

Job Seekers: Treat Telephone Interviews Like In-Person Interviews

Some of the worst interviews I've experienced as a hiring manager were telephone interviews. I once had a job seeker "Daniel" (name changed) take my telephone interview while he was driving in his car.

I could hear everything, from the traffic noise to ambulance sirens to Daniel stopping at a service station and filling his car with gas. The candidate could have simply sat inside his parked car for the telephone interview. Instead, he wrongly assumed I wouldn't notice that he took the call while he was driving.

Unfortunately, what this behavior projected to me was that the job was less important to him than driving in his car and filling it with gas. His lackadaisical attitude could also be seen in the way he answered many of my questions, which provided further confirmation of his questionable character. As you're probably guessing, he didn't get the job.

For many jobs, you must first get through a telephone interview before you're invited to an in-person interview, so don't discount the importance of it. Here are tips to ace telephone interviews:

- Act like it's an in-person interview. Research the company and industry, prepare potential interview questions and answers, and practice interviewing over the telephone with someone so you can get the feel for it before the actual interview.
- Test your telephone voice. Practice how you speak over the telephone so you'll come across sounding clear and at the right volume. Introduce yourself at the beginning using a strong voice that sounds confident and avoid answers that ramble or sound monotone. Feeling a little lethargic? Try standing up when you talk to help you sound more energetic.
- Eliminate background noise. Ensure you can hold the interview in a quiet location. If you're interviewing from your home, be sure no one will pick up one of the other telephones and accidentally interrupt the interview.
- Have the right documents available. This includes your resume, the job description, your list of questions for the hiring manager, a note pad and several pens, reference list, recommendation letters – everything you'd normally bring to an in-person interview. Put them on the desk or table in front of you and spread them out so you can easily see the information.
- Dress the part. There's something to be said for putting on the clothes you'd wear to an in-person interview and wearing them for your telephone interview. Just the act of getting dressed for the part of a job candidate will help your mind psychologically get ready for your telephone interview.
- Have some water handy. You never know when your mouth will go dry, so have something close by to sip. Just don't accidentally knock it over onto all of your paperwork. And, don't chew gum, eat food, or smoke while you're on your telephone call. Trust me, the interviewer will hear you.
- Listen and think before you speak. Allow the hiring manager to take the lead during the telephone interview. Listen carefully and answer each question succinctly. Don't go off on tangents when answering questions over the telephone and never interrupt the interviewer.
- Finish your telephone interview with class. Practice asking questions that will help you uncover what the hiring manager thinks of your qualifications and to find out the next steps in the hiring process. Reiterate your interest in the position and thank him or her for their time.
- Treating telephone interviews with the same level of importance as you'd treat an in-person interview will increase your odds of advancing to the next step in the hiring process.