



The Career Center

East Carolina University
701 East Fifth Street
Greenville, NC 27858-4353
Office: 252-328-6050

MAKING THE TELEPHONE WORK FOR YOU

To the salesman, the telephone is a commission waiting to happen. To the student it is a connection to friends and family. But to a job seekers the telephone becomes a threatening instrument of torture destined to say "NO!" This imagined threat of rejection turns an everyday hunk of plastic and wires into a formidable enemy. It can make even the most eloquent communicator feel like a tongue-tied fool.

If you suffer from this kind of phone difficulty, you are in the majority. You can take comfort from that fact, but only for a minute. Your difficulty with the telephone must be addressed head-on, in the beginning of your search or it will cripple your entire campaign.

Your fear of the telephone is probably closely tied with the risks you take in attempting a job search. Risk-taking is a learned behavior. Some people have been rewarded for risk taking behavior since they were children, and as a result are confident in their ability to face challenges. Others have been rewarded for passive, non-risking behavior, and as a result have greater difficulty confronting new challenges.

Risk-taking brings confidence, even when the result does not turn out well. It feels good to take action and survive. The action of risk-taking leads to increased confidence, which in turn supports your ability to take even greater risks. We often find that as our responsibilities to others increase, so do our responsibilities to ourselves. As we become more aware of our own abilities, we enjoy the experience of growth. Accepting responsibility for your own life and your own decisions also encourages more motivation to actively plan the steps you need to take in order to realize your goals and dreams. Each small risk you take is the foundation for larger and more complicated situations in your life. The only way you will succeed is to try.

Learning to be effective on the telephone is critical to your success. At a minimum you will use the telephone for:

- Networking;
- Researching and information gathering;
 - Identifying those with the authority to hire you;
- Follow up (nothing increases your ability to land interviews like prompt telephone follow-up on resumes and cover letters);
- Pre-screening companies;
- Arranging face-to-face interviews; and
- Making progress checks after interviews.

Since you know you have to make these calls, the question is not, "Is there something wrong

with me?" it is, "What is the best and quickest way to deal with the issue squarely and get results?" Overcoming the phone fright barrier requires an "attitude adjustment" and a plan of action. Follow these guidelines in establishing your action plan:

- A common problem of job seekers is the "I don't want to be a bother" game. Since you don't want to abuse your relationships with friends, there is a reluctance to call people you know and ask for their assistance. In all likelihood, most of the people you know would love to help you and will often go to extreme lengths, (sometimes practically taking over your campaign for you), in order to do what they can do to help you. The best way to overcome your concerns is to get their permission from the beginning. Ask them, "Would it be alright with you if I kept you informed of my progress throughout the campaign?" That way, if something comes up and you need additional information, you will know how willing they are to help you.
- We live in a communication-based society. As a member of society, it is your right and responsibility to ask for what you want. You have the right to ask and others have the right to refuse. Expect "No" occasionally, but concentrate on your right to ask for help. Robert Alberti's book, *Stand Up, Speak Out and Talk Back* (New York: Pocket Books) is useful reading for those who find it difficult to ask for help.
- Be considerate of the other person's time. Start by finding a link between you and the employer as the foundation for a relationship. Ask if they have a minute to talk. Be clear about your goals and so organized in your presentation that you can complete your call in 5 minutes when necessary.
- Never waste a call. Set a goal for each conversation, to learn something that will advance your campaign. If the person you talk with can't or won't help you, ask for references to others who might be able to help you.
- Set a realistic goal for the number of calls you will make each day. Make a list of the people you plan to call. Starting at the top of your list, call each person and attempt to get through to them. Keep someone on your list until you reach them on the phone. If you are having difficulty getting through, try moving them to a different spot on your list and call them at a different time of the day. Revise the list daily, subtracting those individuals you reached and adding new names as you mail out resumes to them. Perseverance is the key to employment.
- Believe in your skills and your personal worth. When you market yourself as a benefit to any employer - not just someone who needs a job - most people will talk to you because something may come out in the conversation they could use. While not every company has openings, every company has problems. Probe into what they might need and focus on what you could do to help them.
- Think of telephone operators, secretaries, and administrative assistants as your allies. Remember to use their names as you establish cordial relationships and treat them with the utmost courtesy.

- Always be prepared to make chance work for you. Expect the unexpected. Anything can and does happen. Luck occurs at the crossroad where preparation and opportunity meet.
- Record all information you need in writing. Include the complete name, title, address, and phone number (including extension) of the person referring you. Having the names you need in front of you as you speak will encourage you to use them appropriately and avoid embarrassment in case of a temporary mental block. List the name of the employer, address and any pertinent information that may be useful. Write in one sentence the purpose of your call. If you aren't sure what you want, you may get something else - or nothing. Be specific, clear and concise. Write an agenda for the conversation. Identify how you plan to get the conversation started and how to probe for the company's needs. Write exactly how you plan to ask for what you want. Communicate clearly your needs. Would others reading this information understand what you want? If not, why not? How do they think you could improve your presentation?
- When you are satisfied with your script, role play with a spouse or friend. Ask him or her to throw you some unexpected questions and to create obstacles to overcome. Read from your script and improvise as needed.
- Record your script on tape. Hold the phone in your hand as you make the recording. You want to make this experience as real as possible. Think of how achieving your objective could benefit this employer. Go back and listen to the tape objectively, as if you were the employer receiving the call. Is your message strong, but not aggressive? Is your delivery enthusiastic? Why would you, as the employer, be likely to grant this request?

One word of warning, necessary as this process is, it can be a procrastination trap. Do not wait for perfection. As soon as you have a polished script and a practiced presentation, pick up the phone and call the company at the top of your target list, experience will perfect your skills. By the time you work your way to the bottom of your "prime target" list, you will be a telephone professional.

We feel that the concepts outlined in this article are vital to the success of every job seeker. Using these tactics will help you avoid needless pitfalls, optimize your efforts through the difficult times when "things are just not going your way," and rebuild and instill a higher sense of self-worth inevitably leading to a successful job search campaign.