



SOCIETY OF ACTUARIES

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Telephone Interviewing Made Painless

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One day, you will probably be presented with the job of a lifetime. Before you get too excited, you will have to embark on the interview process, a series of conversations with your potential employer. Most of you are pretty good at making conversation, and have many interesting things to tell people. However, an interview is not a casual conversation, and should never be treated as such. It is really a sales pitch—and you are the product.

The best candidate is often the best prepared one. The preparation does not need to be arduous. Some planning will be beneficial, and will help to provide a fabulous first impression.

I've divided the initial interview into six easy to follow steps, from doing your homework beforehand, to writing a post-interview thank you note. They have been summarized to help you understand what you need to accomplish to maximize the probability of success.

Step I: Do your homework. "If you fail to plan, you plan to fail" has never rung more true:

1. *Peruse the company's Web site.* Read up on the company's products, financials and current happenings.
2. *Use your network, and get the "inside scoop," or talk to a friend from a major competitor.*
3. *Know yourself.* Review your resume. Go over your accomplishments and make some notes about them. During the phone conversation, you should have your resume in front of you, complete with personal notes and observations about your accomplishments.

4. *Practice interviewing.* Be prepared to answer at least three basic questions:

- Why do you want to leave your company?
- What are you looking for in your next role?
- Why should we hire you?

I tell my candidates to tape record themselves asking and answering questions. About 75 percent follow this advice, and almost 100 percent of those doing this report it to be beneficial.

5. *Prepare your questions.* Here are some issues that you should ensure are clear to you:

- What will I be involved in for the first six months?
- What are some of the skills needed for someone to succeed in this job?
- What do I need to accomplish in the first six months to be considered a fantastic hire?
- How will my performance be measured?
- How will I be mentored and developed?

Step II: Set the tone. All of these guidelines are obvious, but merit review:

1. *Unless absolutely necessary, use a land line.* Cell phone service continues to be spotty. You do not want to risk a dropped call or fuzzy service.
2. *If possible, turn off your call waiting.* Otherwise, never take another call unless it's a personal emergency. The interviewer deserves your undivided attention.
3. *Answer the phone as if it were a business call.* At the time you expect the call, answer with your full name.
4. *Find a quiet, private place in which to speak.* Starbucks doesn't cut it.



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Step III: Manage the conversation. You are being judged and considered during every step of the process, and the phone interview is no exception.

1. *Answer the questions succinctly.* You want to captivate the interviewer and make him or her excited about what you've done. After hearing the question, take a few seconds to plan your answer, and then begin to respond. Your answers should be no more than one minute long.
2. *If you don't understand the question, rephrase it, based on how you think it should be answered.* The interviewer will let you know that you're on the right (or wrong) path. Then answer the question, but succinctly.
3. *Never disparage any current or previous employer, manager or colleague.*

Step IV: Ask questions that sell you. (See Step I, Number 5). Always have some questions prepared. You will be judged by the quality of your answers to the interviewer's questions as well as the quality of the questions you ask. This is not the time to ask about salary and benefits. The offer, prepared after the final interview, will include this vital information.

Step V: Be enthusiastic. Once the conversation is essentially complete, always leave the interview with the impression that you are really excited about the opportunity, even if you have a concern. This could go away once you meet the team. End the discussion with a statement such as, "Joe, I really enjoyed our chat, and am excited about this fabulous role. What are the next steps (and when, if not defined)?"

Step VI: Make a great final impression. Always send a thank-you note to the interviewer. A brief e-mail is sufficient.

If you feel insecure about your interviewing skills, your recruiter or the career services division of your alma mater will be happy to assist you.

The phone interview does not have to be painful, nor should it ever be taken lightly. A great interview takes a little preparation, and with good planning, you will be assured of an invitation to the office, and maybe even a whole new career path! Additionally, you will be learning how to interview and transition jobs. In today's job market, these are crucial, valuable tools. □

