

JUMPING THRU THE PHONE INTERVIEW HOOPS

The goal of the phone interview is to make it to the face to face interview. There are several “hoops” you will have to go through before you can expect an offer. The interview process might consist of one or two phone interviews and one, two or three face to face interviews. Usually the first step of the interview process is for the company to conduct a phone interview. Even the most qualified candidate can trip themselves up on the phone interview and never make it to the critical face to face phase. This article is to help you prepare for your phone interview.

The purpose of the phone interview is to gather basic information and to bridge the gap between resume submission/screening and the personal interview. Often one company rep will conduct the phone interview, but you might be faced with two phone interviewers on a conference line. On the company end, the phone screen step of the process might be conducted with multiple candidate prospects and then the company will determine who from that group gains the coveted invitation for a face to face. Successfully passing through the phone interview will mean that the phone screener has made favorable initial judgements about your personality, energy level, communication style, ability to answer carefully chosen questions, etc. Here are some tips to help you succeed:

- 1. Don't be verbose!!** Answer the questions you are asked succinctly and completely. Don't wander – stay on topic.
- 2. Use a landline.** Don't allow outside noises or a choppy cell signal to keep you from an awesome opportunity. Conducting the call from a landline leaves less room for misinterpretation, awkward speak overs and cuts the odds of disconnection to a minimum. Be sure to use a high-quality phone. Every phone makes your voice sound different; too much treble and you might sound weak, too much bass and you might sound self-important. Find the phone that suits your voice best.
- 3. Attention to detail.** When scheduling this phone interview make certain you have the correct spelling and title of those conducting the interview.
- 4. Do your homework.** Look up the company on the internet, AM Best and additional resources. Hopefully you will know the name of the person conducting your phone interview - check them out on LinkedIn.com.
- 5. Print it out.** Have a physical copy of your resume and the job description in front of you during the call. Prepare a bulleted list of items you want to cover during the conversation. As each one is met, cross it off your list.
- 6. Be prepared to explain everything on your resume.** Any statement on your resume might pique the curiosity of your interviewer. Be prepared to give more detail, but don't take too much time on any one

answer. After a few sentences, ask: "Is this what you were after, or would you like me to go in a different direction or provide greater detail?"

7. **Be prepared to explain every job transition.** Be prepared to explain why you made this or that choice of career direction. Why did you make that lateral move, or how you got that promotion? And what about those short job stints or gaps between jobs? If you left your employment to deal with a family or medical situation, disclose it and be sure to acknowledge that the issue is now fully resolved and you are ready to devote that same 100% commitment back to your career. If you made a change to employment because you were recruited away.....say so. If you left for more money.....say so. If you left for greater responsibilities or if you were part of a larger company reorganizationsay so.
8. **Don't get flustered when uncomfortable questions arise.** Take a deep breathe, re-group. **Be honest.** If a major distraction occurs during the phone interview, disclose it. Your honesty will likely be appreciated; after all, the person on the other line is human too and has likely encountered a similar situation. The worst thing you can do is attempt to cover up something that takes you out of the moment, because it could make you look like you weren't paying attention.
9. **Give yourself time.** Many candidates make the mistake of trying to fit a phone interview during their lunch hour while at work. What if the interviewer is running a few minutes late? The general rule of thumb is - the longer the call, the better you're doing! Take this call at a time where you can schedule a minimum of 45 minutes free. While some phone interviews last only 10 to 15 few minutes, if you end up hitting it off with the interviewer, the last thing you want to do is have to cut them off.
10. **Understand that the interview isn't just about questions and answers.** Your interviewer is likely trained to glean from your conversation your level of self-confidence, personality and ability to communicate effectively. Be yourself. Let your personality show. Don't rush your answers.
11. **Never talk negatively about anyone or any employment situation.** This will only reflect negatively on you.
12. **Practice your response to these basic questions:**
 - Tell me about yourself.
 - Tell me about your biggest strength/weakness.
 - What are your salary expectations?
 - What are your goals in five years?
 - What was your biggest work failure and how did you overcome it?
 - What was your biggest work achievement?

On the question on salary expectations: It is extremely important that you do not answer this question with a number. Once a number has been laid out on the table it's very hard for your recruiter to negotiate around it and change it. You don't want to price yourself out of the range and you don't want to go in too cheaply. The best response to this question is to respond that you are "open" and looking for an offer in keeping with the responsibilities of the position, COL in the area and what you bring to the table. Always

be honest as to what you are making today/recently as you might have to verify the information you offer through a pay stub, W-4, 1099, etc.

13. **Prepare great questions to ask.** You will likely be given an opportunity to ask questions. Use this time to show your enthusiasm and interest. Never use this phone screen as an opportunity to ask about their process, start dates, salary, benefits **or anything else 'they can do for you'.** The interview has to be about them, the company, and more about what you can do for them.

14. **Control your environment.** Always arrange to be in a quiet, well-lit room, free from distractions. Sit in a chair with relevant materials easily in front of you. Give your sole, focused attention to your interviewer. **No pets allowed.** If you conduct the phone interview from home, do it in a pet-free room. Make sure your cat, dog or bird is occupied and safe in another room, so barking and meowing is out of earshot. As cuddly as they might be, don't give a pet the opportunity to be a distraction during this important phone call.

15. **Say thanks... fast.** Unlike a face-to-face interview, there's no shaking of hands afterwards and no chance to look the person in the eye and ask for the job. It's important to leave the best impression and follow it up with a sincere thank-you note (email). This note should be sent within an hour or two after the phone interview. This note is your 'top off' – your chance to keep your name in front of the company. Close and "top off" the loop and reiterate your interest in wanting to meet the interviewer in person. Again: **the goal of a phone interview is to get an invitation for a face-to-face meeting; don't be bashful – ask.** If you can't send the email right away, make several notes about the call while they're fresh in your mind. These will come in handy when you send the thank-you note later in the day.

At the end of your phone interview it's very important that you give feedback to your Lost Dutchman Search recruiter as soon as you can. Call or email.

When you keep these tips in mind, you'll jump through the first hoop with ease.

Now, prepare for your face to face interview!!