



Career Preparation

JOB SEARCHING – THE FOUNDATIONS

Basic Principles in Job Searching

- Be honest with yourself.
- Be honest with others.
- Think like the boss.
- Be a problem solver.
- Sell yourself.
- Tell stories.
- Be positive.

Be Honest with Yourself

There's no better way to wind up in an unhappy situation than to lie to yourself.

Far too many people wind up in ill fitting jobs they hate because they've lied to themselves about what was important and what they could do.

Lying up front won't change the reality of your situation when you finally get started at that new job.

If you really hate working with Java, convincing yourself that maybe it's not so bad isn't going to help you.

Be Honest with Others

Don't lie about what you can do, about what you know, or about what you've done in the past.

Don't think you can say “yes” to “Do you know J2EE?” just because you've done Java and J2EE is Java.

The problem with this type of factual lying is that your lie will be caught.

The follow-up question will probably be “Tell me about what J2EE projects you've done,” and you're stuck for an answer.

Think Like the Boss

Put yourself in the shoes of your boss-to-be. this is the person for whom you'll likely be working for a long time. It makes sense to think exactly how she thinks.

What does he want in an employee?
How can you make his life easier?
How can you make him look good?

Your job is to make her look good.

Be a Problem Solver

Your boss-to-be is looking to hire you for one reason, and that's to solve problems for him.

Sell Yourself

“Selling yourself is something you do every day.”

Selling yourself doesn't mean to present something false or to try to get a job where you're not qualified.

It's about presenting the aspects of you and your capabilities that might otherwise be unknown to the person or company you're interested in working with.

Sell Yourself

To a co-worker: Let's go to lunch. There's a great Mexican place over on Route 120.

To a friend: Want to join our game night? We've got a good group, and I'm going to be DMing a cool new campaign I've been working on.

To your daughter: Sweetie, would you like to go to the zoo this weekend? They have a new dolphin exhibit.

Sell Yourself

At work, and in the open source community, it's the same. Present a proposition and sell it.

To a project team: I'll take care of the reporting subsystem. I've written one before, and I've been familiarizing myself with a few packages that we can use.

To a mailing list: I think that we should use the FooTest as the basis for the testing infrastructure. It scales to large test suites, and it's well maintained.

To your boss: The team lead position is a natural for me. Although I haven't been here the longest, I've developed a great rapport with the others, and you know that my estimation skills are spot on.

Sell Yourself

When you're presenting a résumé, the proposition is “I think you should hire me,” and the evidence is contained within your résumé, your cover letter, and your conversations with those who do the hiring. **You're selling yourself.**

These can be problems for some people. You still need to overcome them to be able to express your talents and history.

The key is that selling yourself is an **active pursuit.**

Tell Stories

The best way to sell yourself is to tell stories.

Stories are evidence of who you are, what you can do, and how you've done it in the past.

Tell Stories

Job hunters often fall into the trap of trying to encapsulate everything into a few simple phrases:

“I’m a hard worker.”

“I have a strong work ethic.”

“I’m reliable.”

“I’m a good listener.”

“I work well with others.”

“I take pride in my work.”

“Descriptions that can apply to anyone are worthless.”

Tell Stories

Instead of simply assessing yourself as a “*hard worker*,” give evidence and let the interviewer make up her own mind.

For example:

“I recently completed a five-month, 50,000-line conversion project. Even though we lost one of the four team members with only three weeks left, we pulled together to make the deadline.”

Tell Stories

Strong work ethic? Explain it:

“A few weeks ago, my team rolled out an upgrade to Office in our 300-seat location. We did it over the weekend to minimize work disruption. Sunday night we had to order in some pizzas, but Monday morning everyone was able to come in and get work at 8 a.m. sharp.”

Tell Stories

Every manager wants reliable employees:

“My projects are consistently done on time, never more than 10 percent over budget. Here are the planned vs. actual charts for the last three projects I worked on.”

Then you can show the actual work products from your portfolio.

Tell Stories

Use recent examples when possible over stories from years past.

Emphasize teamwork and other people, which every manager should have high on her list of important attributes.

Be Positive

Every job book says to never badmouth a previous employer.

That's good advice, but it's not enough. You must be unfailingly positive in all your dealings.

Nobody likes a complainer. People who complain always has something negative to say, no matter the topic.

“I can't believe how dumb the marketing department is. They're still trying to run Windows Vista on three-year-old Pentium IIIs. Not that we have it much better since we're stuck with....”

Be Positive

It might feel good in the short term, but over time it's a definite negative both to you and your team.

People will remember your negative attitude over the long term, including your manager.

Be Positive

Whiners tell the world, “I don’t control my life.”

Whiners also come across as people with an external focus of control, acted upon by the world, rather than acting upon the world themselves.

Blamers are the people who see problems as not theirs to deal with and put the problem on others.

Be Positive

The best way to start being positive is to not discuss problems that have no direct bearing on you or that you cannot fix.

When discussing problems that do relate to you, then discuss what you've done to fix them.

Be Positive

For example:

Interviewer: It sounds like your department had problems with losing track of bugs. That must have been frustrating.

You: It was. We even had the head of accounting come over and chew out our team leader because we lost track of a showstopper. I had tried for weeks to get my boss to let us set up an instance of Bugzilla, but he said we couldn't even think about it until the end of the project. So, I got together with the guy in the next cube and tracked bugs via text files in a Subversion project. It was low-tech, but it saved us some real time.