



# Warm Up to Cold Calling

How a phone call can get your job seeker foot in the door.

Mention cold calling and it's enough to send chills down a job seeker's back. The fear of reaching out to strangers; of possibly sounding awkward, desperate, or like a pushy telemarketer; and the worst—being rejected—is enough to give most people cold feet. Perhaps only public speaking scares people more. However, when viewed from a *different* perspective, cold calling can be more than just a last resort or necessary evil. For savvy job seekers, it's a proactive way to find untapped opportunities and jump-start, even shorten, a job search.

## Courage! You have what it takes.

For job seekers, cold calling is contacting potential employers and organizations, with whom you have no connection, generally to request an interview. It may also be to ask for career advice, an informational interview, or to follow up on a referral. The process can be stressful and unnerving: in the span of a phone call, you need to engage, pitch, and persuade a busy person you don't know—and who doesn't know you—to listen, then, ideally, meet with you. If your palms are beginning to sweat, take heart: you may *already* have many of the skills and experience needed from your job search toolbox to see things through successfully. So, choose your prospects and go for it: nothing ventured, nothing gained! To begin:

**#1. Compile a list of prospective employers/companies.** Ask professors, counselors, alumni, and acquaintances for leads at places you'd like to work. Research and contact each organization to obtain specific names and contact information of hiring/department managers to call. As with interviewing, the more you know about your target, the more informed you'll be and intelligent you'll sound when you make contact. Skip HR; whenever possible, go directly to the person who can hire or assist you.

**#2. Prepare a script.** Your message should be an audio cover letter with the brevity of an elevator speech: polite, clear, and *to the point*. It should introduce who you are and give the precise reason for your call. If someone referred you, include the name in your opening sentence. If seeking a job, pinpoint your relevant qualifications and focus on how they bring value to the company and meet the employer's needs. Refine your message as needed.

**#3. Nail your résumé.** Send it with a personalized email cover letter, say you'll follow up within the week, then do so. Or, have your info ready to send to an interested prospective employer after you cold call.

**#4. Practice. Practice. Practice.** Aim to sound comfortable and natural, not like you're reading.

## Melt the ice.

When cold calling, follow the same principles for a phone interview. Have your script, a note pad, and glass of water handy. Find a quiet place. Have a good connection and turn off all notifications and other devices. Wear interview attire to help get your head in a professional space. Also, stand while speaking. Call during business hours; this is a professional interaction, so all rules of etiquette apply. Begin by asking if it's a good time to talk, and use formal titles like Mr., Mrs., or Dr. Speak clearly, and don't let nerves hijack the speed or pitch of your voice. Be positive. You need to put your best words and voice forward if you want to engage and create a connection with a stranger. Get to the point and stay on topic. Be respectful and listen carefully, especially for cues of interest or impatience. Finally, thank the person for their time, inquire about the next step, and follow up appropriately. Be polite to receptionists; it's smart to have the gatekeepers on your side. Also, if the person you ask for isn't available, simply say you'll call back. This gives you a reason to try again without having your information and call ignored.

## It's a numbers game.

Accept that most cold calls will be met with a "no" and lead nowhere. Still, persevere! Be disciplined, develop a thick skin. Resolve to make a set number of cold calls each day until you achieve your goal. Track calls on a spreadsheet with dates, persons you spoke with, notes taken, and follow ups. With practice, you'll feel more in control and confident with the process.



## i n a nutshell:

Like all job search practices and tools, the ultimate purpose of cold calling is to secure an interview.

- **Target specific contacts who can actually hire or assist you**
- **Be familiar with your script and use it as a guide; don't sound like you're reciting**
- **Highlight unique qualifications and benefits you bring that will help land an interview**
- **Employ your phone interview and elevator speech skills**
- **Be enthusiastic, but direct and professional; don't chit chat**
- **Push yourself; be realistic, disciplined, and don't give up**

While success is never guaranteed, and you may never love doing it, cold calling is a proactive step you can *always* take to better yourself and advance your career prospects.