



More Ways to Ace a Phone Interview

A little effort can go a long way to a successful first discussion.

By Sarah E. Needleman

You might think that being at home for an interview means a more relaxed environment. But experts say the key to success is being as diligent as you would be in person. Advice to help you ace the phone interview.

Hide distractions. Keep email, magazines and other alluring visuals out of your line of sight, advises Chris Falvey, senior principal, human-resources operations analyst at CA Inc., a software company based in Islandia, N.Y. "I've had people who've had to ask me to repeat questions," he says. That does not make for a good first impression. Likewise, silence any background noises. "If a TV is on in, (interviewers) can tell," says Angela Alper, talent acquisition manager at Chubb Corp., an insurance company based in Warren, N.J.

Be personable. A warm voice and a sense of humor can go a long way toward establishing a friendly rapport with interviewers, says Andy LaValle, executive director of executive search at Time Warner Inc. in New York. "You want to get your story across with a little bit of fun, a little bit of panache," he says. Pay attention to your voice inflection, adds Katherine Spencer Lee, a district president in Atlanta for staffing firm Robert Half International Inc. "Because you can't see someone's facial expressions, the tone sometimes plays as big a role as what you're saying," she says. "People (sometimes) come across as unenthusiastic."

Request feedback. In a phone interview, you can't read a recruiter's body language to know if you're on track. When in doubt, it's OK to ask: "Is there any area you want me to go deeper in?" says Cindy Nicola, vice president of talent acquisition at Electronic Arts Inc., a videogame publisher in Redwood City, Calif.

Explain how you'd relocate. Due to the sour economy, many employers are unwilling to help new recruits sell their homes or get out of leases. If you're vying for a job that requires a move, show how you can make that happen on your own, suggests Joyce A. Foster, vice president of human resources at Hilex Poly Co. LLC, a manufacturer with 10 U.S. locations. "A number of candidates have said to me that their house is already up for sale," she says. "It just makes the whole process go faster."





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Be open, honest about pay. If interviewers insist on knowing your minimum salary requirement, give an honest answer and then ask the recruiter if the amount is within the job's pay range, suggests Julie Loubaton, director of recruiting and talent management at Consolidated Container Co., an Atlanta-based manufacturer. If it's not, consider offering to be flexible; there may be some wiggle room, she says.

Ask questions. When the interviewer is done talking, ask smart questions about the job and company to demonstrate your interest in the opportunity, advises Maureen Crawford Hentz, manager of talent acquisition for North America at Danvers, Mass.-based manufacturer Osram Sylvania Inc. For example, you might ask how the economic stimulus package has affected the business, she says.

Say thanks. Before hanging up, ask the interviewer for his or her email address so you can send a thank-you that also reiterates your interest in the job. "Do just as you would after a face-to-face interview," says Paul Newman, assistant vice president, human resources, at OppenheimerFunds, an asset-management firm in New York. "It goes a long a way."

Write to Sarah E. Needleman at sarah.needleman@wsj.com

