

*Column from the Wednesday, 9/24/03, Wall Street Journal re Telephone Interviews:*

“. . . With ever-greater numbers of resumes piling up on their desks, many hiring managers are relying on telephone interviews to weed out candidates. Some job seekers take comfort in that, since it seems less nerve-racking than a face-to-face interview. But the comfort is deceptive. It's actually quite a bit tougher to make a good impression, and stand out from other candidates, as a voice on the other end of a phone line.

“The telephone interview is probably the most tricky and difficult interview to do because you're eliminating one of the key parts of the interview, which is body language," says Kevin Dolan, a senior vice president in the New York office of outplacement-consulting firm Right Management Consultants.

“For that reason, careful preparation is crucial -- as much as it is for an in-person meeting. Be sure to know the latest on the company and know how you're going to present your strengths and qualifications. Dress professionally -- you'll feel more confident than if you're running around the house in shorts and a T-shirt -- and find a quiet room in which to conduct the interview.

"The telephone interview calls out the skill set and lets us know if the person has the technical skill to do the job," says Joanne Wagner, manager of corporate recruiting at Staples Inc., the Framingham, Mass., office-supplies retailer. "Bringing them in lets us know if they're a cultural fit.' "

“Since the interview starts as soon as you pick up the phone, have your "interview voice" ready. You have only about 10 minutes to make a good impression, says Lois Frankel, president of Corporate Coaching International, a Pasadena, Calif., consulting firm. Smile while you're talking and stand up -- you speak louder and more concisely when doing so.

“Take advantage of your ability to use reference materials during the interview. Have your resume on hand so you can talk about your job experience. But avoid the temptation to write things down in advance and read from a prepared script. "It impedes the flow of conversation," says New York career coach Carol Kanarek. Indeed, listening and responding to what is said is absolutely vital in a phone interview.

“In addition, have a list of questions ready. Don't wait until the end of the interview to ask them, or else the interviewer may feel interrogated as you rattle them off. Instead, ask them sporadically throughout the interview, giving the discussion the air of a casual conversation. It will set the hiring manager at ease and help you feel more in control.

“The interviewer will most likely have made a decision about you as a candidate by the end of the conversation. So it is OK to ask about the next step and when second interviews will take place, as well as what else you can offer. You can also find out if it is acceptable to call or e-mail if you haven't heard from the hiring manager by a certain date.

“One more thing: If you have call waiting, ignore it as long as you're in an interview -- even consider disabling it. Keeping someone on hold is almost a guaranteed kiss of death.”