

## Telephone Interviewing Tips

The goal you want to accomplish during a telephone interview is to receive an invitation for an on-site interview.

- Conduct your telephone interview in an area where you can have privacy. Noisy distractions take their toll so make sure the television or radio are turned off, any young children are with an adult in another room and household pets are out of the area.
  - Whenever possible, do some research on the company before you talk with them. The recruiter you are working with can provide you with some of the information. However, you should also take the initiative to check the internet (use the computer at the local library if you don't have one) and read trade magazines to stay abreast of what is going on in the plastics industry.
  - Whenever you talk with a company, have a copy of your resume with you.
  - Have a pad and pen/pencil available. Write down the caller's name and title. Ask him/her to spell their name if need be.
  - Don't eat, smoke or chew gum during the phone conversation, but do have a glass of water nearby.
  - The employer's impressions will be based not only on your ability to answer questions correctly, but also on your tone of voice, choice of words and enthusiasm. Smile--it comes through the phone.
  - In addition to answering the company's question, be prepared to ask some of your own. Interviewing should be a two way street, where both parties get to know each other better. Have a list of questions ready. The hiring company wants to talk to someone who is interested in helping them solve some problems. The focus of your questions should cover the company, what they do, the position responsibilities and how your skills, talent and education can contribute to the company's growth and profitability.
  - When the interviewer asks questions, don't just answer "yes" or "no"---elaborate--use this time as an opportunity to sell your talent, skill and abilities.
  - When the interview appears to be coming to a close, let him/her know you appreciate their time, have interest in learning more, and would like to come in for an on-site interview.
  - We recommend that you stay away from asking questions about benefits and salary. Take the approach of "What problems are you having, and how can I help solve them?"
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## On-site Interviewing Tips

The goal you want to accomplish for an on-site interview is to receive an offer of employment from the company.

- Make sure you are dressed for an interview. Check with your recruiter. Many companies now use "business casual" attire, so a traditional suit, tie or similar business attire is not always best. Whatever the decision on what clothes are appropriate for your specific interview, make sure that the clothing you wear is clean and pressed.
  - Make sure you pay attention to your personal grooming. Shined shoes, clean nails, trimming the moustache or beard, a recent haircut and breath mints should all be considered. Jewelry, perfume and cologne should be kept to a minimum.
  - Remember to get a good night's sleep the night before. Avoid alcohol usage and eat light foods.
  - Have extra copies of your resume with you.
  - Show up 15 minutes early. Make sure you obtain the telephone numbers for the company and the primary contact at the company in case you have traveling problems. Your recruiter will be pleased to give these to you. Also, remember to take things like the weather and traffic into account when arranging your transportation to the interview.
  - Your body language and facial expressions will be noticed. Keep good eye contact when talking to someone, stand up straight, make sure your hand shake is firm, smile often, and speak in a confident, uplifting and enthusiastic tone of voice.
  - Be confident and factual about what your responsibilities are and what you have accomplished.
  - Speak positively about your experiences, especially any challenges that you may have had. Convey to the interviewer how a challenge has helped you grow and/or succeed is very positive.
  - Be ready to answer basic and in-depth interviewing questions, and remember to answer a question as enthusiastically the tenth time it is asked as you did the first time it was asked.
  - Have a list of questions ready (see the list below for suggestions). By asking effective questions, you will be in a better position to make a good career decision.
  - Reiterate your interest in the position and the company...let them know you appreciate their taking time from their schedules to meet with you...and don't be afraid to tell them you like what you've seen and heard, and you want to come to work with them!
  - Establish a follow-up time frame.
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## **Candidate questions to ask during an interview**

1. Why is the position open?
2. If there is/ was an incumbent, what went wrong? Why are they replacing that individual? Or , why did they leave? Asking questions such as these should help you learn a lot and "put issues on the table".
3. To whom does the position report, and what is his/her background?
4. What are the most important responsibilities of this position?
5. What autonomy would I have to perform my responsibilities?
6. How much emphasis is placed on technical skills in this position?
7. How much emphasis is placed on people skills in this position?
8. What educational or training support will be available to help me learn what I need to know to be successful?
9. What is the most important thing I can do to help your company during the first 60 to 90 days of employment?
10. Describe your perception of an ideal candidate for this position.
11. How will my performance be judged? Is there a formal evaluation process, and if so, please describe it for me?
12. What is a typical workday or week or month for this level of position?
13. What is the company's management philosophy?
14. Will I mainly inherit projects or initiate them?
15. What brought you to this company, and what is your background?
16. What is a typical career path for this position?
17. If I have subordinates, what are their strengths and weaknesses?
18. How do you characterize the working environment of this area or department?
19. How much travel is required? What about overtime?
20. What are some of the company's goals?
21. Where do you see this company in 3 years, 5 years?
22. What kind of a reporting relationship would exist between my immediate supervisor and me?
23. What growth opportunities are available for a person starting in this position? Can you give me an example?
24. What other information can I give you to help you evaluate my qualifications for this position?
25. When would you need me to start if you were to hire me?

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## **Questions candidates should be prepared to answer during an interview**

1. Tell me a little about yourself? (This question should be handled from a career point of view and not a personal point of view. Focus on the positive. If you are a strong problem solver with great communication skills or if you enjoy

- troubleshooting difficult technical issues or sharing your technical knowledge while developing a team, bring those points out.)
2. What would you like to do here? (Explain how you can contribute, create and help the company grow.)
  3. What did you dislike about your last/present job? (Be aware of negatives and don't downgrade people or your company. Limit your negatives i.e., "the top management has changed, and their philosophy is not one I agree with" or "the company is downsizing and future growth no longer looks positive". If you are not sure how to address a question such as this, ask your recruiter for assistance. Focus more on the positive of what motivates you. If you can relate a positive example of a project or aspect of your current situation the interviewer will get an idea of your preferences. For example "What I enjoy most about my present situation is working directly with the equipment and troubleshooting processing issues. That part of my job provides me with a lot of challenge and gives me the personal satisfaction of knowing my talent is being used to the company's advantage.)
  4. Describe the best manager you ever worked for?
  5. How do you compare yourself to your peers? (Be confident of your capabilities, but know you have room to grow. You may want to note individual contributions as well as team contributions.)
  6. What are your main responsibilities?
  7. In what way have your responsibilities changed from the time you started with your present company?
  8. What have you accomplished in the past year, past 2 years, etc.? (Be confident and be specific whenever possible. If you saved your company money, reduced cycle time, improved yields, now is the time to tell them about it.)
  9. What are your professional goals for the next five years?
  10. What skills have you developed that you believe would be of value to a new employer?
  11. What are some of your weaknesses? (Try to deal from strengths in an interview, but be realistic. Think ahead of time of a weakness which an employer can live with such as being a "workaholic" or having a low tolerance for sloppy work or being a stickler for detail.)
  12. What do you do as a member of a team? As an individual contributor?
  13. Do you prefer to work as part of a team, or would you rather work alone?
  14. What steps have you taken to obtain additional training to improve your skills?
  15. Are you an initiator (an idea person), or do you carry out the directives of someone else? Can you do both?
  16. What motivates you to do your best?
  17. What kind of work environment do you prefer?
  18. Describe your ideal boss? (Do some thinking, but consider this: Did you ever work with a person who could combine his/her talents with yours and others to create synergy....  $(2 + 2 = 5)$ ?)
  19. Is overtime a problem?
  20. Is travel a problem?

21. What business accomplishment are you most proud of? (Don't be shy, and be prepared to give details.)
22. What can you do for us that other candidates can't? (What a company normally looks for in this type of question is what makes you unique. This will take an assessment of your experience, skills and traits. Summarize concisely: "I have a unique combination of strong technical skills and the ability to train others by sharing the knowledge that I have gained over the years as a (Technician or Plant Manager or Process Engineer) and
23. Why are you considering leaving your present job? (Be light on the negatives and give as many positives as possible.)
24. Why should we hire you? (Explain why you believe that you will bring more values to the job and company than it will cost the company to hire you, and give examples. If the company has discussed four critical tasks that need to be tackled, and you have the experience and talent to do them, confidently review the skills you are bringing with you which will successfully accomplish their goals.)
25. Can we check your references? (Have a list of names and phone numbers ready.)

## Behavioral Interviewing

Over the last several decades a newer style of interviewing has surfaced and gained in popularity. This interviewing method, called "Behavioral Interviewing", was actually developed in the 1970's. It focuses on past performance and behavior, and it is now estimated that over one-fourth of all organizations utilize this method to some degree. Preparing for this type of interview is time well spent, and it has been proven that candidates who prepare for behavioral type interviews are better prepared for traditional interviews as well.

Companies that utilize the behavioral interviewing approach have determined specific skill sets that are required for a position. Such skills may include:

Problem Solving	Leadership	Decision Making
Interpersonal Skills	Communication skills	The Ability To Motivate
Critical Thinking Abilities	Ability To Build Teams	Organizing and Planning Skills
The Ability To Influence Others		

Questions asked during the interview process focus on bringing out those specific skill sets. The theory being, if you have the behavioral skill sets that match those needed by the position, you will be a better match for the position and company, thereby ensuring success.

Preparing for a behavioral interview takes more time because you will need to develop perhaps two or three illustrations. You will want to be (1) specific in stating the situation or task, (2) specific in describing the action you took and (3) specific in citing the results. As you practice "being specific" you will develop a better presentation of the behavior and this will help to ensure that you do not ramble. Listed below are some sample behavioral questions.

Please note, an important key to remember about Behavioral Interviewing is to reframe any of your negative experiences into positive ones. For instance, if the interviewer asks about a situation in which you "failed", you would add to your response, "What I learned from that experience was..." and/or "What I would do differently is..." Remember that mistakes and failures are part of life's lessons and are basically unavoidable, but they are very valuable reminders for making different choices in the future.

Preparing for a behavioral interview does take more time, but it is more than worth the effort. Review the position you are applying for and ask yourself questions like:

- What skills are necessary to do this job?
- What skills would make a person doing this job successful?
- What skills would make a person unsuccessful at this job?

As you consider each question, review the list of basic skill sets (see above) to determine which "skills" might be part of your answer. Describe a specific situation, describe the action you took and then cite specific results. We have listed an example (below) that may be a helpful illustration.

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### **Possible behavioral questions candidates should be prepared to answer during an interview**

When answering behavioral questions, most companies look for the "Situation/Task" the "Action" and the "Result" and then "What you learned". For example, answering question number one below -

"A co-worker and I had a healthy disagreement about how to tackle a problem. He wanted to do it one-way and I wanted to do it another. Realizing that there are many ways to do certain tasks, I agreed to do it his way, keeping in mind the lessons learned from my way. We were able to accomplish the task in minimum time with both our efforts, and I even learned something to boot! His process was quicker than mine because it eliminated up-front investment and cost and maximized our company's goal of market share sooner."

1. Describe a time when you were able to get two co-workers who disliked each other to work together as a team. How did you accomplish this? What was the outcome?

2. Describe a problem that you solved for your employer. How did you approach the problem? What part did others play in solving the problem? What was the outcome?
3. Tell us about a time when you didn't meet an important deadline. What things had you failed to do? What were the repercussions that you faced? What did you learn?
4. Tell me about a specific time when you were successful at selling an idea to your manager. How did you proceed? What were the results?
5. Give us a specific example of a time when you used good judgment in solving a problem.
6. Give me an example of a time when you set a goal and were able to achieve it.
7. Give us an example of a time when you had to make a split second decision. What were the results?
8. Tell us about a difficult decision that you have made in your present job?
9. What is your normal way of dealing with conflict? Give us an example.
10. Tell us about a time when you were able to successfully deal with another individual that you personally did not like or knew that they did not like you.
11. Give us an example of an incident when you tried to accomplish a task and failed.
12. Give me a work example of when you showed initiative and took the lead on a project. What were the results?
13. Give us an example of a situation in the last several years where you had to deal with a very upset co-worker. What were the results?
14. Tell us about a time when you were forced to make an unpopular decision. How did that decision affect your project?
15. Tell us about a time when you were neither satisfied nor pleased with your performance. What did you do about it?
16. As a supervisor or manager, have you ever had to counsel or discipline an employee? What was the nature of the counsel or discipline? What steps did you take to accomplish this? How did you prepare? What were the results?
17. When faced with a problem, what steps do you take before you come to a decision?
18. Describe a time when an associate was not completing their share of the work. Who, if anyone, did you discuss the issue with? Did that person take any steps to correct the associate? Did you agree or disagree with the actions taken? Why?
19. Describe what you do when an associate or colleague disagrees with your ideas.
20. Tell me about an important goal that you have set for yourself and tell me about your success in reaching it.