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60 Minutes: The Phone Interview

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When someone has decided to consider new career opportunities, it is a big deal! There are so many things to consider, such as the following:

- What kind of step am I looking to make?
- How much more money am I looking to make?
- Will I really be able to relocate?
- I have great benefits; how are the benefits at the companies I'm looking at?
- Are the long-term opportunities better elsewhere?

Many people want to learn the answers to some or all of their pressing questions early in the interview process. Although getting those answers would be an ideal situation for someone seeking a new role, it's unlikely that many of the answers to those questions will come to light until further along in the process.

Upon telling a candidate that a company wants to have a phone screen, I'm almost always asked something along the lines of, "My family wouldn't be able to relocate with me for six months; should I mention that?" Or, "I need a big step up in money to make this move; should I ask what the range for this position is?" or many other questions that simply are not right to bring up in an initial interview. When I'm asked whether those things should be brought up, my reply is: "You have 60 minutes to impress the interviewer. Asking those questions at this stage is not the best way to show you are a great fit for the role. Those questions will get answered along the way, but when you have 60 minutes to make the impression you want to make, spending time on issues and concerns will not get you to where you want to be."

So, how do you want to spend those 60 minutes? On a very basic level, employers are essentially assessing an interviewee on two things: Can the person do the job? Do I want this person working for me? An interviewee wants to convey competence and a collaborative essence in the phone screen.

To convey competence, review the job description for the role for which you're being considered. Write out notes that describe your competencies for all the responsibilities. When there is something in the job description that you haven't done before

(and hopefully there are some, particularly if you are considering a role that either broadens the scope of work you've done or takes you to a new level of responsibility), note how your experience to date will lend itself to the work. Be able to describe why you are looking to expand in those ways, too.

Review the company's website beforehand, and explain in the phone interview why the company is of interest to you. For example, if you are currently at a large company and interviewing at a small one, be ready to explain why you think you'd fit in well in their environment—or vice versa.

When conveying why you would be a good person to have on the team, think about the work you will be doing and the different interactions you would have in the role.

Review the LinkedIn profile of the person with whom you will be speaking. Whether it is someone in the human resources department or a hiring manager, think about what that person will want to know about you. Be prepared to impress by being well prepared!

Many candidates have a perceived need to interview the interviewer—to interview the company they're considering joining. The best way to do that is to ask well-thought-out questions that indicate a positive outlook yet get you the answers you need. Keep your ears open for red flags, and take note of the concerns you have and figure out the best ways to get to the answers you need. The hard questions most interviewees want to ask simply won't matter if no job is being offered! And many don't need to be asked, because they become immaterial along the way. The better the interview process goes, the more likely the interviewee will get more of his or her needs met. So the best thing someone can do is put him- or herself in the position to be the best candidate for the job.

As with any search one partakes in life, a job search involves an evolution in thinking. What seems most important at the beginning may become less important along the way. The importance of any one variable might go from low to high or vice versa. Some things that seem important might fall off the list, and items not previously thought of might land on the list of things to consider. It's a journey. Be invited to continue the journey by making sure that your first 60-minute phone interview gives the interviewer the information he or she needs to conclude that you're a great fit for the role! ■



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