TELEPHONE INTERVIEWING TIPS

Telephone interviews are a common practice in today’s job market. They are offered for a variety of reasons including time/cost savings, pre-screening, and reaching out-of-town applicants. It is important to have a game plan prepared prior to the telephone interview. The following tips will help you get prepared.

DO SOME RESEARCH

- Find out who is conducting the interview. Is it one person or several people? Try to get the names and titles prior to the interview. Conduct some background research on the interviewer(s) via the internet and your contacts.
- Research the organization. What are the key issues it faces? How does this position fit into the mission and goals of the company? Be aware of issues and topics that may put the organization in the news.
- Learn everything you can about the specific position for which you are applying. Learn about similar positions at competitor organizations and have some idea of the salary range where this position fits.
- Explore the websites of competitors so you can be knowledgeable about the employment sector.

ORGANIZE YOUR THOUGHTS

- On an index card, make a list of your strengths, goals, and accomplishments. Create another list of weaknesses and what you have done to improve your weaknesses. Finally, create a list of what interests you in the company and prepare some talking points on how you can add value to the organization.
- Keep these cards in a place you can refer to them during a phone interview and for use if you are invited to a further interview round. This will help you tell a consistent story about your skills and accomplishments in future meetings.
- Make a short list of questions you would like to ask during the interview.

PRACTICE, PRACTICE, PRACTICE

- Like any interview, a phone interview requires practice. Take time to practice questions and answers with friends and family. Set up a “mock interview” with a member of the SFS Career Development Center staff to walk through tough questions and get candid feedback.
- Review a list of potential questions and write out your answers. This exercise helps you to refine your answers in a succinct and clear manner.
- Pace yourself. Practice answering the questions into the phone. Speak slowly and clearly. Keep in mind that the people on the other end will be taking notes.

FIND A GOOD LOCATION

- Stake out a quiet space to hold your interview. You will need a chair to sit in and a table to spread out some papers. You may even want to have your laptop up and running. However, do not open your laptop during the interview if you will be distracted by e-mail and other communication.
• Make sure there is no noise or background music during the interview.
• Let family, friends, and roommates know the interview time so you will not be disturbed.

DO A SOUND CHECK
• Make sure you have a professional voicemail message on your home or cell phone in case the interviewer calls when you are not expecting it. This is vital as it may serve as the company’s first impression of you.
• Check out your phone and make sure it works in the location where you will be interviewed. Call a friend to make sure the line is clear of static. You do not want to have one of those “can you hear me” moments.

ORGANIZE YOUR PAPERS
• Keep your resume and cover letter close at hand. Take out your index cards to keep your answers focused and organized.
• Have a pen and notepad on hand to take notes. This is helpful in noting comments, questions, and most importantly, your interviewer’s name(s) and title(s).

BE PROFESSIONAL AND POLITE
• Be prompt and ready to go at the appointed time.
• Listen carefully to the questions. If you do not understand the question, ask the interviewer to repeat or clarify it.
• If asked about salary during a phone screen, avoid a specific amount if at all possible. Say you are willing to negotiate or give a range, based on industry knowledge gained during pre-interview research. This could help you negotiate a better salary at a later point in the interview process.
• If thrown an unexpected question, pause and take time to answer. If you do not know the answer, say you do not know and follow up with the interviewer later if you feel doing so would help your case.

BE PERSONAL
• Be enthusiastic — show interest in the position and the organization.
• Ask questions so that the interview is as conversational as possible. People hire people who are likeable so an engaging, conversational style is your goal.
• Express your thanks and appreciation at the end of the interview.

FOLLOW UP
• Write down your thoughts about key points you want to make if you are asked back for another interview.
• Send a thank you letter to everyone who interviewed you.

Adapted from Nathan Newberger’s article, 8 Telephone Interviewing Tips on WorkTree.com.