

How to Handle A Phone Interview

Last time we talked about writing resume. After you submit your resume for a particular job, you might get a call or email to schedule a phone interview. Phone interview is an economical and effective way to screen candidates. It is usually one-on-one with human resources or department managers who this position will report to (we call them hiring managers). Yes, hiring managers are not HR!

No matter who will be on the phone with you, you **MUST** do your homework before you are on the phone. If HR does the interview, mostly likely HR will have a list of “qualifying” questions from the hiring manager. Here are some tips for preparing for a phone interview with HR –

- Print out your resume and the job ad
- Be very familiar with what you put on your resume and match each job requirement with your corresponding experience and skills.
- Prepare your “cheat sheet”, which means you can write down your key experiences and accomplishments on a piece of paper in bullet points. Key project experiences are great to share with the interviewer so write down 2 or 3 good project management or leading examples if you have any.
- Prepare 2-3 questions about the company and the division
- If asked about your current compensation, you should give HR what your current base and bonus is. I don’t suggest avoiding giving direct answers to this question.
- If asked about your expectations, try to avoid giving a specific number or range. A good answer is to tell HR that you are flexible and open to any serious offer. It’s best to talk about salary more seriously after your on-site interview. If you work with a recruiter, let him/her handle salary negotiation and you should let the recruiter know your real expectations.
- At the end of the phone interview with HR, you should ask him/her what will be the next step and when you should expect to hear from them about the next step.

When the hiring manager conducts the phone interview, there is a lot more you need to prepare in addition to all the above-mentioned –

- There will be mostly technical questions. It’s the biggest difference from talking to HR.
- Prepare anything and everything that will sell your skills and experiences. Write them down on your “cheat sheet”!
- Answer questions directly. I can’t stress more how important getting to the point is. Some candidates talk and talk but they are beating around the bush. It could be a deal breaker if you don’t know how to give direct answers. It’s part of communications skills.
- Show your interest level. Tell the hiring manager you are excited about this opportunity and you are confident about the fit. Companies like candidates who show interest.
- Ask about the next step before finishing the conversation.
- Lastly, speak slowly but clearly. If you are not confident about your English, the best way is to rehearse in front of a mirror or ask a family member to give you mock-up interview questions. The more you practice, the better you will become during the interview!

Be positive, confident and most of all – be very well prepared!