

Honing Your Job-Hunting Skills

AAAEA – Chicago

Presented by Bilal Masri, PE

Prepared by GM Sadat, PE



Just A Few Questions

Imagine Walking into an Interview and You are Asked the following 'easy' questions:

1. What specific goals, including those related to your occupation, have you established for your life?

Answer: (uh... make money? Pay Off Loans Maybe? 😊)

2. How would you describe yourself? 😊

Answer: (Fast'n'Furious? Smart? Cool Dude?!! Thrillicious?)

3. How has your college experience prepared you for a business career?

Answer: (Right, I Survived College Food Court meals!, Beer, Monday Night Football, More Beer, Sleeping at The Library in front of Boring Books... Duuuude Come On Now!)

Answers!

If you thought any of those answers were correct.... Then you need to rethink your job-hunting methods.

You have finished your degree and you know your stuff.... Now you have to convince someone else that you can put your knowledge to work effectively and that you fit into the team culture.

Landing A Job Requires You To Hone Your Skills, both -
Preparation AND Presentation
then
Learn how to Close the Deal

Part I: Before The Interview (**Preparation**)

Part II: At The Interview (**Presentation**)

Part III: AFTER the Interview (**Closing The Deal!**)

Before The Interview

1. Research the Employer, Interviewer, and Industry

Interviewers describe lack of company knowledge as one of their top pet peeves. Learn to do your homework:

- *Campus Recruiting Office*
- *Company Web site.*
- *Google search. Research the Company, the interviewer, etc*
- *Annual Reports or other printed materials from the company.*
- *People you know who work there (part of your network, alumni).*
- *Customers and vendors.*
- *Library: print, online, CD resources, online library databases*

Before The Interview

2. Identify the Characteristics to Showcase in the Interview.

What skills and characteristics is the interviewer looking for? Learn how to identify them and show them off. Consider a career portfolio as an aid.

- *Positive attitude toward work*
- *Proficiency in field of study*
- *Communication skills (written & oral, speaking and listening)*
- *Interpersonal skills*
- *Confidence*
- *Critical thinking and problem-solving skills*
- *Flexibility*
- *Self-motivation*
- *Teamwork*

Before The Interview

3. Rehearsing and Practicing

Best ways to ensure you are in fact prepared

- *Mock interviews*
 - *(Practice Interviews with your friends)*
- *Video-taped mock interviews*
 - *(Career Center at your school)*
- *Interview simulations*
 - *(With a Guidance Counselor)*
- *Informational interviews*
 - *(Go After the Employer and Seek Info from them by Calling and Asking for An Informational Session)*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire

Be sure you look right for the interview - DO NOT go into your closet on the day of the interview and decide then what you feel like wearing.

Attention to details is crucial, so here are some tips for both men and women. Make sure you have:

- *clean and polished conservative dress shoes*
- *well-groomed hairstyle*
- *cleaned and trimmed fingernails*
- *minimal cologne or perfume*
- *no visible body piercing beyond conservative ear piercing for women*
- *well-brushed teeth and fresh breath*
- *no gum, candy, or other objects in your mouth*
- *minimal jewelry*
- *no body odor*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire - WOMEN

Dress for success for women

- *Standard job interviewing attire for women is conservative dark navy or gray skirted wool blend suit.*
- *Other conservative colors -- such as beige or brown -- are also acceptable. Red is a power color. A blazer with blouse and skirt is a possible second choice to a suit. You should always wear a jacket.*
- *Skirt length should be a little below the knee and never shorter than above the knee -- no nightclub attire here. Avoid wearing a dress (unless accented with a jacket). Blouses should be cotton or silk and should be white, or some other light color. Shoes should be low-heeled.*
- *Make-up should be minimal, with lipstick and nail polish conservative tones. Pantyhose should be flawless (no runs) and conservative in color. Avoid both body odor and excessive cologne.*
- *Opt for a briefcase rather than a purse.*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire

Dress for success for women (Continued)

- **Skirt vs. Pants:** *If you are not comfortable or confident wearing a skirted suit, you might not interview well. You should be true to yourself, and your clothing should reflect your self-image and help you project your most confident self. Some women feel they look better in pantsuits than in skirted suits.*
- **Jacket Required?** *It's not the pants that determine professionalism as much as it is whether the candidate wears a jacket (true of both men and women).*
- **What About My Hijab?** *If you feel that Your Hijab is going to hinder you from getting the job, then perhaps you should not consider working for that firm. I have seen several sisters get hired in Fortune 500 firms such as US Cellular and Sprint and they have been able to stay the course. Remember, Fortune 500 promotes Diversity! Also consider applying with Arab-Owned Businesses. They are less apt to be racist. Albeit, you must be aware of self-racism.*

*Follow Up on Community Hires: I always promote working for non-Arab businesses first in order to learn good practices and then return to the Arab community to teach businesses controlled by older owners different and better ways of doing business**. If people do not want to learn from your prior experiences, don't worry, they won't be around. Staying in Business is about continuous Change, not stagnation. Learn To Change or Go Out of Business!*

- **Should I Wear Makeup?** *Risky Move-- Too much makeup and hair in the eyes could be very risky attire / grooming mistakes.*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire

Dress for success for women (Continued)

***You may receive many** conflicting opinions from many ‘experts’.. So how can a woman, or man for that matter, decide?*

MOST IMPORTANTLY - Don't be afraid to ask the interviewer ahead of time

- Feel Out the Company before you even go to the Interview.

When you do get to the interview, That is the best Time to Ask Yourself:

Is This The Place I Want To Work 10-12 hours a day?

Am I Going To Be Comfortable With This Environment?

- ***Lessons Earned:** 10 years ago, I remember one of my female engineering colleagues once confiding in me that she did not accept a job offer by a well known & established engineering firm in New Jersey. At the interview, while walking thru their offices, all she noticed were secretaries that wore un-conservative attire and almost no female engineers. She felt she was going to be one of the very few professional females. So she declined their kind job offer. She couldn't visualize herself in such a male-dominated environment. Remember, when you are at the interview, subtly, you are also interviewing them.*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire - MEN

Dress for success for Men

- *The standard job interviewing attire for men is a
 - conservative dark navy or gray two-piece business suit (of natural fibers, such as wool, if possible),
 - a white long-sleeved button-down dress shirt,
 - a conservative silk tie (that matches the colors in your suit), and
 - nicely polished dress shoes.*
- *If you do not own a suit, OR IF the company is a bit more informal (Find this out before the interview) then you can wear
 - a conservative sports coat (no plaids or wild patterns and preferably a dark color),
 - nicely pressed dress slacks,
 - a white long-sleeved button-down shirt,
 - a conservative silk tie, and
 - nicely polished dress shoes.*
- *Your belt should always match your shoes.*

Before The Interview

4. Plan Your Interview Attire

Dress for success for Men (Continued)

- *If you have a beard or mustache,*
 - *your facial hair should be neatly trimmed.*
 - *If you have any visible body parts pierced, most experts recommend removing all jewelry, including earrings.*
 - *Avoid both body odor and*
 - *excessive cologne.*

Riskiest grooming and attire for men:

- *Non-matching suit*
- *Long hair and/or ponytail*
- *Facial hair (5 o' clock shadow, untrimmed beard/mustache)*

At The Interview

1. Arriving at the Interview.

Believe it or Not --The interview begins before you even meet the interviewer ...From arriving, waiting, and interacting with gatekeepers

Realize that those secretaries, receptionists, and administrative assistants that you might consider unimportant often play a significant role in the interviewing process. When you enter the reception area or outer office, these gatekeepers who greet you are often asked later by the interviewer to sum up their impressions of you. Learn the gatekeeper's name. We all like to be called by our names, and unless we're frantically busy, we like to be schmoozed. Make friendly conversation with the gatekeepers. You might even ask their advice about the interview. Thank them profusely. Make them feel important – after all, they are.

Check Sum: Be nice to The receptionist. She is the first to judge you!

Truth: My Receptionist alone eliminated 10 to 20% of Job Seekers, she may not be the Hiring Manager, but she can either be your biggest ally or your biggest enemy when it comes to impressions.

At The Interview

1. Arriving at the Interview “The Don’ts”

- **Appearing Judgmental**

- If you walk into a smaller office, don’t make them feel they are not big enough for you

Lessons Learned: I had an Architect walk into my office one time and she asked my secretary (Is this it? This is the WHOLE company?) She didn’t realize that my receptionist was going to come and complain about her bad attitude after her interview. Even during the interview, her attitude showed that she was disappointed that she is interviewing with a small office. Research your firm before you get there. No Surprises!

- **Being Impatient or Demanding**

- for example: if your interviewer has you wait a few minutes --be patient. Don’t make it obvious that you are being “inconvenienced”. Remember, the receptionist is watching you! And of course people will talk around the water cooler after you left.

- **Being Needy**

- For example: if your interviewer is still trying to make up their mind about you, try not to force yourself on him or her to push for a hire. We all know we need a Job. They need an employee. The interview is where a match is made. Don’t FORCE a match.

- **Being Argumentative**

- You are not there to win any debates. Keep your goal in mind.

At The Interview

2. First Impressions and Establishing Rapport

Make the most of the first few minutes of the interview. So you finally meet your interviewer:

- *Greet him or her enthusiastically.*
- *Stand up (if not standing already) and extend your hand for a medium-to-firm handshake*
 - *Don't offer a limp, dead fish, loose handshake (as if you're afraid to get an infection from him/her)*
 - *Don't give him/her a bone-crusher Either 😊*
 - *Put on an ultra-warm smile, and say something like: "Good morning, I'm glad to meet you" and "Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be a candidate for this position."*
- *Bring a copy of your resume with you & keep it handy --if interviewer has trouble locating it.*

Real Life Event: This is the worst mistake I see candidates make ALL THE TIME.

Interviewer Asks: "Do You have a resume?"

Candidate Replies: "No!, I sent you guys a copy of my resume! You Have It via Email!"

Truth: COME ON NOW!!! You are applying for a Job! Be Prepared, Interviewer Is Not Your Secretary!
- *Smiling & making eye contact are important elements to establishing a good impression.*
- *Answering interview questions with ease. Gentle Confidence is Key (no over-confidence)*
- *Asking questions of the interviewer and about his company are vital to making a good impression. It shows you are also considering them seriously.*

At The Interview

3. Confidence and Enthusiasm

Body-language and other tricks Can help you project important traits. Most Interviewers consistently say candidates lack confidence, and especially, enthusiasm

- *Eye contact with the interviewer, is extremely important! One expert, recognizing that eye contact is hard to maintain in a one-on-one situation, says to look at interviewer's nose.*
- *Avoid averting or moving your eyes left and right. I notice interviewees often look up at walls and ceilings, as though expecting that answers to interview questions will appear there. That usually tells me the person is running away or hiding something.*
- *Also don't cast eyes downward.*
 - *Arabic Females are lectured all the time thru their upbringing to NOT LOOK A Man Directly in the eyes. This is still true in almost all situations. However, in an interview, you want to appear sincere and non-evasive. Use your judgment in the situation. Your instincts are key, as they have served you well in assessing what is appropriate and what is not.*
- *The best way to show enthusiasm in a job interview is with a big, warm, consistent smile.*

At The Interview

3. Confidence and Enthusiasm

Body-language and other tricks Can help you project important traits. Most Interviewers consistently say candidates lack confidence, and especially, enthusiasm

- *The best way to show confidence in an interview is with a strong, forceful voice.*
- *Sit up straight to look confident. And sit on edge of the seat to appear eager and enthusiastic.*
- *Hand gestures should be subdued, but make sure you have some gestures to show enthusiasm.*
 - *Where you might use large hand gestures when making a presentation, use smaller, non-distracting ones in an interview.*
 - *If you can't keep from talking with your hands and using big, distracting gestures, keep hands in lap or hold a pen.*

At The Interview

4. Handling Tricky Situations

Cope with some of the more dicey aspects of interviewing and avoid or correct blunders and bloopers. Not every interviewer you meet is going to be the all-knowing perfect and professional engineer. Remember, we are all human and every one is different. Here's a few samples

- *A **Bad interviewer** might be unfocused, disinterested, unprepared. He or she might dominate the interview by doing all the talking or might ask inappropriate and illegal questions. (I.e. your age, race, national origin, marital status?)*
- *The **unfocused, unprepared interviewer** probably hasn't read your resume and maybe can't even find a copy. This hapless soul doesn't even know what to ask you. Be sure to offer this disorganized interviewer a copy of your resume while asking, "May I take you through some highlights of my career?"*
- *While the **bigmouth interviewer** is holding forth, make as many mental notes as you can (or jot them down if you've brought a small notepad). Don't show your exasperation; instead be an attentive listener and hang on the interviewer's every word. Try to get a word in edgewise by leaning forward and opening your mouth slightly. If that doesn't work, even a nonstop talker will likely eventually ask if you have any questions. At that point, you can ask questions or describe your fit with the company and the position based on the mental notes you've been making.*
- *The **surlly, grumpy interviewer** may be having a bad day or may be testing you by being unpleasant. Don't let the interviewer's demeanor cast a pall on your interview. Keep smiling and respond to questions with as much verve as you would with a cheerful interviewer.*

At The Interview

4. Handling Tricky Situations

So you got one of those terrible interviewers we just cited you in the earlier slide... And he asked you a question, Now what do you do?

- *If you are Drawing a total blank: What is you simply cannot come up with a response to a question?*
 - *Take a moments to think. If dead air just hangs there as the seconds tick away, ask the interviewer for a minute to think.*
 - *If you are truly stuck, ask if you can come back to that question.*
 - *Such a request is a risky strategy that may eliminate you, but it's better than not answering at all.*
- *Giving a weak response:*
 - *Acknowledge your flub and start again, saying, "Here's what I really meant."*
- *Sweating profusely:*
 - *Discreetly get out a handkerchief or tissue and dab the sweat.*
 - *Similarly, if your hands tend to sweat, be sure to wipe them dry before shaking the interviewer's hand.*
- *Bilal, please add a note here for Arabic-related questions... things that could embarrass an interviewee due to his/her national ethnicity. Especially with today's anti-Arab climate.*

At The Interview

5. Show Your Interest by Asking Questions.

*Toward the end of most job interviews, the interviewer will give you the opportunity to ask questions. You must ask **a least one** question; even if you are not interested. To do otherwise often signals the interviewer that you don't really have any interest in the job or the company. Questions you might ask at a job interview:*

- Can you describe a typical day for someone in this position?*
- What is the top priority of the person who accepts this job?*
- What are the day-to-day expectations and responsibilities of this job?*
- How will my leadership responsibilities and performance be measured? And by whom? How often?*
- Can you describe the company's management style?*
- Can you discuss your take on the company's corporate culture?*
- What are the company's values?*
- How would you characterize the management philosophy of this organization? Of your department?*
- What is the organization's policy on transfers to other divisions or other offices?*
- Are lateral or rotational job moves available?*
- Does the organization support ongoing training and education for employees to stay current in their fields?*
- What do you think is the greatest opportunity facing the organization in the near future? The biggest threat?*
- Why did you come to work here? What keeps you here?*
- How is this department perceived within the organization?*
- Is there a formal process for advancement within the organization?*
- What are the traits and skills of people who are the most successful within the organization?*

At The Interview

5. Show Your Interest by Asking Questions. (continued)

- *Do not ask questions where the answer is*
 - *obvious or readily available -- or*
 - *when the topic has already been thoroughly discussed in the interview*
 - *Asking it demonstrates that you failed to listen to earlier information.*
- *Never ask about salary and benefit issues until the employer raises these subjects.*
- *Me first: What you can do for me instead do what I can do for you?*
- *Questions that reveal weaknesses.*
 - *Will I have to meet a lot of deadlines?*
 - *Do you really expect me to work very hard and do a lot of overtime?*
- *Questions asked in a confrontational or condescending tone.*
- **Real Life Lessons:**
 - *If you are applying in engineering firms in the private sector, Remember the smaller the firm the longer the hours you are going to have to work.*
 - *Also, **MOST PROFESSIONALS DO NOT GET PAID OVERTIME.** Don't be shocked if the company pays straight time or even just salary. Most Engineers work in engineering because they like it. If we wanted to make a lot of money, we could have been doctors, lawyers or stock traders. This is your career, you are working for your career. You are not an "hourly worker"*

At The Interview

6. Closing the Deal: Getting to the Next Step in the Process

Job-Hunting is like a Sale. You Marketed yourself and the buyer (interviewer) may be interested. But you need to “CLOSE THE DEAL”.

- *First, if you are excited about the job and feel you had a strong visit*
 - *You should ask for the job offer.*
 - *If you're offered the job, ask about getting a formal, written offer, and ask about when the company needs your decision.*
- *Second, if job offer talk is still too preliminary,*
 - *Make sure you ask about the next step in the process –*
 - *Ask about the company's timetable for filling the position.*
- *What if there's Objections?*
 - *Overcoming Objections: it's a proven theory that if you can overcome all your prospect's objections, s/he will have no choice but to agree to your offer.*

At The Interview

6. Closing the Deal: Getting to the Next Step in the Process

Overcoming Objections

- *Overcoming objections can be done in a number of different ways, but the keys are to*
 - *Acknowledge the interviewer's objection*
 - *Understand the true cause of the objection*
 - *Respond with enough information to defuse the objection*
 - *It's best to anticipate these potential objections before the job interview*
- *What do you do if no objections are raised? That doesn't mean they don't exist it. Be Proactive, and ask the question:*
 - *"Do you see any concerns that stand in the way of my succeeding in this position?"*

After The Interview

1. Thank-You and Follow-up Communications.

Your follow-up can help parlay you into an offer. You can't sit back and wait for the job offer, so consider these key rules and strategies for following-up your job interviews.

- *Ask at the end of the interview when the employer expects to make the hiring decision.*
- *Obtain the correct titles and names of all the people who interviewed you. (Ideally, do get each person's business card.)*
- *Be proactive and consider follow-up a strategic part of your job search process.*
- *Only about 5 percent of those looking for jobs perform this simple yet crucial ritual.*
- *So, you want to send a Follow Up Thank You Letter, but you're wondering:*
 - ***Will The letter come off as me being wimpy or even desperate to send a thank-you letter? Won't the employer think I'm sucking up?***
 - ***No! Employers consider it common courtesy!***
 - ***Will a thank-you note make or break my chances of getting a job?***
 - ***No! Why Take a Chance on NOT getting the job?***
 - ***Should it be a typed business letter or a handwritten social note?***
 - ***Typed is always Better, Even an Email is fine***

After The Interview

3. Offer or Rejection.

Handling either with grace and effectiveness

- *Remember the old saying:*
 - *“if it was not meant to be, then it was not meant to be.”*
- *Don't be upset or angry at that company or interviewer.*
 - *Don't kill your chances of future employment with them.*
 - *Remember, engineering is still a close-knit community*
 - *Bad talk about your interviewer can come back and haunt you later*
- *When One Door Closes, 10 Others Open...*
- *Perhaps Your Culture and The Company's culture were not compatible?*
 - *You cannot change who you are. Accept and be Proud of yourself and your heritage.*

Internships

- Employer surveys rate previous work experience as one of the most desirable traits in college graduates. But how can a company assess student work experience?
- Internships and co-ops provide employers with the ability to evaluate hiring potential based on internal skill standards and actual performance. Furthermore, by training interns in a controlled setting, employers can provide company-specific training, increasing new hire productivity.
- To compete in the recruiting market, employers are cultivating talent through internships and co-op programs - which have re-emerged as one of the most effective short- and long- term recruiting tools.
- University career centers will note committed organizations that offer internships, co-ops, and lectures.

Internship

If the student has the luxury of choosing an internship or co-op program, they should consider the following:

- That it provides *project/job experience* that suits the student intern needs.
- The company fits the type of place you would like to work after graduation.
- Provides *training* that will enhance the intern's skills and prepares them for a successful transition to a full-time position.
- That the program provides a Mentor for the student intern.
- Are there opportunities to become a full-time employee after graduation?
- Is feedback from former interns of the company's program available.
- Are there extra features to the program, such as networking gatherings and speakers, that communicate the organization's commitment to students and enhance the student experience.

Internship

Quite often at UIC I would see brilliant students from overseas but they failed to assimilate into life. This gives them exposure to the right people. As it is overseas, its about who you know just as much as what you know. Some simple pointers

- Take a look at your professors' backgrounds

" I took a course that was taught by the head of the Criminal Justice department at UIC. After doing well in his class, I approached him for an internship with some people he knew at the Cook County Public Defender's office. This is what led to me realizing I didn't want to be an attorney, but its a good example of knowing who they are and what they can do."

- Volunteer:

Corporate America is in a bear market meaning money is tight. Look for ways to assist on projects as a temporary, unpaid internship. Just because there is no posting for such help needed doesn't mean they don't need it. Look for projects that are going on in your field in the area, find out who owns the contract, and approach them asking for the internship. Many times they will be impressed by the initiative. Small town governments are very big on this with their tight budgets.

- For general workplace behavior:

–Remember, these are your coworkers and deserve respect. Treat them as you would expect to be treated

–Don't speak Arabic in the workplace. Its unprofessional and makes people uneasy as they feel you may be speaking about them

–Dress and act for the position you want, not the position you hold.

–Find ways to set yourself apart from your peers. Identify special projects or ways to increase productivity or smooth workflow. There are a number of intelligent people out there and you must stand out so find ways to do that.