The Unwritten Rules of Interviewing

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WARNING

The stories you are about to hear
are true;
only the names have been changed
to protect the innocent

Getting your foot in the door

- ❖ The MYTH of job postings
  - Most posted jobs are already taken
  - Many jobs are never posted
  - Good candidates make their own job postings
- ❖ Getting your resume looked at
  - Use your network (No, it's not cheating!)
  - Use the phone
  - Write letters - to the right people
  - Use email – only if you really must

15 Seconds per resume

- Double check your spelling
- Tailor your resume to the position you are applying for
- Try to be specific rather than general
- DO NOT lie, pad, exaggerate

The initial phone call

- ❖ Preparing for the interview
  - Read up on the company
  - Read up on the department
  - Read up on your new boss
- ❖ Asking questions
  - Be ready with questions
- ❖ Act excited !
  - Do you really want the job?
- ❖ Warn your roommates, spouse, children, ...

Researching the company

- ❖ Check the Web
- ❖ Follow up on papers and reports written by the staff
- ❖ Use your network

I'd like you to give a presentation

- ❖ Who's the audience?
  - You have to know the audience
  - Be flexible – you don't know who will actually be in the audience until the day of the talk
- ❖ What's the purpose of the talk?
  - High level overview
  - Technical project description
- ❖ How long should it be?
  - Different length talks have different purposes

What should you include in your talk ?

- ❖ Why is this problem important?
  - ▪ Or - Why should I care?
- ❖ What was the outcome/product/....
  - ▪ Did you actually finish something?
- ❖ What was your contribution?
  - ▪ OK to use words like "we", "the group", "my advisor", but they must be offset by words like "This is my main result"

How long should your talk last?

- ❖ 1 hour
- ❖ 50 minutes
- ❖ As long as people keep asking questions
- ❖ As long as it takes

The single most important point is that you MUST finish on time.

Probably the most important aspect of the entire interview is your presentation

- ❖ The interview talk can make or break the interview
- ❖ You need to be able to convey:
  - Technical competence
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Self-confidence
- ❖ Practice your talk ahead of time
- ❖ Prepare for questions, especially the really obvious ones, n=1

Technical competence is not enough

- ❖ Technical competence
  - Always highly valued, BUT not sufficient
- ❖ High level of creativity/curiosity
  - Much sought after - and very rare
  - Critical thinking skills and follow-through
- ❖ High level of enthusiasm
  - More important than you might think
  - Team dynamics increasingly important

Bad Answers to Good Questions

10 Easy Ways to Not Get a Job Offer

What do you want to work on?

- ❖ I'm very flexible
  - I don't know what I want to do
- ❖ Anything you want me to work on
  - I don't know what I want to do
- ❖ I don't know
  - I don't know what I want to do

Why did you work on this problem?

- ❖ Because my advisor told me to
  - ▪ I need to be told exactly what to do
- ❖ It looked kind of interesting
  - ▪ I can't prioritize tasks
- ❖ I wanted to graduate
  - ▪ I'm tired of school and I'm desperate for a job (funding ran out).

Off-the wall questions

- ❖ If you were an animal, what would you be?

- ❖ If you are a part of a salad, what part are you?

- ❖ If you were on an 8-hour transatlantic flight, who would you want to sit next to you and what would you talk about?

60 Seconds & You're Hired!, Robin Ryan, Penguin, 2000

Do you have any questions?

- ❖ I can't think of any right now
  - It's all I can do to stay awake
- ❖ No, you've covered everything so well already
  - I wasn't paying any attention
- ❖ What does your company do again?
  - I know I should ask questions and I'm buying time until I can think of one

Dinner conversation

- ❖ So now you can relax, right ?
  - ▪ Think again, you're still on an interview
  - ▪ Follow your host/hostess lead
  - ▪ Again, act excited
- ❖ Is there life after work?
  - ▪ Now is a good time to ask those questions
  - ▪ Try to find out how you'll fit into the group
- ❖ Stay away from hot-button issues
  - ▪ Politics, religion, is P = NP?

After the interview

- ❖ Thank you !
- ❖ Thank you !!
- ❖ Thank you !!!
- ❖ Written note, not email

Summary

- Be assertive in all aspects of the job hunt
- Demonstrate follow-through and professionalism
- Show enthusiasm
- Have a game plan for what you want to say and practice it

Typical questions

1. Tell me about yourself.

2. Where do you want to be in five years?

3. Why should I hire you?

4. What have you learned on your own?

5. What would you like to know about us?

6. How do you work under pressure?

7. What do you expect to accomplish here?

8. What kind of decisions do you find most difficult to make?

9. Give me an example of ….

Questions you might ask

1. What would a normal working day be like?

2. Can you explain the position and the type of candidate you would like to hire?

3. What do you expect from the successful candidate in the first three months?

4. Who will the new employee report to?

5. Do you see any major changes within the company that will affect this position?

6. How often are performance reviews given?

7. Does the company provide any training or other educational opportunities for staff?