

# Phone Interviewing Tips: By Joanne Faille

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Since a phone interview is typically a screening tool, your goal is to be invited to meet in person with the employer. Some companies phone screen routinely, while others phone screen to overcome potential concern. Do you know which is the case? Either way, put forth your very best effort.

Your objective is to convince the interviewer that you are worth inviting in for a face-to-face meeting.

## **Preparation - Before the Call:**

- Know the job for which you are interviewing.
- Focus and preparation for a phone interview are as important as for a live interview.

Do your homework first – take an hour or so to review background information on the employer. Most companies offer product information and management profiles on their web site, along with corporate accomplishments, channel information, etc. Search for common ground both in domain and product experience, and general background – be prepared to reference information, and to identify the points in your background that are most relevant.

Be sure you are in a place where you can concentrate without distraction, can hear and be heard clearly, and can take notes and read.

Some experts say you'll sound more professional if you look and feel as if you're in a live interview. Consider dressing the part for the phone interview. It may sound silly since the interviewer can't see you, but you really will project a more professional image if you're dressed for the part instead of wearing, for example, slippers and sweat-pants.

This is not an informal chat – treat it as an Interview -- have the following at hand:

- Your resume, so you can remember highlights of your experience and accomplishments.
- A list of professional accomplishments and results delivered, to remind yourself of key points you want to cover with the interviewer. You don't want your responses to sound scripted, but you do not want to fumble for, or omit, important points.
- Outlines of stories that demonstrate your competencies and problem-solving abilities.
- A list of questions you might want to ask the interviewer, specific to the company, industry, and to the position based upon what you hear in the interview, if given the opportunity to do so. Be sure to prepare intelligent questions, keeping in mind you will be assessed by the questions you ask as well as the answers you give.
- Your calendar, i.e., a list of possible interview times and dates. (Hopefully you will be asked!)

## **Phone Call Mechanics - The Scheduled Call:**

- Busy people, hectic schedules, you know the drill... Phone screens don't always take place right on time, therefore it is advisable not to box into yourself into a tight schedule, but rather leave “slush” time on either side of the scheduled call.

- Don't take it personally if you occasionally get stood up altogether – after all, how can it be personal when the interviewer hasn't even met you?! If that happens to you, and if the phone screen is rescheduled, maintain a positive attitude – attitude shows, and it counts.
- A word about the spontaneous interview, the unscheduled call from an interviewer that begins “Is this a good time?” -- ideally this is indeed a good time, because the interviewer is at your disposal and this is your opportunity to make an impression. Of course you want to be try to be accommodating - conversely, if you are caught at an inopportune time, speak up or risk making an impression that is less than desired.

### **The Phone Interview - Content and Context:**

A phone conversation does not afford the ability to convey or interpret body language or facial expressions. Your challenge is to communicate effectively and make a personal connection. Everything depends on your articulation and tone.

- Mentally prep yourself. Be prepared with answers to the most common of questions, i.e., the dreaded open-ended "tell-me-about-yourself" – have a tight sense of what you want to convey.
- Be enthusiastic, but do not dominate the conversation. (In the event that you find yourself nervous and tongue-tied, say so, and hopefully that will help relieve the sense of pressure.)
- Use concise, fact-filled sentences and phrases.
- Do not ramble or over explain. Conclude responses with "check-back" phrases such as, "Does that answer your question?" and "Is that what you're looking for?"
- Don't feel you have to fill in silences. If you've completed a response, but the interviewer hasn't asked the next question, don't start babbling just to fill in airtime. Instead, ask a question of your own related to your last response.
- Show that you've done your homework by asking a few intelligent questions based on factual information you have obtained about the opportunity. Demonstrate industry knowledge by asking thoughtful questions. For example, "The industry seems to be moving toward [emerging technology]. How does your company plan to compete?"
- DO NOT ask self-serving questions, e.g., about salary, benefits, etc.!

### **After the Interview - Follow-Up:**

- The interview is behind you - if you came away with clear feedback and a defined path forward that's ideal, but this won't always be the case. Any feedback short of “sorry, you're not what we're looking for just now” leaves an open door to initiate further communication.
- Consider following up with a brief note of thanks, including a few short lines that re-enforce your strong fit for candidacy, and your sincere interest. In the high-tech world, this is likely an e-mail note – do copy your recruiter. If you opt to send a follow-up note, remember you are being judged on your every action – spelling and grammar count, as does content.
- Oops - you can't believe you blew the question to which you unfailingly know the answer after-

the-fact - use good judgment as to whether follow-up communication on this will make a difference, and if so, communicate that.