

## Telephone Interviews

Telephone interviews are becoming more commonplace in the recruiting market, and you should be well prepared if a recruiter wants to spend time on the phone with you in that context. Often, telephone interviews are used for primary or screening interviews that can help a recruiter narrow down a pool of candidates. Increasingly, however, many internships will be decided by one or two phone interviews. With an internship, because you will only be with the company for a few months, many organizations will understandably not fly you to New York or L.A. to meet with them. In short, no matter what the context, chances are you will experience a phone interview in your job search, and you should be prepared.

### *General Interviewing*

Much is the same about telephone interviews and in-person employment interviews. The Career Center has a handout on employment interviewing, and if you haven't read it, *you should do so now, before preparing for your telephone interview*. The handout covers some basic preparation, possible questions and interview tactics (when to speak, how to answer typical questions, etc.).

### *Before Your Telephone Interview*

Be prepared. Below is a list of common tactics and ideas to keep in mind as you prepare.

- ◆ Practice with a mock interview with at Career Services. Call (765) 658-4280 to schedule one.
- ◆ Prepare your answering machine or voicemail: the message should be up-to-date, clear, and concise—not silly, long or musical. A recruiter may not listen to “Hi, this is Lisa, Tracy, Margo, and Wendy. Lisa’s at softball practice, Tracy’s in and out usually, Margo’s taking a nap, and Wendy, well, she’s busy. But leave us a message and we’ll get back to you. In the meantime, here’s a clip of our favorite song...” Instead, try, “Hello, you’ve reached \_\_\_\_\_ at 765-658-0000. We’re not here right now, but please leave a message.”
- ◆ Make sure your cordless or cell phone battery is not low. Turn call waiting off.
- ◆ Prepare for the time slot: many interviewers will schedule a time to call you, much as they would schedule a time for an in-person interview. *If you agree on a time, be there!* As with any interview, be early. The extra 15 minutes will not only allow you to prepare yourself, but also, if the recruiter calls early, you’ll be available. If the recruiter is late, don’t worry. Just stay put, working on some homework or something else.
- ◆ Prepare the environment: make sure that you will not be interrupted. The last thing an interviewer wants to hear, for any reason, is “Can you hold on for a moment?” If, for any reason, you absolutely have to divert your attention from the interview, excuse yourself in a brief and professional manner. Make sure the radio and television are turned off, and if possible, that the room is empty except for you. Also, have a glass of water available.

- ◆ Have a list of positions you're applying for near the phone so that you don't have to ask the interviewer when he or she calls what position they're calling about.
- ◆ Prepare for the questions: interviewing over the phone gives you a chance to prove your knowledge—without having to memorize extensive facts. It's just like an open-book test. Prepare a packet of information that you can have available during the interview. Include your resume, cover letter, a profile of the company and the position, relevant background, talking points about your work experience (stress the positives—even if they ask you what your worst experience was, spin it), and any other pertinent information. That way, you can stay on track during the interview and prove your preparation skills. Also, make sure you know your experiences well enough so that you don't read right from the resume. It's a dead giveaway that you aren't prepared.
- ◆ Prepare for pop quizzes: if possible, even have the company's website brought up on your computer screen. Should they ask a question for which you don't know the answer, you can try to do some quick thinking with the help of your browser. Please note: if you do have the computer on, turn off the volume! An interviewer expects you to have notes, but they don't want to hear IM sounds or anything else in the background.
- ◆ Do your research and have questions ready.

### ***During the Interview***

- ◆ Dress for success: even though you can't be seen, dressing up will help you to act more professional over the phone. It works, and the person on the other end can tell.
- ◆ Stand up: your voice sounds different: more powerful, more assertive and more full. It just makes a better impression. Smile: although they can't see you, it changes your tone of voice and makes a better impression.
- ◆ Have your information packet open and ready at all times.
- ◆ Have a notepad and your calendar ready.
- ◆ Make sure, at the beginning of the call that you will be available for the entire time that an interviewer needs.
- ◆ Make sure you're already aware of the interview tactics mentioned in the handout, "Employment Interviewing," available in The Career Center.
- ◆ Because the employer can't see you, your body language plays a less important role. Make sure you end your answers to questions well and make it clear that you are finished.
- ◆ Don't be afraid of pauses. Instead of filling them with chit-chat, use that time to ask a follow-up question related to your previous answer.

- ◆ Just because they can't see you doesn't mean that you can eat or chew gum.
- ◆ Concentrate. Focus. Stay on track.
- ◆ If you can't hear the interviewer clearly, don't be afraid to communicate that. Just let the recruiter know that you are having difficulty hearing him or her.
- ◆ Let the interviewer end the interview. Thank them for their time, and send a thank you note after you're done. Yes, this does help to separate you from the pack.

### *Special Cases*

#### *Impromptu interviews*

Sometimes, employers want to test your ability to think on your feet. Should you receive a call when you're not expecting one, don't freak out. They might also decide to do an impromptu interview when you're calling to inquire about openings. Although you should always be prepared prior to calling anyone, you can do one of several things:

- ◆ Explain that you were just "on your way out to an appointment," apologize for the inconvenience, and offer to call the interviewer back at another time.
- ◆ Explain that you're in the middle of another project, telephone call, et al, and offer to call back in five minutes. This will give you time to prepare.
- ◆ Continue the interview right then. In this case, as you exchange opening greetings and pleasantries, it's a good idea to pull out your interview packet, which you'll already have available. Just be yourself, and don't stress: chances are, if they're doing this to you, they're doing it to all candidates, and so you're all in the same boat.

#### *Missing the call*

If, for some reason, you missed the call, you'll probably find a message on your answering machine or voicemail wondering where you were. The moment you receive the message, call back. Even if it's 7:30 or 10:00 at night, you'll still be able to leave a voicemail message. Leave your name, number, and the position for which you were applying. Apologize and offer to set up a better time to speak. Be prepared, though: if the interviewer is still there, he/she may want to do the interview right then.