



Serious job placement.

Strategies for Phone Interviews

By Bob Larson, CPC

Phone interviews are becoming increasingly common these days especially in the fast-paced information technology industry, where companies are regularly involved with numerous job searches to fill open positions. In many cases, there's just no time for face-to-face initial interviews to screen a variety of candidates. But the phone interview can also be a very stressful encounter, especially if the call comes in when it's not a good time for the candidate to talk. On top of that, many people just don't like phone interviews period.

Careers columnist Amy Lindgren is one of those people. She dislikes them so much that she devoted a recent column to the subject, carried by Knight Ridder Newspapers, offering strategies for people to employ to make phone interviews work to their benefit. If you haven't had a phone interview as of yet, chances are you will sooner or later. Here is Lindgren's advice on how to best deal with them.

With rare exceptions, never launch into an interview from another conversation. For example, if an interviewer calls because you have sent a resume, and then says, "Why don't we talk for a few minutes right now," you are being asked to participate in an interview. When the call comes in, your first line of defense is to gain an equal footing. If you agree to the conversation, request a time later in the day or the next day when you will be more fully prepared. Yes, it's possible you'll lose the chance to talk, but there's an even better chance that you'll miss an important point if you talk when you're not prepared.

Use whatever time you have to lay some groundwork. If you don't have any information about the company, conduct some research in the time you have. At the very least, look for the company's listing in the Yellow Pages, and check the company's site on the Internet Pages. Then, prepare a brief list of questions, and a list of relevant experiences that you want to share.

Find a quiet place where you won't be interrupted. Put the phone on a table or desk and put your files and a notebook nearby. A headset is a wonderful tool for these situations; if you anticipate several phone interviews it might be worth the investment. If you have a call-waiting function on your phone, and are able to turn it off, do so. You don't need the distraction of the beep-beep in your ear.

As the interview begins, check to see that both parties can hear the other clearly. Agree on a length for the conversation and the expected outcome. Avoid three-way conversations and speakerphone interviews at all costs--they simply are not to your advantage. As the interview comes to a close, request an in-person follow-up and ask to set a date. You may not be successful, but it's better to try. And thank the interviewer just as you would in a more conventional interview.

As a follow-up, in addition to the standard thank-you letter, it's a good idea to include a few paragraphs summarizing the conversation and your main qualifications for the job. This will provide a good reminder later as the interviewer looks over phone notes from other candidates.

Of course, employers usually won't hire you without seeing you. But this initial conversation is just a way to determine if you are worth seeing. So make sure you're prepared so that you can put your best foot forward. If you don't like phone interviews, you can certainly try pushing for an in-person meeting, even offering to meet the employer before the workday begins or at some other convenient time at or near their office. If that doesn't work, accept the inevitable with grace, and vow to use a little strategy to keep the tables turned in your favor.