ASK ELLEN – is a very brief phone interview enough?

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Q: I have a question for you regarding a phone interview that I had recently. First, the person conducting the interview lost track of time and was delayed by 15 minutes. I decided to call him and he apologized for losing track of time and asked if he could finish up what he was doing. When we finally connected, he seemed a bit rushed. Our conversation lasted about 20 minutes and I felt like I didn’t get the chance to sell myself. We had a great conversation, but is 20 minutes long enough for me to get the job? Do some hiring managers get enough out of your resume to decide who they are going to hire even before speaking with candidates?

A: Well, how much time is necessary for an employer to make a decision varies, but it usually takes more than 20 minutes on the phone. Hiring is a risky thing for both the applicant and the employer, and most employers will want to meet a candidate in person at some point before an offer is made. This could have been a brief screening interview, though, and after those are done, the hiring manager will decide who will come in for a more formal interview. So the very brief phone call you describe would maybe raise an eyebrow just a little bit, but not a red flag, for me if I were the applicant.

The brevity of the call is not the only thing going on here, though; there are also the delayed start time/”losing track of time”, the fact that you had to call the interviewer, and that he seemed “rushed”. There could be good explanations for these, the interviewer did apologize, and this all could be out of the ordinary… or this could be a disorganized, unprofessional hiring manager or workplace. If he calls you back to schedule another interview I would proceed with caution and pay attention to any other evidence of flakiness. I would ask about turnover at that workplace, or how long the previous person in that job (the one you’re applying for) stayed. If this employer offers you the job after a rushed, delayed-start 20-minute phone call, I would ask if you could come in for a face-to-face meeting. Remember, you are interviewing them also, and if there are indicators that all is not well at that workplace and you ignore them, you may regret later that you accepted the job.

As for deciding to hire, from the resume alone – that is very rare and not a good idea, for a number of reasons, including the fact that people can easily lie or exaggerate on their resumes (also not recommended, but people do it), and that a resume is not going to give information about the person’s professional demeanor, ability to sell him/herself for that job, ability to perform under pressure, verbal and nonverbal communication skills, interviewing skills and preparation, understanding of appropriate attire, and general fit for that workplace.

What interviewers should ask in an interview: [http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/the-right-questions-to-ask-when-hiring/](http://boss.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/07/05/the-right-questions-to-ask-when-hiring/)
Thank you,

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