“Powering Through the Interview”

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Justin Lewis, P.E.
About Me

- Born and raised in Louisville, KY

- Attended University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign
  - B.S. Civil Engineering, 2007 (Geotech)
  - M.S. Civil Engineering, 2008 (Geotech)

- Joined Keller (formerly Hayward Baker) in 2008
  - Currently Project Executive
  - FE, PE, PM, and Division Manager previously
“You go to a job interview to discover whether your talents, abilities, interests and direction are a good fit for the job, the company, and the company’s mission.”

Susan M. Heathfield
Human Resources Expert
Powering Through the Interview

- Purpose and Goals of Interview
- Preparation
  - Typical Interview Questions
- Tips for Before, During, and End of Interview
- Interview Follow Up
- Avoiding Anxiety & Nervousness
- Pop Quiz!
Purpose of Interview

**Interviewer**

Determines if you are qualified for the Job and a fit for the Company.

**Interviewee**

Determines if the Job and Company are a fit for you.
Purpose of Interview

An Interview Is:

- A test drive of your communication abilities
- Chance for interviewer to get to know you as a person
- An event where you control the input, but not outcome
- Opportunity to turn one way communication into two way dialogue

An Interview Is Not:

- A Conversation with a Friend
- A Place to monopolize the conversation
- Something to Fear!
Goals of Interview

- **The Obvious: GET THE JOB!**

- **Make the Argument**
  - Why You Deserve to be Hired
  - What You Bring to the Company

- **Differentiate Yourself**
  - Get Across 3-5 of Best Accomplishments
  - Unique Characteristics to “Stand Out”
Preparation: Company Research

- Industry Company Is in
  - Transportation, Water Treatment, Public/Municipality
- Understand Services Provided
  - Design, Construction, Consulting?
- Size of Firm – 5 employees? Or 10,000?
- Organizational Structure
- Office Locations – Geography
  - Local, Regional, Global Firm?
- Website – Typical/Featured Projects
- Current Events/News, Recent Announcements
- Industry salaries/benefits
Preparation: Interviewer

- Position in the firm?
  - HR, Sr. Engineer, Owner

- Professional background
  - Company Website, LinkedIn

- Personal background
  - Facebook? (If public), Web Search
  - For small talk purposes, common interests.

- More you know about the Interviewer, more comfortable you will be.
Preparation: Interview Questions

Introductory Questions

- “Walk me through your resume”
- “Tell me about yourself”

Answering Strategies

- Best opportunity to frame your candidacy by telling Your Story
- Clear, well-organized 1-2 minute response
- Often the 1st question and sets tone for interview
- See Handout – Responding to Introductory Questions
Preparation: Your Story

- Use “Your Story” to articulate your value
- Why do you need a “Story”?
  - Create differentiation from other candidates
  - Interviewer understands what you bring to the company

- Articulating Your Value
  - Personal qualities and strengths as common bond
  - Keep it simple with stories of impact
  - Clarity – Be clear about who you are and are not
  - Consistency – Story should align with interview goals
Preparation: Your Story

Organizing Your Story – 2 Basic Methods

- Chronological: Leading from one experience to another
  - *Describes the evolution of your interest in career*

- Story that is based on your skills and selling points

Responding to Introductory Questions Handout

- Work through worksheet to prepare
Preparation: Interview Questions

- Behavioral Questions
  - “Tell me about a time when...”

- Answering Strategies
  - No rambling: Concise and thoughtful storytelling.
  - Anticipate stories you will need to tell, write them down.
    - “The time I overcame failure was....”
Preparation: Behavioral Questions

S.O.A.R. Method – Achievement

• Situation you encountered
• Opportunity/Obstacle you faced
• Action(s) you took to address the opportunity/obstacle
• **Results:** Quantifiable or specific results of your action(s)

S.O.F.T. Method - Failure

• Situation you encountered
• Opportunity/Obstacle you faced
• **Failure:** what actions taken that did not work
• **Takeaway:** lessons learned to help future performance
Preparation: Interview Questions

- **Analytical/Technical Questions**
  - Engineering related

- **Self Assessment**
  - Strengths? Weaknesses?
  - Greatest Achievement/Failure?

- **Fit**
  - Why should we hire you?
  - Why do you want to work here?

- **Brain Teasers**
  - Thinking on your feet – cannot prepare for these!
Interview Questions Summary

Step One: Anticipate Questions
  • Put yourself in shoes of interviewer – company research

Step Two: Plan Your Responses
  • Write out response to each question
  • Review responses with friends, roommate, parents
  • Review and Edit so they are concise and on message

Step Three: Rehearse
  • Deliver responses to mirror, voice recorder, friends
  • Mock interviews – possibly videotape
# Interview Questions Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of question</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Strategies for responding</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Behavioral         | • Tell me about a time when your opinion was challenged. How did you handle it?  
                     • Tell me about your last experience working in a team?                     | • Situation  
                     • Obstacle  
                     • Action  
                     • Result  
                     Begin by outlining your strategy/methodology/decision framework/etc.  
                     Include the “why” in your response.  
                     Ask questions for clarification and additional information when needed.  
                     Where appropriate restate/summarize your conclusions. |
| Analytical/Technical| • What are the different ways to value a company?  
                     • Which is a better long-term investment, Priceline.com or Ebay?         | Begin your response by restating the question. Make sure you address the “why” factor. For example: My philosophy on management is...  
                     Consider addressing the underlying “fit question” relative to the position/organization as you formulate your response. |
| Self-Assessment     | • What was the most challenging or riskiest decision you have made?  
                     • What do you consider to be your greatest achievements to date? Why?  
                     • What things give you the greatest satisfaction at work?  
                     • What things frustrate you the most? How do you usually cope with them? | Articulate the reasons why you are a good match for the position and company throughout the interview.  
                     Ask intelligent Qs about the company.  
                     Sometimes there’s a “right” answer and sometimes there isn’t. In either case, what matters most is how well you support your response—where possible incorporate specifics and creativity. |
| Fit                 | • Why do you want to work here?                                           | Stay calm. Understand what they are assessing—they’re trying to get a sense of how you deal with an unexpected and/or uncomfortable situation.  
                     Practice thinking on your feet. |
| Brain Teasers       | • Why are manhole covers round?  
                     • How would you find a needle in a haystack?                           |                                                                                                                                      |
| Stress              | • Interviewers may ask Qs quickly—using a “rapid fire” approach.  
                     • Interviewers may act disinterested, bored, or begin answering emails during your conversation. |                                                                                                                                      |
| Case                |                                                                           | Use traditional business frameworks to solve these business problems.                                                                                      |
Problematic Questions

Examples

- Do you have a visual, speech, or hearing disability?
- Are you planning to have a family? When?
- Have you ever filed a workers’ compensation claim?
- How many days of work did you miss last year due to illness?
- Would you have a problem working with a female partner?
Before The Interview

- Positive and Confident Attitude
  - Highly Ranked CEE Department!

- Dress for Success (even on virtual interviews!)

- Look Yourself Over Before Arriving/Logging On

- Arrive/Log On 10-15 Minutes Early – BE PROMPT

- Pen, Notepad, Copies of Resumes

- If Submitting Application – Consistent with Resume
During the Interview – Body Language

**R-E-L-A-X!**

**Do**
- Bring Enthusiasm
- Relaxed Smile, Direct Eye Contact
- Straight Posture, Lean Slightly Forward
- Firm Handshake, Use of Hand Movement
- “Read” the Interviewer

**Don’t**
- Arms Crossed, Looking at Watch
- Nervous Movements, Hands Clenched
- Staring at or Looking Past Interviewer
- Interrupt Conversation
- Lie
End of Interview

- Summarize Your Key Strengths and Why You are Right for Position
- Ask Any Outstanding Questions
- Thank Interviewer by Name
- Inquire About Next Step and Associated Time Frame
- Express Interest in Hearing from Them
Interview Follow-Up

- Thank You Email within 24 Hours

- Reconnect by Phone or Email if No Correspondence in Discussed Timeframe

- Be Prepared if Next Step is Offered
  - Second Interview or Office Visit
  - Job Offer – Employment Terms
Avoiding Nervousness and Anxiety

- Be Prepared
- Be Prompt
  - Being Late Increases Stress
- Relax
  - Take a minute to clear your mind immediately before
- Role Play
  - Practice Interview with Friends, Roommate
- Stay Focused on Goals
- Smile, Be Enthusiastic!
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions

What is your biggest weakness?

- Your response?
  - If you are completely honest, may hurt chance at getting the job.
  - Stating you don’t have one is lying, nobody is perfect.
  - Cheesy responses not good either
    - “I work too many hours and neglect my friends”
    - “I tend to make people jealous with my work ethic”
  - Give small flaw you are actively working to fix
    - Important question to be prepared for to answer
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions

Would you rather work for money or job satisfaction?

- Your response?
  - I want to work for money! (WRONG/BAD RESPONSE)
    - Okay to admit money is important though.
  - Nothing is more important to me than the job! (GOOD)
    - Money can’t buy happiness, right?
    - If not, you’re just looking for the paycheck....
    - Trick Question
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions

Would you rather be liked or feared?

- Your response?
  - I want to be feared! (WRONG RESPONSE)
    - Really? Probably doesn’t work well with others....
  - I want to be liked! (OKAY RESPONSE)
    - Wants to at least fit in to work environment but may be a pushover....
  - Neither, I want to be respected. (BEST RESPONSE)
    - Trick Question
    - Ability to motivate people to complete the job
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions

Would you still work if you won the lottery?

- Your response?
  - Yes, I absolutely love the work grind!
    - *Is this really the truth?*
  - No, I hate the thought of working.
    - *What message are you sending to the interviewer?*
  - My favorite: Probably, but either for myself or for a non-profit involving engineering
    - *Pursue my passion of engineering and don’t have to worry about paying the bills*
Pop Quiz: Interview Questions

Who are you going to vote for in November?

- Your response?
  - Still undecided, not sure, etc.... (BEST)
  - A strong response either way is a real gamble.

- Should this question be asked by interviewer?
  - No, always avoid discussing politics AND religion
Powering Through the Interview

Great Preparation = Great Interview = Hired!

Questions?
Preparation: Responding to Introductory Questions

Use this page to collect ideas to answer introductory questions. (i.e. Tell me about yourself OR Walk me through your resume) Don’t worry about organizing it yet; just consider things you might want to include.

1. Summarize your key selling points – the most important things you want the interviewer to know. Choose items that add the most value to the position for which you’re interviewing.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most important skills or characteristics</th>
<th>Where did you demonstrate this skill?</th>
<th>How did you develop an interest in this industry/function?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. _____________________</td>
<td>______________________________________</td>
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<td>b. _____________________</td>
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2. Articulate elements of your candidacy that differentiate you or provide a competitive advantage.

   Key attributes that differentiate you from other candidates.

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<th>a. _____________________</th>
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</table>

3. What negative impressions or stereotypes might you have to overcome?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impression to overcome</th>
<th>Message to address it</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>a. _____________________</td>
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4. What is the best way for you to structure your answers - a chronological evolution of interest or by identification of key selling points? (Make any notes in this space.)
Option 1: Telling a story that chronicles the evolution of your career interests.

Once you have some ideas recorded on page 1 concerning what you might include, use this worksheet to help you organize your answers to introductory questions.

First, put the remarks you want to make in the order you want to make them. Usually this is a simple chronology, though it may begin at a different point in time.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job or experience</th>
<th>Key thing(s) you learned (one of your key skills/selling pts, a differentiating characteristic, or a message to overcome a weakness)</th>
<th>How did the experience add to your interest in this career?</th>
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Option 2: Telling a story based on key skills or selling points.

I. Identify What Your Target Audience Values
   Based on your research, what are the top three things your target audience values in candidates? How well does your background match these?

II. Understand your message / objective of communicating your story
   What are the top three things that you want to make sure the listener takes away?

III. Demonstrate solid and concrete evidence to support your message / objective
   What are relevant and succinct examples of the value that you bring? These can include: Direct experience; transferable skills; Interpersonal attributes; Education; Relevant certifications (EIT); and Volunteer leadership positions.

IV. Build a bridge from your educational experience to your career target
   What are the specific skills and experiences from number III that serve as a bridge from your education and volunteering and show your commitment, understanding, and readiness to make this transition? Address gaps and mitigate risk for potential employers.
Now that you’ve organized the elements of your response to introductory questions, begin to write out a prose version of it.
1. Tell me about yourself.
2. Tell me about your work experience.
3. What is your most important accomplishment to date?
4. How would you describe your ideal job?
5. Why did you choose this career?
6. What goals do you have in your career?
7. How do you personally define success?
8. Describe a situation in which you were successful.
9. What do you think it takes to be successful in this career?
10. What accomplishments have given you the most satisfaction in your life?
11. Would you rather work with information or with people?
12. Are you a team player?
13. What motivates you?
14. Why should I hire you?
15. Are you a goal-oriented person?
16. Tell me about some of your recent goals and what you did to achieve them.
17. What are your short-term goals? What is your long-range objective?
18. What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
19. How do you handle stressful situations?
20. Do you feel you handle conflict well?
21. Give an example of a time when you had to be relatively quick in coming to a decision.
22. Have you ever had a conflict with a boss or professor? How did you resolve it?
23. What major problem have you had to deal with recently?
24. Tell me about a time when your course load was heavy. How did you complete all your work?
25. Describe a situation in which you were unsuccessful; how did you handle it; what you learned?
26. Do you handle pressure well?
27. What is your greatest strength? What is your greatest weakness?
28. Tell me about a time when you had to accomplish a task with someone who was particularly difficult to get along with.
29. If I were to ask one of your professors/a boss to describe you, what would they say?
30. Why did you choose to attend U of I?
31. What changes would you make at your college?
32. How has your education prepared you for your career?
33. What were your favorite classes? Why?
34. What criteria are you using to evaluate the company for which you hope to work?
35. Who were your favorite professors? Why?
36. Why is your GPA not higher?
37. Do you have any plans for further education?
38. How much training do you think you’ll need to become a productive employee?
39. What do you know about our company?
40. Why are you interested in our company?
41. Do you have any location preferences?
42. How familiar are you with the community that we’re located in?
43. Are you willing to relocate? In the future?
44. Are you willing to travel? How much?
45. Is money important to you? How much money do you need to make to be happy?
46. What kind of salary are you looking for?
47. Do you have any questions for me?
Warm-Up Questions
  What made you apply for this position?
  Tell me about yourself.
  Briefly, would you summarize your work history and education for me?

Work History
  What is important to you in a company/organization?
  Describe one or two of your major accomplishments.
  Give an example of when you worked under pressure to meet a deadline.

Education
  What special aspects of your education or training have prepared you for this job?
  Why did you choose your major?
  What job-related skills have you developed?

Self-Assessment
  Which three adjectives would you use to describe yourself?
  What is your greatest strength?
  What is your greatest weakness?
  How do you cope with conflict?
  Describe a time when you overcame an obstacle.

Motivation
  Where do you see yourself in five years?
  How will this position enable you to reach your goals?
  What will you bring to the company/organization that is unique?

Oral Presentation Skills
  Have you ever done any group presentations?
  How comfortable are you speaking in front of groups?
  What is your experience with making presentations?

Leadership
  How do you facilitate group communication?
  Describe a time when you delegated responsibilities to group members.
  How do you set an example to others?
  How would you describe your basic leadership style?
  Describe a time when you worked in a team.

Stress Tolerance
  How do you cope with pressure?
  Give an example of a time when you worked well under pressure.

Job Performance
  What would you say are some areas that you need to improve on?
  Do you prefer working alone or in groups?
  How do you receive feedback?
  Describe a time when you explained something complex to a colleague successfully.

Creativity
  Of your creative accomplishments, what gave you the most satisfaction and why?
  What kind of problems have people recently called on you to solve? Tell me how you solved them.
  What methods do you employ while brainstorming?

Decisiveness
  The last time you did not know what decision to make, what did you do?
  What was the last major problem that you were confronted with? What action did you take?
  How do you determine or evaluate success?

Questions to ask employers
  What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
  What is the next step in the selection process?
  What kind of assignments might I expect during the first six months on the job?
  Describe the company culture.
  What training would I receive if hired?
Feedback on Mock Interview

A. Introduction

Firm handshake _________________________________________________________
Smile   _________________________________________________________

B. Presence

Posture   _________________________________________________________
Projected warmth/enthusiasm ______________________________________________
Avoided annoying mannerisms___________________________________________

C. Communication

Voice tone and volume ___________________________________________________
Proper use of diction _____________________________________________________
Attentive listening ______________________________________________________
Eye contact ____________________________________________________________

D. Interaction

Answered questions directly _______________________________________________
Provided specific examples ________________________________________________
Asked questions when appropriate __________________________________________
Demonstrated interest in position ___________________________________________

E. Closing

Asked the interviewer thoughtful questions __________________________________

What do you enjoy most about working here?
Is there anything I’ve mentioned that makes you think I’m not the best candidate for this job?
What is the next step in the selection process?
When do you expect to make your final decision?
What do you (the interviewer) like best about your job/company?
What kind of assignments might I expect during the first six months on the job?
Describe the company culture.
What training would I receive if hired?

Avoided questions on salary and benefits ___________________________________
Thanked the interviewer for his/her time ____________________________________
Inquired about the hiring timeline/process __________________________________
Finished with a firm handshake and smile ____________________________________

F. Specific comments/suggestions on questions and answers during the interview
• Why did you select your college or university?
• If you could, how would you plan your academic study differently? Why?
• How would you prepare for important tests or exams?
• What college subjects did you like best? Why?
• What college subjects did you like least? Why?
• Describe your most rewarding college experience.
• If I were to ask your professors to describe you in three words, what would they be?
• What was your biggest challenge as a student, and how did you handle it?
• Do you think that your grades are a good indication of your academic achievement?
• Did you prefer working independently or in groups on school projects?
• Do you have plans for continued study?
• What extracurricular activities have you participated in?
• What was your greatest strength as a student?
• Why did you choose your major?
• How has your college experience prepared you for a career?
• Have you completed any internships? What did you gain from the experience?
• Tell me about your work experience? How has it prepared you for a career?
• Have you accomplished something you’re proud of at work?
• What major problems have you encountered at work and how did you deal with them?
• What have you learned from your mistakes?
• What do you expect from a supervisor?
• What is your greatest weakness?
• How do you plan to overcome your weakness?
• What motivates you?
• What unique attributes can you bring to this company and position?
• How do you think a friend or professor who knows you well would describe you?
• How would you describe yourself?
• How do you handle stress and pressure?

Questions About the Future
• What are your short term goals and long range objectives?
• How do you plan to achieve your goals?
• What do you see yourself doing five years from now?
• What do you see yourself doing ten years from now?
• What are the most important rewards you expect in your career?

Questions About the Company and the Job
• What do you know about our company?
• What interests you about this job, why do you want to work here?
• If you were hiring a college graduate for this job, what qualities would you look for?
• What do you think it takes to be successful at this company?
• What can you contribute to our company?
• What new ideas do you think you can bring to this company?
• Describe the relationship that should exist between a manager and employees.
• In what kind of work environment are you most comfortable?
• Are you willing to travel or relocate?
• How do you feel about working evenings and weekends?