



IDEAS AND TIPS FOR TURNING INTERVIEWS INTO OFFERS

Telephone Interview

Objective

The objective of a Telephone Interview for a candidate is to share enough information with the client to either be asked for a second phone interview or to receive an invitation for an onsite interview. A second objective for the candidate is to get your initial questions about the job and company answered.

Preparation

You should allow up to 1 hour for a phone interview. Find a quiet, private location to conduct the interview where distractions and interruptions are at a minimum. Have the following available during the interview:

- A copy of the version of the resume sent to the interviewer.
- A note pad and pen.
- Five or six carefully worded questions you'll want to ask.
- Company literature with pertinent sections highlighted.

The Interview

Begin the interview by thanking the client for taking a few minutes to speak with you.

Phone Personality

The need to make a good impression on the phone cannot be overemphasized. The telephone screening interview is a make-or-break proposition, your one chance to convince the interviewer that you are worth serious consideration. The interviewer will be listening carefully to determine three factors: your sincere interest in the job, how you verbalize your qualifications and how aggressively you pursue the position.

Voice reflects personality. A well-modulated, controlled voice communicates authority and heightens the verbal impact you want to make. The quality, pitch and tempo of your speech convey a certain attitude, energy level and enthusiasm.

Here are some practical tips to enhance your phone "personality" and overall presentation:

Talk directly into the mouthpiece. Hold the receiver approximately three inches from the mouth, not below your chin or above your nose. Speak in a relaxed, conversational style as though the other person was in the same room, not on the other side of the planet.

Avoid sitting in a hunched position, grasping the phone in a vise-like grip. This will add a note of stress, and your voice will communicate that uneasiness. Try standing, it opens your diaphragm to a smoother airflow and imparts a feeling of liveliness. Getting up and moving around introduces an element of action, which instills a relaxed, conversational manner and reduces fatigue. A longer cord or cordless phone will allow maximum mobility. Ensure that your cordless phone is fully charged!

Sound upbeat. If you had a lousy day and came home to find your spouse and kids arguing, put it out of your mind. Genuine enthusiasm is contagious and very important. Smile to show a sense of humor. After all, the interviewer may have had a bad day too.

Be a conversationalist. Listen carefully to get the big picture and to avoid saying something that indicates any momentary mental distraction. Allow the interviewer to complete questions without you finishing his train of thought or blurting out answers prematurely.

Handle any trick questions in stride. The interviewer may throw in several to test your alertness or mental keenness. Showing verbal adeptness is a sign of how quickly you can "think on your feet." Be cautious: the interviewer may say something that puzzles you or that you firmly disagree with, Show enough respect to voice your thoughts in a professional manner. A defensive posture or argumentative tone is the surest way to alienate the interviewer and eliminate your candidacy.

The Telephone Interview

Establishing rapport at the beginning of the phone conversation sets a favorable tone. During the first few minutes, mention something that shows commonality of interest or similarity in background. This helps both parties feel more comfortable as the conversation progresses.

Get to know the person behind the voice. Does he show a sense of humor? Is she direct and forthright in supplying information? Does his speech sound "canned", or does it exhibit freshness of thought and expression? Just as importantly, does she actively listen to you, or merely wait for the chance to ask her next question? The interviewer may be a personnel official or a hiring manager. If the individual is someone with whom you will be working, pay all the more attention to her explanation of the job and what potential it offers.

Your prepared list of questions will indicate that you have given careful thought to the prospect of joining the firm. Even though you don't know everything about the position at this point, convey the impression that it's something you are interested in and competent at handling.

Only in a face-to-face interview can you totally sell yourself. The purpose of the phone interview is to identify areas of mutual interest that warrant further investigation. In other words, whet their curiosity and give them good reasons for wanting to invite you to the company location.

Basically, what the interviewer needs to hear and conclude is that you can get the job done. Mentally, he is making the connection between the company's problems and you as a problem solver. Don't overwhelm him with facts and figures; he's only going to remember so much.

You can best make your point by reciting memorable stories that document your ability to analyze a dilemma, weigh alternative responses and choose the appropriate action. By selectively highlighting turnaround situations you spearheaded, you are communicating a willingness to tackle similar problems for his company.

As the conversation winds down, become less talkative and give more thought to what you say. Your final words will generally have greater impact and be remembered longer. Careful word choice and voice inflection will under-score the significance of your remarks. By contrast, a machine-gun volley of words will likely put the listener on the defensive or turn him off altogether.

By the end of the phone conversation, both parties should know how much of a "fit" there is. Provided the job interests you, express your desire to proceed to the next step: a company visit. End the conversation on a positive note. Thank the interviewer for the information shared and again let her know that you look forward to visiting his/her company.

Afterwards

After the phone interview has been completed, call your Recruiter and give them feedback. Share the following information with them:

- With whom did you speak? Names and titles.
- What was the content of the discussion?
- Did you discuss salary?
- Are you interested in pursuing this opportunity any further?
- What did they say about next steps?

Face to Face / In-Person Interview

Objective

The objective of the In-Person interview is to get the company to make you a job offer. The In-Person interview allows you to learn those things you need to know about the position, interviewer, and the company so that you can make an intelligent decision about the job.

Preparation

Research the company

- Use the internet to find any recent news stories about the company (growth, mergers, awards, etc)
- Know the company's products and services.

This will give you information that you can use to ask questions of the interviewer(s).

What to bring to the interview?

- 3-4 copies of the resume that was supplied to the company
- List of References. 3-5 people who can vouch for your work experience. These can be former or current supervisors, peers, subordinates, vendors, etc. You should provide name, title, contact information, and relationship to you. Consult with these references for their approval and to ensure that their remarks are positive.
- Pen and pad of paper. We recommend a bi-fold portfolio, where you can put the copies of your resume and reference information.
- Bring directions to the interview location as well as the interviewer's phone number in case you're running late.
- Bring along your recruiter's phone number to give immediate feedback after the interview.
- Leave any cell phones or pagers in your car.

The Interview

Arrival at the interview

- Arrive no earlier than fifteen minutes before the interview (but no later than five minutes prior to the interview).
- Allow adequate time for traffic, parking and a last minute appearance check. If possible, scout out the location the day before the interview to avoid last minute problems.
- If asked, complete an application. (In some instances the clients will send an application prior to the interview. If this is the case, have this filled out upon arrival.) Complete the application in full and leave no blanks. Do not write "see resume" as a response to any application question. Respond to "expected salary" questions as "open" and "current salary" questions truthfully. List references if requested, your recruiter's name should be your response to any "referred by" questions.

A typical sequence of events are:

- Interview with Human Resources (general questions. review of the company and their benefits.)
- Interview with the immediate supervisor and peers.
- Interview with the hiring authority (manager, etc.).

Shake hands firmly and maintain eye contact with the interviewer.

Maintain a high energy level. Sit up with back straight. No coffee (to spill) and no smoking.

It is to your advantage if a subject of mutual interest arises, but do not fake knowledge. Be yourself. Poise, confidence, and self-respect are of great importance.

The interview should be a two-way conversation. Ask questions of the interviewers. This shows your interest in the company and the position, and enables you to gather the right information to make an intelligent decision afterwards. The questions you have prepared can be asked to the different people you see.

Remember that the objective of the interview is to obtain an offer. During the interview, you must gather enough information concerning the position to make a decision.

Conclusion

If you are sincerely interested in the position and are satisfied with the answers given, you should ask the interviewer if he/she feels that you are qualified for the position. This gives you another chance to review points that may need clarification. Illustrate confidence in your abilities and convince the interviewer that you are capable of handling the position successfully.

Ask for the job.

Make a positive statement about the position. Emphasize that this is exactly the type of opportunity you've been looking for and would like to be offered the position. Ask when you should expect an answer.

Afterwards

After the interview has been completed, call your Recruiter and give them feedback. Share the following information with them:

- With whom did you speak? Names and titles.
- What was the content of the discussion?
- Did you discuss salary?
- Are you interested in pursuing this opportunity any further?
- What did they say about next steps?

Send a note/email to each person that you interviewed with thanking them for taking the time to speak with you. Reiterate your interest in the position and the company as well as your ability to do the job. If needed ask your recruiter for a sample "Thank you" letter.

BEHAVIORAL INTERVIEWING

Behavioral interviewing is a relatively new style of interviewing that was developed in the 1970's by industrial psychologists. Behavioral interviewing asserts that "the most accurate predictor of future performance is past performance in a similar situation." Currently, a large percentage of all organizations are using behavioral interviewing to some degree.

Unlike traditional interviews, which include such questions as:

1. Tell me about yourself.
2. What are your strengths and weaknesses?
3. Why are you interested in working for us?

Behavioral interviewing emphasizes past performance and behaviors. As a consequence, candidates unprepared for the rigor of behavioral interviewing have not fared well. Simply practicing the list of common interview questions no longer works.

Why should you prepare for behavioral interview?

- Candidates who prepare for behavioral interviews are better prepared - even for traditional interviews.
- Using behavioral answers works well with inexperienced interviewers.

· Companies that invest the time and energy in developing behavioral interviews often attract top candidates. Top candidates make the company a more desirable place to work.

How do I prepare for a behavioral interview?

Companies that employ behavioral interviewing have predetermined the skill sets they require for a particular position. These skill sets could include: **decision making and problem solving, leadership, motivation, communication, interpersonal skills, planning and organization, critical thinking skills, team building and the ability to influence others.** The company determines the skill sets by doing a detailed analysis of the position they are seeking to fill. Job seekers also must go through this same process. To conduct a job analysis the job seeker should ask questions such as:

1. What are the necessary skills to do this job?
2. What makes a successful candidate?
3. What would make an unsuccessful candidate?
4. Why have people left this position previously?
5. What is the most difficult part of this job?

Once you have landed the interview, keep in mind the following points.

- * Be detailed and specific. You should have developed three stories that illustrate your past performance. Remember that the interviewer will be operating under the premise that "past performance in a similar setting is the best predictor of future performance."

The best way to accomplish this is to use the three-step **STAR** process or

- 1. Situation or Task**
- 2. Action**
- 3. Result or outcome**

For example, you might recount a time when communication within your work group had broken down (situation). To resolve the problem, you organized informal lunch meetings for people to discuss relevant issues (action). Morale then improved, as did the lines of communication (result). Using this three step STAR process is a powerful way for you to frame your experiences and accomplishments for the interviewer.

- * Limit rambling and tangents. While you can't control what is asked, you can control what you say.
- * Listen carefully to each question. If you are unsure, rephrase the question and ask for clarification. When you respond, be sure to recall your past accomplishments in detail.
- * Practice your behavioral stories using real-life examples. It is very difficult to make up behavioral stories, which is why behavioral interviewing is becoming more popular. By practicing, you will be able to recall with confidence your past accomplishments.

Sample Behavioral Interview Questions

Decision Making and Problem Solving

Give me an example of a time when you had to keep from speaking or making a decision because you did not have enough information.

Give me an example of a time when you had to be quick in coming to a decision.

Leadership

What is the toughest group that you have had to get cooperation from?

Have you ever had difficulty getting others to accept your ideas? What was your approach? Did it work?

Motivation

Give me an example of a time when you went above and beyond the call of duty.

Describe a situation when you were able to have a positive influence on the action of others.

Communication

Tell me about a situation when you had to speak up (be assertive) in order to get a point across that was important to you.

Have you ever had to "sell" an idea to your co-workers or group? How did you do it? Did they "buy" it?

Interpersonal Skills

What have you done in the past to contribute toward a teamwork environment?

Describe a recent unpopular decision you made and what the result was.

Planning and Organization

How do you decide what gets top priority when scheduling your time?

What do you do when your schedule is suddenly interrupted? Give an example.

Other Behavioral Questions

Give a specific example of a policy you conformed to with which you did not agree.

Give me an example of an important goal which you had set in the past and tell me about your success in reaching it.

Describe an instance when you had to think on your feet to extricate yourself from a difficult situation.

Sample Resignation Letter

Informing your current employer of your resignation takes tact and discretion. If they inquire as to whom your new job is with, it is best to tell them that you cannot disclose that information until your new employer announces it within his/her own organization. The following sample letter is suitable correspondence to announce your resignation.

(Date)

Dear _____,

Please accept this letter as my formal resignation as (Title) for (Company) to become effective as of (Date). I have accepted a position in (Location).

I believe this position will offer me more challenge and opportunity for advancement as well as allow me to broaden my own experience and knowledge.

I want to take this opportunity to thank you for your time and efforts in my training and advancement during the past (Time) The support and concern shown by you and the rest of the management team has been deeply appreciated.

I leave (Company) with no animosity or ill will and wish you and your company continued success.

My decision is irrevocable and any counter offers extended by you and/or (Company) will be rejected.

Sincerely,
(Your Name)

Dealing with Counteroffers

What are you really getting when they beg you to stay?

Quitting a job is never easy. Career changes are tough enough and the anxieties of leaving a comfortable job, friends and environment for an unknown opportunity can easily cloud anyone's judgment. But what should you do when your current employer "muddies the waters" even more by asking you to stay?

A counteroffer is an inducement from your current employer to get you to stay after you've announced your intentions to accept another job elsewhere. And, in recent years, counteroffers have practically become the norm.

If you are considering a counteroffer, remain focused on your primary objective. Why were you looking for another job to begin with? If an employee is happy with their current job, employer and/or salary, they're usually not paving the road with resumes. So often times a counteroffer that promises more money never really remedies the real reasons for wanting to move on in the first place.

Apart from a short-term bandage on the problem, nothing will change within the company and when the dust settles you can find yourself back in the same old rut. Recruiters report that more than 80% of those who accept counter offers leave, begin looking for another job, or are "let go" within six to twelve months after announcing their intentions.

Counteroffers are certainly flattering and make an employee question their initial decision to leave. But often times they are merely stall tactics used by bosses and companies to alleviate an upheaval a departing employee can cause. High turnover also brings a boss's management skills into question. His reaction is to do what's necessary until he's better prepared to replace you.

What kind of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they pay you what you are worth?

The things they'll say:

- "You can't leave, the department really needs you."
- "We were just about to give you a raise."
- "I didn't know you were unhappy. Why didn't you come to me sooner?"
- "What can we do to make things better?"

Again, stay focused on your decision and your opportunities.

You need to ask yourself:

- What kind of company do you work for if you have to threaten to resign before they pay you what you're worth?
- Where did the money for the counteroffer come from? Is it your next raise or promotion just given early? Are future opportunities limited now? Will you have to threaten to leave again for another raise or promotion?

You've demonstrated your unhappiness and will be viewed as having committed blackmail in order to get a raise. Your loyalty will also be questioned come promotion time.

Well-managed companies rarely make counteroffers since they view their employment policies as fair and equitable.

If you do consider being "bought back", obtain the details of the offer in writing, as well as a one-year "no cut" contract from the employer. If they refuse, as two-thirds of counteroffering employers do, your decision to leave is made.

Look at your current job and the new position as if you were unemployed, then make your decision based on which holds the most real potential. It's probably the new job or you wouldn't have accepted it in the first place.

