Inside the Mind of an Interviewer

ADVICE ABOUT TECHNICAL INTERVIEWING AND LEARNING TO INTERVIEW THE INTERVIEWER

Beliefs about Technical Interviews

Truth ▶ Talented programmers can fail to get a job offer

Myth ▶ If I struggle with a question, there's no way to turn things around

Myth ▶ To do well in the interview, I need to know the best solution right off the bat

Truth ▶ In most cases, it's not valuable to ask about benefits and compensation during the interview

Myth ▶ If I ask a question about the problem, the interviewer will think I don't know what I'm doing

Myth ▶ The most important goal of this interview is to get the job offer

Myth ▶ The interviewer's waiting for me to mess up; they aren't on my side

What Technical Interviewers Look For In Candidates

What We Look For In Candidates: Technical Qualifications

- Algorithms
- Architecture
- Clean Code
- Syntax
- Logic
- Math
- Object Oriented Design
- Error Handling
- Data Structures
- Testing

Can this candidate keep up with the technical demands of a developer position at our company?

Can this candidate solve problems and express their solutions through code?

What We Look For In Candidates: The So-Called "Soft Skills"

- Problem Solving
- Perseverance
- Concentration
- Openness to suggestion and ability to admit when they are wrong or don't know something
- Intellectual Flexibility
- Verbal Communication
- Ability to learn quickly

What We Look For In Candidates: The So-Called "Soft Skills"

- ▶ Problem Solving/Perseverance
  - ▶ We love it when candidates have strategies for when they get stuck
  - ▶ "Lightbulb Moments"

Myth "If I struggle with a question, game over. There's no way to turn things around"

What We Look For In Candidates: The So-Called "Soft Skills"

- ▶ Verbal Communication
  - ▶ "My biggest suggestion for almost any candidate is to talk through their thought process. I find candidates who talk about how they're planning to solve the problem—even ideas they end up saying won't work—do better at the interview."

Myth "To do well in the interview, I need to know the best solution right off the bat"

What We Look For In Candidates: The So-Called "Soft Skills"

▶ Verbal Communication

    ▶ Not just about **answering** questions,

           it's about **asking** questions too!

Myth   "If I ask a question about the problem, the interviewer will think I don't know what I'm doing"

What We Look For In Candidates: The So-Called "Soft Skills"

Demonstration Time!

Verbal Communication Demonstration

Write a method called intSum that takes an integer, n, and returns the sum of all positive integers from 1 to n.

Examples:

intSum(1) = 1, intSum(2) = 3, intSum(3)= 6

We Want **YOU** to Want **US**

"There are a variety of organizations and some will be a better fit than others. One company may not be a great fit and that's okay. **It's your job to try to figure that out for yourself** during the interview and through research. You should be interviewing the company in a way, too."

We Want **YOU** to Want **US**

"One aspect that I often look for is for the candidate to interview us. I'm much more likely to be inclined to recommend somebody that genuinely seems interested in working here. Many candidates fail to comprehend that they also need to interview us to see if this is a job that would fit their personality. **In other words, nobody is excited to hire somebody who is just looking for a job and doesn't care which company they work for.**"

We Want **YOU** to Want **US**

"I was part of an in-person interview when the candidate's phone went off in the middle of the interview. He asked "can I take this?" to which we replied "no". It wasn't the reason we didn't hire him, **but it didn't help**."

We Want **YOU** to Want **US**

- Think about what qualities you want in an employer/company

- Do your research

- Ask Questions!

IT'S A QUESTION PARTY!
MY FAVORITE!

Myth "The most important goal of this interview is to get the job offer"

We Want **YOU** to Want **US**

▶ Questions Regarding Benefits and Compensation

    ▶ "Salary doesn't matter until after you make sure there's a good fit between you and the company."

Truth "In most cases, it's not valuable to ask about benefits and compensation during the interview"

A Quick Bit of Advice

PREPARING FOR AN INTERVIEW

# General Advice: Cheating

Cheating: The Horror Stories

▶ "I was giving an online coding interview when I could tell the candidate was getting stumped. Then, out of nowhere he quickly came up with the correct solution. I asked him to walk me through it and it was quickly obvious that he didn't even understand the code he had written. After a few painful moments trying to figure it out, he said "wait, this doesn't even work"."

▶ At a recruiting event: "One of the people who got 99th percentile on [the Automated Coding Assessment] showed up for the in-person interview and clearly did not know how to program at all—didn't even know how to begin the [first coding] question. So clearly he cheated on [the Automated Coding Assessment] event, and there were several people who got 99th percentile all about the same time; they were probably sharing answers."

General Advice: Cheating

- If cheating pays off and you get an onsite interview or even a job offer….

WHAT THEN?

General Advice: Preparation
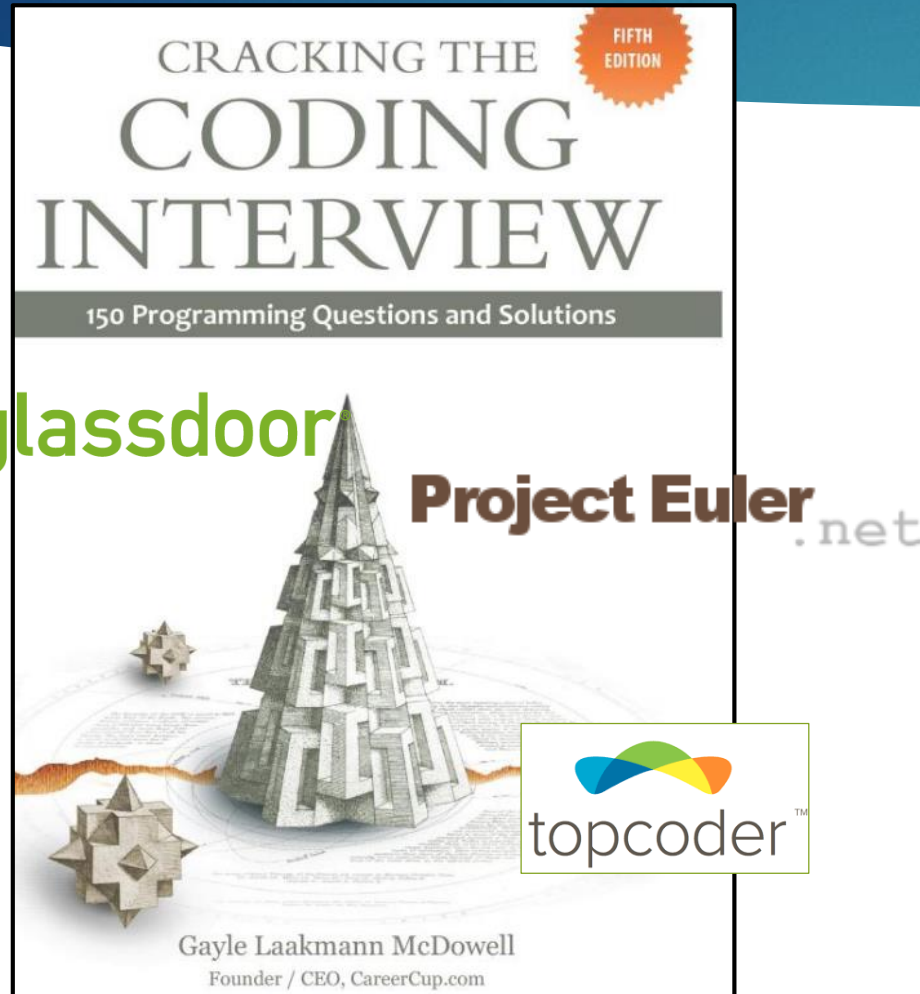
- Studying interview questions prior to the interview
  - Can be a helpful tool
  - Rote memorization will backfire: Quick answers lead to harder questions
  - If you've seen it before, let the interviewer know

General Advice: Practice Interviewing

- Do not wing it!
- Practice Interviewing...
  - Can help with nerves
  - Improves verbal skills
  - Will impress interviewer

Practice Makes Perfect

From the Other Side of the Table

ISSUES INTERVIEWERS CARE ABOUT AND CHALLENGES THEY FACE

Life as an Interviewer: HR and Legal

- We have an important set of guidelines that we follow to preserve fairness

- Sometimes we have to plead the fifth even though a candidate's question seems reasonable

Life as an Interviewer: HR and Legal

> "Sometimes candidates will ask you how they did in the interview or why they did not get hired. While it might be tempting to give them that feedback, **there are many legal risks involved in offering feedback**… If you are ever asked to give a candidate feedback, please respond by saying 'I'm sorry, we have a strict policy against providing feedback on the interview.' **Do not ever offer any good or bad feedback to a Clearwater candidate**, including friends and family, at any stage in the process."

Life as an Interviewer:
The Brainteaser Controversy

▶ The Cons:

▶ They don't appear relevant to the candidate

▶ Once a candidate has seen the problem, there's nothing to be learned from asking it.

▶ They do not "prove" whether a candidate is intelligent or a good problem solver.

Laszlo Bock, one-time SVP of People Operations at Google
(found on http://www.kpcb.com/blog/lessons-learned-how-google-thinks-about-hiring-management-and-culture)

Life as an Interviewer:
The Brainteaser Controversy

▶ Then why do interviewers still use them???

  ▶ They demonstrate a candidate's ability to persevere

    ▶ "These kinds of problems can often fluster a candidate. It's in these moments of stress that candidates show persistence"

  ▶ They can demonstrate a candidate's ability to verbally communicate and pick up on verbal cues and suggestions

    ▶ Brain teasers break the ice and get a candidate talking from the start of the interview

    ▶ "We want people that can talk though problems"

  ▶ These are used as a small piece of the puzzle

Life as an Interviewer: Finding the Balance

- Technical Skills vs. Non-Technical Skills
  - "I've noticed that because I have a technical background, I naturally tend to do very technical interviews, all coding, at the expense of the human side of it. I need to work on considering the non-technical aspects of the job as well."

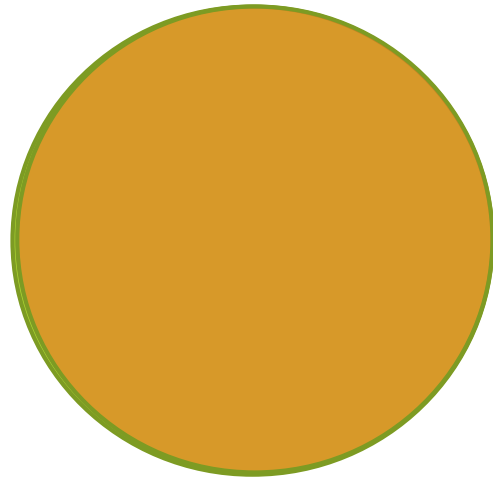# Life as an Interviewer: The Imperfect Science

All Applicants

Candidates we should not hire

Candidates we should hire

Candidates we make offers to

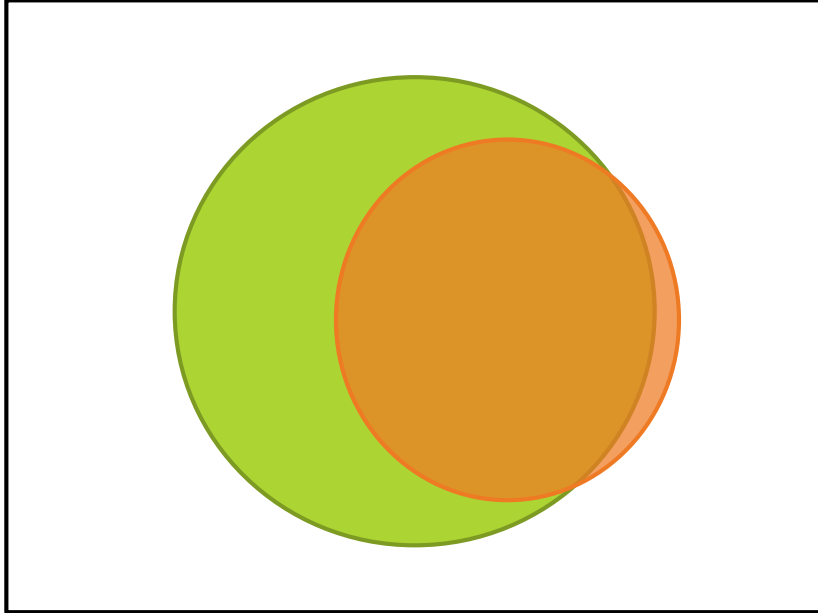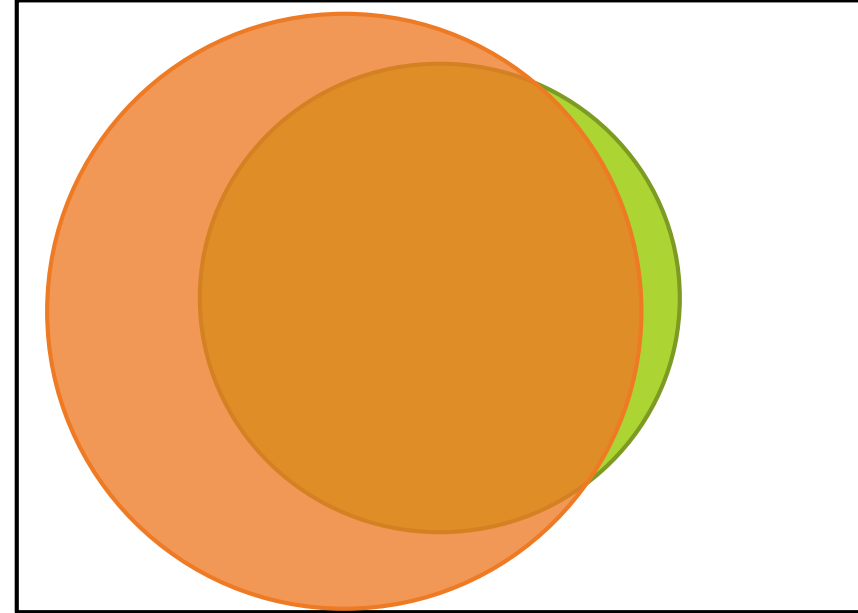# Life as an Interviewer: The Imperfect Science

The Ideal:
Perfect Overlap

▶ In a Perfect World…

  ▶ We offer jobs to all qualified candidates

  ▶ We don't offer jobs to unqualified candidates

Life as an Interviewer:
The Imperfect Science

Too Strict

Not Strict Enough

Truth

"Talented programmers can fail to get a job offer"

Life as an Interviewer: Interviewers are People Too

Myth

"The interviewer's waiting for me to mess up; they aren't on my side"

Life as an Interviewer: Interviewers are People Too

In my experience, **technical interviewers are hoping that you will succeed**. We want to go into a good interview that allows us to judge a candidate's abilities fairly. Accordingly, **we do not want to trick candidates or make them look foolish**. This is not to say that we will only ask softball questions or that we'll ignore a candidate's weaknesses or give him or her a pass. However, **we try our best to create an environment that will allow qualified candidates to succeed**.

Thank you, BSU faculty and students!

ANY QUESTIONS?