



## **INTERVIEW TIPS**

### **Taking an Interview**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preparing for the Interview	3
What a Prospective Employer Fears / Wants to See in a Technical Lead	4
During the Interview	5
Personal Questions of an Interviewer	6
Interview Questions / Requests You Might Hear	7
Persuasive Communication	10
Initial Rapport	
Probing, Listening Actively, Primary Needs	
Features, Backed by Examples, Translated into Benefits & Outcomes	
Overcoming Objections	
Summarizing, Giving and Soliciting Feedback	
Closure Towards Action Plan, Step Commitments	
Managing Expectations	

## Preparing for the Interview

**Overall Interview Goal:** To inform, become informed, determine the mutual suitability, interact in a collaborative fashion, and have the option at the end of the cycle to accept or refuse an offer.

- What three or four points from among my accomplishments, technical strengths and personal / leadership qualities should they know about me if they know nothing else?
- What should they know about my goals and attitudes?
- Be prepared to track time to ensure that the above points are conveyed in the allotted time.
- Be prepared to handle questions about anything that could be an issue or vulnerability in your background. This could include short tenures, failed companies or products, gaps in your resume, etc. Think about the beneficial aspects of these experiences, i.e. what you learned, how it demonstrates you're not afraid of risk, etc. Don't be defensive; be prepared to talk about self-improvement.
- Do your homework about the company, its technology and market, as well as your interviewers.
- Use the interview, in part, as a building block for a future working relationship.
- Approach it as a challenge to enjoy and learn from.

## What a Prospective Employer Fears

- That you won't be capable of doing the job, or learning it quickly ("time is money")
- That you'll be unwilling to take direction
- That you'll be unwilling or unable to show initiative or decisiveness
- That you'll be unable to get along with authorities, peers or subordinates
- That you'll be arrogant
- That you'll be a whiner
- That you'll prove unstable
- That you'll do just enough to get by
- That you won't stay for very long
- That you'll misrepresent yourself - your skills or experience - in the interview
- That you'll learn proprietary information and pass it on

## What a Prospective Employer Wants to See in a Technical Lead

- Someone who proves the opposite of what they fear (*see above*)
- Evidence of achievements and competencies that are relevant to their technologies and work environment
- Evidence of strong technical fundamentals with a balance between breadth of knowledge and specific expertise
- A responsive listener
- A skilled problem-solver
- A team player
- One who understands and can embrace the interviewer's and firm's primary needs
- Someone who is:
  - courteous
  - punctual
  - appropriately confident
  - honest
  - reliable
  - appropriately motivated (not too eager or desperate)

## During the Interview

### Style:

- Stay purposeful, but stay alert. Use your intuition; be responsive.
- Shake hands firmly - no vice grips or “dead fish” shakes
- Use eye contact as a means of connecting with your interviewer(s)
- Sit straight, but not too stiffly; don’t slouch: project poise
- Eliminate nervous gestures as much as possible: playing with rings, your hair, ear, fingers or pens, etc.
- Listen well; keep interruptions to a minimum, reserved for back-and-forth brainstorming
- Don’t smile nervously to handle uncomfortable moments
- Eliminate distracting patterns of speech, such as overusing “uh,” “you know,” “like”
- Be direct in your answers, but make sure to use illustrations to support any assertion you make.
- Don’t speak too long at any point without checking in: asking a question or soliciting feedback
- Don’t be afraid to pause and think momentarily: don’t just fill the pauses with words
- Avoid monotone; don’t be afraid to show appropriate passion on ideas, issues
- Stay crisp and stop when you’re finished: no filling or redundancy

### Strategy:

- Solicit and respond to interviewers’ primary needs as early as possible: you solve relevant problems, you deliver return on investment
- Describe your qualities, translate them into benefits, illustrate benefits with your accomplishments, tie your accomplishments to business outcomes

### Tactics:

- Determine how much time you’ll have at the outset, keep track for yourself
- Don’t try to control the whole interview, but do make your positioning points and qualify the opportunity
- Asking questions generally gains control
- Make sure to offer up control if you haven’t answered questions
- Don’t be afraid to reframe questions to emphasize strengths, key positioning points or responses to objections
- Solicit feedback while you still have time to respond
- Determine the next step

## Personal Questions of an Interviewer

- What do you like most about this company? Your group?
- What could make your life here easier?
- What are the key problems to be solved for the company? Your group?
- (If a job's open.) Who would the ideal person be to fill this role?
- How would you characterize the culture here?
- Is there anything you'd like to do to change the culture?
- Are there any bottlenecks within the organization that effect your group?
- What are some examples of a great day here for you? A bad one?
- What are your goals for your future here?
- How do decisions get made here?
- What would you consider innovative in products and management practices?
- What does this firm have over competitive firms?
- What do the competitive firms have over this firm?
- How are concerns with quality and ethics reflected in management practices here?

## Interview Questions / Requests You Might Hear

### Job History / Experience

Walk me through your background.

How did you do in school?

Describe a typical day on the job.

What was the mission of that job?

What made you leave that job?

What made you pick that job?

What accomplishments there can you take personal responsibility for?

What accomplishments do you feel most proud of there? overall in your career?

What would you have done differently there? overall in your career?

To whom did you report?

What did you think of him/her?

How did you get along with him/her?

How did others get along with him/her?

What challenged you most about your boss(es)? your reports?

To what do you attribute your company's successes? your successes?

To what do you attribute your company's failings? your failings?

What was the best job you ever had and why?

What was the worst job you ever had and why?

Have you ever been fired?

If so, what was the story behind it?

Have you ever fired somebody?

If so, how did you do it?

(If relevant) Why have you changed jobs so often?

(If relevant) Why did you stay at that company for such a short period?

(If relevant) Why have you stayed at that company for so long?

### Skills / Knowledge

What are your technical strengths? Interpersonal or leadership strengths?

How broad are you technically?

What are your weaknesses?

What's your view of the (relevant) market?  
How do you see us in the market / client base?  
How much do you know about our product?  
How are your writing skills?  
How are your presenting skills?  
How would you solve this specific architectural / coding problem?  
Tell me what you think of this piece of code.

## **Style / Attitudes**

How would you describe your decision-making style?  
Describe yourself as you think your boss, peer, or subordinate would?  
Describe yourself as you think one of your less enthusiastic subordinates would.  
What motivates you?  
What would be the ideal company culture for you?  
Tell me about a difficult situation and how you resolved it successfully.  
Tell me about a difficult situation you weren't able to resolve successfully, and why.?  
Who have been your mentors and why?  
Describe when you made an unpopular decision, or confronted an impropriety.  
What role do you tend to play in management or other team decisions?  
How would you define leadership?  
Who do you think are the greatest leaders and managers, and why?  
What, if any, are your leadership and management qualities?  
What are the fundamentals of a good R&D process?  
How do you typically handle pressure?  
How flexible are you?  
How firm are you?  
How organized are you?  
Give me an example of how creative or resourceful you can be.  
Is there a common thread to what you've found fulfilling through your various jobs?  
Is there a common thread to what's frustrated you through your various jobs?  
To what do you attribute your successes?

## **Your Job Status**

How interested are you in making a move?  
How long have you been looking for a job?

Why do you want to work here? (And you may not know yet if you do.)

If you could have the ideal job, what would it be?

Where do you want to be in a year? 3 years? 5 years?

How long are you prepared to commit to us?

Will you relocate?

How much will you travel?

How much are you making?

What are you looking to make?

Why should we hire you?

What's unique about you?

Are you a U.S. citizen?

If not, do you have a green card?

When can you start?

## **15 Questions They're Not Supposed to Ask**

1. How old are you?
2. Are you married?
3. Do you have children?
4. Do you plan on getting pregnant?
5. Do you have a police record? (unless going for security clearance)
6. Do you use drugs? (unless going for security clearance)
7. Do you have AIDS?
8. Are you a homosexual?
9. How do you vote?
10. What religion are you?
11. Do you go to church / temple?
12. Are you now, or have you ever been in therapy?
13. Have you ever been party to a lawsuit?
14. Will you show me source code from your last company?
15. Will you go out with me?

# Persuasive Communication

## Initial Rapport

- Be calm, confident.
- Tune in to the other person. Pay attention to who s/he is and how s/he's doing this day.
- Be genuine.
- Approach the interview with positive expectations.

## Probing, Listening Actively, Building Rapport and Knowledge of Primary Needs

- Identify primary needs to assess the person and the opportunity, and to be persuasive.

Primary needs are the real, often hidden, needs of the interviewer. They might include:

- improve the value of my equity by getting these problems solved
- get a role model in here to help the younger folks and take a load off of me
- get a guru here because I can't handle some of the questions, etc.

- Listening actively means engaging in what's being said. At appropriate breaks, you reflect your understanding of what you hear, empathize, and/or probe further to expand or clarify what's being said.

## Presenting Features, Backed by Examples and Translated into Benefits and Outcomes

To illustrate:

Feature: I'm an expert on IP security.

Example: In fact, I was one of the chief architects and patent holders on the latest version of our product.

Benefit: What that means for you is that I can bring in a specialized knowledge as well as contact base and even notoriety to your security issues. We closed a major customer not long after a presentation I made to the CSO and her team.

- Benefits are most powerful when personalized to someone's primary needs.

## Overcoming Objections

- Sometimes objections should not be overcome, for example, when certain basic requirements for proceeding are not met. For example, if someone considers you "too senior for what we basically see as maintenance coding," the job is probably not right for you, unless there is a chance at creating a role that would utilize more of your expertise.
- To overcome an objection, first listen to ensure that you:
  - understand the nature of the objections
  - understand the model of what the objector really wants, confirmed through reflecting what you've heard

- Often, people’s objections stem from short-sighted assumptions or hidden biases. You must quickly evaluate the validity of the objection before marshaling your response.
- If you are to respond, there are three basic rules to follow:
  - a) Don’t get defensive. A response differs from a defense.
 

*Example:* “It’s true I had those two short tenures in a row. I understand your concern about commitment. But you can see I have longer tenures as well, and both the shorter ones were with start-up’s, which demonstrates my ability to take risk. I believe you can use someone who isn’t afraid to try new approaches.”
  - b) Probe for the bedrock concerns at the foundation of the objection.
 

*Objection:* You’re expensive.

Possible Concerns:

    - How can I feel more confident of return on my investment?
    - I don’t have the budget for this. Is there something you can say to help me get more?
    - Hey, you make more than I do!
    - To pay you that money would create unrest with the rest of the team who earn less.
    - I don’t think you’re a match, but it’s easier to say it’s the money.
    - What if you don’t produce?
  - c) Position negatives from the objector’s model into positive differentiation.
 

*Example:* “I understand your financial concerns. But look at it as a commentary on how much I’ve been valued in other settings. And that’s because I produce. Of course, it also means I’ll have that much more incentive to produce here, to prove myself. “

## Summarizing, Giving and Soliciting Feedback

- At the end of a session, summarizing what should be understood clarifies what’s been communicated. Offering specific feedback, particularly if you feel positively about a potential opportunity, adds meat around the bones of your interest to continue, thus making it more natural to move towards closure.
- Knowing you intend to summarize and offer feedback at the end forces you to listen more attentively throughout.

## Closure Towards Action Plan, Step Commitments

- It is important at every stage in the process of developing a good opportunity to understand what it takes to achieve the next step. Often the time when you can most artfully gain a commitment from someone on the fence is during the feedback and summary at the end.

## Managing Expectations

- The concept of managing expectations is rooted in one prime directive: no surprises. Identify problem areas as quickly as possible and raise them to your EGS Elite Search Consultant or other appropriate person. It might be compensation, job title or responsibilities, commute, feeling about an interviewer. Dealing with these or other issues early on creates the opportunity for resolution one way or the other.