the firm, you would accept an in person meeting.
11. You must try to find out if there are any questions about your credentials. Flush out objections with, “Is there anything about our conversation today that would keep you from setting up a second interview?”
12. If you are interested in pursuing the opportunity further let them know by having a closing statement that says something to the effect, “I’ve enjoyed our conversation. This sounds like a compelling opportunity, I would be interested in meeting with you and your colleagues. If you are interested in that as well please let me know directly or reach out to Pinnacle Group and I will make myself available.”

After the Phone Interview

1. Call the Pinnacle Group recruiter and debrief on the interview. They will then call the client to discuss his or her feedback and determine what steps to take next.
2. Prepare a follow up email to thank the interviewer for their time, expressing your interest in the opportunity and one or two points you found specifically intriguing about the opportunity from the call. Short and sweet and sent that day or the very next day. Thank you notes are essential.

Good luck with your phone interview!