

COLD CALLING AND PHONE ETIQUETTE

10 Rules For Every Job Search Related Phone Call You Make

1. Know exactly why you are calling (are you calling for a job, internship, informational interview, etc.?). Be able to articulate your motivations clearly and concisely. This sounds obvious, but plenty of people don't handle this well and thus make a less than confident first impression. Note: see the "[Informational Interviewing Career Success Guide](#)" for more information on this topic.
2. Know as much as possible about the firm you are calling. Research through the Web, faculty members, students (who have interned) and alumni, as well as through [CareerSearch](#) (an employer research database available in the Career and Professional Development Center).
3. Try to get a connection in the firm before you call. In short, talk with faculty members, alumni, family, etc. and try to find someone who has a contact at the organization you are calling. For a lengthier discussion of how to network, see your career consultant. If you can't make a connection, determine who you are trying to reach (human resources person, senior staff member, a particular manager, etc.).
4. Be courteous and enthusiastic. If you connect with the person you were hoping to reach, ask if he or she is available to talk at that time or whether it would be better to schedule a later time to talk.
5. Keep your responses short and to the point.
6. Be friendly, yet professional.
7. Avoid background noise and distractions. Turn off the television and music, don't call from a noisy residence hall room, etc., turn off call waiting so you don't get interrupted (if you can't turn it off, be sure not to take any other calls while you are talking with a job search contact).
8. Take notes (especially names).
9. Be sure to follow up, sending any materials they request. Ask whether they prefer that you follow up by phone, email, etc.
10. Be sure to send a thank-you note after any substantial phone conversation (interview, information sharing, etc.).

On the Phone

1. Be very clear about why you are calling, but think ahead about whether you have secondary interests (i.e. if they don't have any openings, would you like to do an informational interview, inquire about freelance work, ask for other leads, etc.).
2. Be prepared to give 2 - 3 sentence answers as to: why you are interested in that firm, what skills, etc. make you stand out, what you can do to help them meet their needs and goals, what your goals are. If the person you are speaking with seems familiar with your resume, then go into more detail in your answers. If he or she doesn't seem to have a sense of your background, give an overview before you begin discussing specific jobs and experiences.
3. Ask questions -- having a conversation with a potential employer is typically more effective than pure Q&A. An exchange that includes you both asking questions and follow-up questions will seem more comfortable and exude more confidence (from your position) than an exchange where the interviewer simply asks questions and you respond and wait for the next question. In addition, the earlier you find out what they need, the more effective you can be during the conversation. Note that if the employer seems intent on running you through a list of questions -- go with the flow and save your questions for the end.
4. Have a resume and supporting documents (project sheets, etc.) ready, in case they ask you to fax or overnight your materials.

When They Call Back

1. Answer all calls in a friendly and energetic manner.
2. Be sure that your answering machine message is appropriate and professional. Also ask roommates, family, or anyone else who may answer your phone, to answer courteously, in case a potential employer is calling.
3. If you can't focus on the call (you are on your way to class, not feeling well, etc.), ask to schedule a time when you can call back (within 24 hours).

Other Variables

1. Dealing with secretaries/support staff/assistants -- be courteous and get the name of the person you are speaking with -- this will save you time in the future (you can go back to that person for help, rather than re-explaining what you need to someone else). Remember that if this person becomes your ally, you have a better chance of getting connected with the person you are trying to reach.
2. Dealing with voice mail -- leave a short but detailed message as to why you are calling. Leave not only your name and number, but also suggest times when you can typically be reached.
3. What to wear? Some career advisors suggest that you dress for a phone interview as you would for an in-person interview, believing it will get you more focused. This

is a matter of personal preference. You should have your resume in front of you, an empty pad of paper to write things down (like names, etc.) and any information about the company you may want to use for questions, etc.

When They Don't Call Back

1. Ask the secretary or receptionist whether there is a time of day when you are more likely to reach the person you are trying to contact.
2. Attempt to schedule a phone appointment through a secretary.
3. Attempt to call early in the morning, during lunch hour, or after 5 p.m. when secretaries may not be working. Some employers answer their own phone when a secretary or receptionist is unavailable.
4. Know your limits. If you are trying to make a contact at a firm that you are moderately interested in, you may give up after they fail to return two or three calls. However, if a company or firm is your first choice, you may continue attempting to get through, even after their repeated failures to return your calls. At some point though, it will be clear that calling is not effective, either because they are not interested, or they don't take the time to return calls. If this is a firm that you are seriously interested in, you might try to contact someone via email, fax, overnight mail, or visiting.
5. Keep in mind that throughout the calling process, you are getting cues about the company just as you would in a site visit. A company where people don't return calls, or miss scheduled phone appointments may be a difficult place to work. Likewise, a company where staff returns calls in a timely manner may be more efficient and respectful of employees' time.