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HR's on the Phone. Now, What?

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It's 7:30 PM on a Saturday night. You're just about ready to head out the door for a night of fun when the phone rings. OMG! It's someone calling about that job you applied for last week and they have some questions to ask you. What do you do?

This is the dreaded "telephone interview" which alone is enough to frighten anyone but is made worse by the fact the call comes when you didn't expect it. You had plans for the evening; if you agree to the phone interview then, you'll miss out on a good time, but if you decline, will you blow your chances of getting the job?

The Traditional System of job hunting will tell you that you definitely will and nothing is more important than taking this next step towards getting hired. You're probably familiar with the loads of "advice" on how to handle this call, which is nearly always placed by a recruiter or HR person who is acting as a "screener", but who has no authority to hire you and whose opinion as to who should be hired does not count.

These are often considered pre-interview interviews, with the assumption you have to get through this hurdle in order to be granted a face-to-face interview which will determine if you have what it takes to meet with the person who can actually hire you, who we will call "Mr. Bigg."

Mr. Bigg is your future boss and is either the owner of the company, a corporate executive or a department manager. Mr. Bigg's time is extremely valuable, which is why the process of "screening candidates" often is delegated to intermediaries whose time is not as valuable as his.

Now, you would think that because these screeners are acting on behalf of Mr. Bigg that they can speak for him and make decisions for him. In fact, the Traditional System will have you believe that you must win the approval of HR and/or a recruiter in order to get to Mr. Bigg. This is not correct.

Mr. Bigg is paid enormous amounts of money simply *because* he speaks for himself and makes his own decisions. He will choose whoever he wants to work for and with him,

regardless of what HR and/or a recruiter says, who they recommend or what anyone else thinks. This is why you can bypass all intermediaries with ease.

But back to the phone call. It's HR on the line and they want to ask you some questions. Now that you know only Mr. Bigg can hire you, talking to anyone else is a waste of time. HR's questions are predictable ("Tell me about a time when you failed," "What is your greatest weakness," "Why should we hire you?" etc.) and irrelevant.

In the Traditional System, an interview – on the phone or in person – is a personal interrogation and has nothing to do with the real reason you'll be hired. You will not be hired because of how you answered ridiculous questions like, "What did you want to be when you were 10 years old?" that have no correct answers; you will be hired because Mr. Bigg believes you can help him solve a problem and/or address an opportunity he, his department and/or his company is facing.

So your phone call needs to be about this issue, which you will have determined in your research before you wrote to Mr. Bigg. The HR person or recruiter will be unable to discuss this issue with you, so you can easily terminate the conversation quickly professionally like this:

HR: "I'm calling about the job at Ajax Industries you applied for. Sorry about calling on the weekend, but I'm catching up on paperwork."

You: "Yes, I'm glad you called, but I'm on my way out. I'd be happy to talk with you during business hours about Ajax Industries' new line of stainless steel bedside commodes. From what I've seen, these products are going to blow the competition away. Will you be able to discuss with me the company's preliminary marketing and promotional plans as you expand your product line into patient care?"

HR: "Uh. . .no. I had some questions about your work history."

You: "Well, as I said, I'm on my way out. Why don't you email your questions to me? I'll be speaking with Mr. Bigg next week anyway and if he wants to know about what I did for other companies, I'll have my portfolio to show him when I meet with him. Thanks for calling. Goodbye."

And with that, you head on out the door for your evening of fun, confident, composed and totally in control of your job-*getting* campaign.