Soft Skills #6 – Interview Prep (Session 2)

02/15/23

4:30 PM – 6:30 PM

**Lead By:**

Shauna Strickler

ICEBREAKER Questions:

* What is one word that first comes to mind when you think about interviewing?
* Interview horror stories
* Interview success stories
* What questions do you know you can ace?
* What are some questions that don’t know how to answer

What are we talking about today?

* [How to make stress your friend](#Stress)
* [Interview Research](#Interview_Research)
* [STAR(T) Method](#START_Method)
* [Interviewing the Interviewer](#Behavioral_Interviews)
* [Technical Interview Tips](#Technical_Interviews)
* [Money Talk ($)](#Money_Talk)
* [Mock Behavioral Interviews](#Mock_Behavioral_Interviews)

**How to make stress your friend**

Interviewing is a stressful activity and causes nervousness for most folks, but being nervous can lead to a better interview. Channel this energy! When you change your mind’s response to stress, then you can change how your body responds to the stress.

According to a 2021 survey by JDP, 93 percent of American job seekers get nervous before a job interview. Focus on how rewarding it will be to talk about your achievements and the skills you have acquired. Visualize the interview going well and feel excited anticipation, not fear, at the prospect.

Commit this image of a positive experience to memory and recall it just before you are ready to go into your interview. Actors turn nerves into performance energy; an interview is, to a degree, a performance too.

More tips for interview nerves:

* **Be your biggest fan:** Believe in yourself! Sounds simple, but starting a notebook of your achievements to remind yourself of your success can help that self-doubting inner voice. There is a reason you got this interview. They wouldn’t have invited you to speak with them if they didn’t think you could possibly do the job.
* **Regain control:** The interview can FEEL like the employer has all the control, leaving to stress and anxiety. WRONG! This is a two-way process, and you are interviewing them as much as they are interviewing you.
* **Posture:** this affects how we view ourselves. The concept of ‘power posing’, harnessing the positive, psychological effects gained from adopting assertive ‘power poses’, can provide an instant boost directly before your interview. Advocates of power posing, both men and women, are likely to be found standing in a bathroom, feet slightly apart and hands on hips in the classic ‘Wonder Women’ (or ‘Superhero’) pose before walking confidently into their meetings. Another beneficial exercise involves standing and tensing leg muscles for a few seconds and then relaxing them as slowly as you can. The process of tensing and releasing muscles will relax your body and decrease the feeling of anxiety. Always stand while waiting for your interview; rising awkwardly from a chair is neither going to assist your confidence, nor make a strong first impression.

Additionally, in the actual interview- be sure to sit slightly forward to be leaned in and really show an engaged demeanor.

* **Slow Yourself Down**: Anxiety can cause tightness in the throat and impact on clear, confident speech. As part of your interview preparation, practice the pace of your speech, as nerves have a habit of speeding speech up. Accept a glass of water, if one is offered in the interview, to assist.
* **Address unfounded fears**: Reframe some of your fears. Instead of “I’m going to forget something important about my skills or experience” remind yourself “If I forget something, I can always take a moment to think, take a sip of water, or even ask for a few moments to think before responding. I WILL come up with an answer.”
* **Logistics:** Have parking/travel plans taken care of WELL in advance. If you have the choice of time, opt for a time when you know you are at your best (first thing in the morning for me!).Get a good night’s sleep
* **Eat / Drink** to fuel you: a solid meal and plenty of water before you are going into an interview can keep your energy up and fuel your brain.

**Interview Research**

One major source of anxiety in interviewing comes from not knowing what to expect. So the more you’ve done to prepare, the better. This will help you come across as strong, confident, and ensure you are tailored to the role / company.

What should I already know about the company?

* Some information about when it was founded with some brief history
* Name of the current CEO
* How they make money
* Name of key projects or clients
* What’s important to THEM
* Mission Statement / Values
* Tech Stack and Main Technologies
* Current Events / Press Releases
* Have they hired a Grand Circus graduate before?

Types of Interviews:

* Phone / Video screening
  + Often with a recruiter, usually around 30 minutes
  + Use your Elevator Pitch as the template
* Behavioral Interview
  + “Tell me about a time when”
* Technical Interview
* Panel Interview
  + Multiple interviewers, who may / not be associated with the role you are applying for
* Assessments that demonstrate your skill set
  + Take home coding assessments
  + Live coding assessment during an interview

There will likely be multiple rounds of interviews before you land a position. There’s not one right way to do this and it will depend on the company, but often we see an order of: Phone Screen, 1st round interview with hiring manager which could be behavioral or technical, 2nd round interview, and some sort of coding assessment built into the timeline.

One thing to keep in mind – don’t get TOO hung up on the types of interviews. You want to be prepared for some variability here. Just because you are scheduled for a technical interview with the Hiring Manager, doesn’t mean you won’t end up being asked behavioral questions as well! Likewise, just because you’re speaking to a Corporate Recruiter for a phone screen, doesn’t mean you won’t get asked detailed questions about your coding knowledge.

**STAR(T) Method:**

* S – Situation
* T – Task
* A – Action
* R – Results you achieved
* T – Translation (optional)

STAR or START is a strategy to answering behavioral based interview questions. Telltale openings are “tell me about a time when, give me an example of…”, etc. but even if they don’t explicitly ask for an example, your answers can almost always benefit from a story.

This allows you tell a story without rambling- simple framework to follow.

Past behavior dictates future behavior. STAR or START examples are going to be KEY for you to show rather than just tell, your skillsets. They don’t have to all be technical related, but if they aren’t you may want to consider taking an extra step and translating why that experience is relevant to your audience.

The most common method is the STAR method, but here at GC we also like to incorporate this last component of “Translate” when you are telling a story that is not directly related to tech/coding. It is optional, and you will likely hear us use the phrase STAR or START interchangeably.

S + T – Situation + Task:

* Describe the situation and task you need to accomplish
* Be specific about an instance – not a time or ‘series of events’
* Pull from professional, job, educational, and personal history
* Give a real example – no fluff

A – Action You Took:

* Describe the action you took
* Keep focus on you, even if talking about a team or project / collaboration
* Don’t talk about what you might have done or what you thought you should do, talk about what you did

R – Results:

* How did the situation end? For you and/or the company / customer?
* What did you accomplish through your actions?
* What did you learn from the situations?
* How did you follow up?

T – Translate:

* How does your story translate into a developer role?
* What transferable skills did you employ?
* What do you know about the role / company that align with this transferable skill

STAR(T) Method Summary:

* Show me, don’t just tell me
  + Most interviewers will be strangers to you, so you need to have proof or prior examples to back up your words
  + Focus on the results
* Be detailed and specific for each part of the S.T.A.R.T Method
* Use stories that demonstrate proficiency and/or experience with competencies or tasks listed on the job description
* You may also want to consider stories that are unique, perhaps show adversity overcome, innovation, or other unique value adds

\*\*\*After this we did a breakout where we went over the STAR(T) Interview Questions document. I saved a copy of that to the Grand Circus / Career Services folder for future reference \*\*\*

**Behavioral Interview Tips:**

* Note that some interviewers will allow you to tell your opening story and will ask questions afterwards. Other interviewers will follow a more conversational style and will interrupt your storytelling early on during the interview. You should be ready for both styles
* Tell unforgettable stories
* Be honest about what you don’t know when needed but focus on how you have and will learn new skills.
* Where appropriate, start your answers with the customer/client/user.
* Know **why** you want to work for **the company you are interviewing for.**

Don’t get thrown off if the interviewer seems somewhat “disengaged” or you hear typing, see eyes at other monitors. They are probably frantically capturing notes to pass along to hiring managers and to stay in compliance!

Tell unforgettable stories and don’t forget to be specific, providing data to back up your words.

Also remember – “I before we.” Your stories should generally be focused on what YOU did, not necessarily the group as a whole. This is not the time to be modest or overly humble. If you are using the STAR method, it will be much harder to sound like you are just boasting, as it is factual and backed up with real evidence of your skillset.

Ultimately don’t forget – this is a conversation! It should be a two-way street.

Virtual Interview Checklist:

* Review the resume you submitted for the role
* Have the job description in front of you
* Test your internet, webcam, microphone, etc.
* Updates & Downloads -- leave enough time
* Finalize your on-camera outfit
* Clean up any visible on-cam backgrounds (NO virtual backgrounds with Amazon Chime) and review lighting
* Physical Notepad and Pen/Pencil
* Glass of water at hand
* Have project tabs open, ready to screenshare
* Jump into the interview (4) minutes early

On Site Interview Checklist:

* Review the resume you submitted for the role and have multiple printed copies to bring with you
* Have the job description accessible (maybe printed?)
* Have your attired laid out night before
* Bring a Notepad and Pen/Pencil
* Consider bringing a bottle of water
* Check traffic patterns for the time of your interview in advance
* Prepare for shaking hands (maybe?)
* Arrive 15 minutes early (at least)

Interview Attire:

A lot of tech companies are fairly casual, so it is recommend dressing like the first 2 pictures. If the company looks more formal, then feel free to wear a full suite. Try and get a sense of then when doing your research and initial interviews so you can be ready when necessary.



**Always Ask Questions:**

Having multiple questions ready to ask the interviewers helps you better understand the job, the company, company culture, etc. You are interviewing the company just as much as they are interviewing you! Examples include:

* What are the biggest challenges someone in this role would face?
* What metrics or goals will my performance be evaluated against?
* I read about “*xyz”* on [insert resource] and I found it interesting. Can you tell me more?

The general recommendation is to have at least 5-6 questions prepared, with the intention of asking 3. You want to be prepared in case they answer some along the way. Questions should revolve around current topics and events that are company or industry specific. It’s totally okay to have these written / typed out in advance and refer to them during the interview. It shows you are prepared!

Depending on where you are in the interview process you may feel it is too early to talk about money, benefits, PTO, dress code, etc. That’s not to say these are off limits because you and the company both need to understand that these are an essential part of any job. Asking may also reveal their attitude towards employees, the culture fit, etc.

Additional questions to consider:

* How are decisions made when there’s disagreement and stakes are high??
* What are some of the ways the company celebrates success?
* How do you as a manager support and motivate your team?
* What role do company values play in hiring and performance reviews?

You may want to really think outside of the box with questions that help you understand the company’s culture. If you ask questions that are common and very broad (such as “Tell me about your company culture.”), you will likely get canned responses. Not necessarily for ill intent, they are just so used to answering that question it’s easy to get into autopilot. If you ask a unique question, it may force them to really slow down and think of the answer, and you may get a more honest authentic response.

**Technical Interview Tips:**

Types of Technical Interviews / Assessments:

* Take home code challenge – you complete this on your own time and will often be interviewed later on the solution you submit. So be prepared to discuss how you came up with what you did
* Whiteboard questions – could be live using a computer and you actually run the code
* Question and answer – they may ask you a specific question to discern your knowledge. Things like, “What’s the difference between a class and an object”.

Every company will have a different approach to technical interviews. The interviewer will likely ask clarifying questions and want to know your thought process, where you’re stuck, etc. Think of this like paired programming – if they are asking questions it doesn’t necessarily mean you are doing something wrong!

Technical Interview Tips:

* Make a plan (OUTLOUD)
* Don’t be afraid to ask clarifying questions
* Start with the customer and work backwards
* Start with a working solution and enhance as you go
* Think out loud and communicate. Many employers want to hear you work through your process to solve the problem. It isn’t just about the ‘right’ answer on the spot.

The Interview is over…now what?

* The average response time is 3-10 business days to hear back from a job interview, but varies
* Send a thank you note within 12-24 hours of interview. Make sure your note includes:
  + One reason why you’re a fit for the role and/or
  + One reason why you’re interested in the role
* Consider adding your interviewer on LinkedIn (this seems thirsty)
* Avoid sending the same message twice – vary the verbiage

Employers will often provide feedback faster after a phone interview and may require more time after an in-person interview. Keep in mind the size of the company and their HR time too. Larger companies may have more red tape to work through before moving forward. Smaller companies could move quicker, but let’s say their 1 recruiter is on vacation- that’ll certainly slow down the process.

Try to get an anticipated timeline from then by the end of your interview, so you know when to follow up if needed.

Follow-up Templates:

**WITHIN 24 HOURS AFTER THE INTERVIEW**

“Hi (name),

Thank you for taking the time to interview me yesterday. I enjoyed our conversation about \_\_\_\_ (specific topic you discussed), and the \_\_\_\_ (job title) position sounds like an exciting opportunity. I’m looking forward to hearing about the next steps, and don’t hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or concerns.”

**IF YOU HAVEN’T HEARD FROM THEM IN THE SPECIFIED TIMEFRAME THEY GAVE YOU**

“Hi \_\_\_\_ (name),

I hope you’re doing well. I wanted to send a quick note to see if you have any updates regarding the \_\_\_\_ (job title) position. I was excited about what I learned in the interview and I’m eager to hear about next steps. Any information you can share would be great. Thanks!”

**Money Talk ($):**

Key things to consider when determining compensation:

* Know your range
* Understand the pay
* Avoid a number

Always wait for them to bring up compensation.

Have a well-researched target range of around a 10-15k difference. Remember salary is just PART of compensation package. Don’t forget about health insurance, PTO, 401k match, tuition reimbursement, etc.

Determine what is the market paying for your skillset? (Glassdoor, ONET, salary.com, etc. are good places to start your research) Median salary is around 59k for grand circus grads, but of course there is a range and your prior experience (whether in tech or not) will play a factor. When in doubt- talk with us!

Some people say to avoid talk of salary until an offer is made. Personally, I find this near to impossible to do with most recruiters, and I also don’t see it as hugely beneficial to either party’s time. You definitely don’t want to lock yourself into one number for better or worse however, so a range is key, as well as language that expresses to the interviewer that it would ultimately depend on the entire offer.

We have two examples here of what a response could be to a question about compensation. My preference would be the second option, but you can absolutely try the first. Be prepared though- many recruiters will say they are unable to share or don’t have that finalized yet and will press you for your range.

Lastly, if they ask you “What was your prior salary?” HARD PASS. In some places this is illegal to ask in an interview, but it’s not across the board. Simply deflect this question towards you target compensation if you’d like, or state ““My former salary isn’t a reflection of my current skillset. What I’m targeting for this role is a range of XYZ.”

Some possible responses / ways to discuss pay:

* I am continuing to research on what would be a fair market range for a role like this one as I make my pivot into tech. Do you mind if I ask what the budget range associated for this role is?
* Based on my previous experience in XYZ and skills in XYZ, I am targeting a compensation range of X-X. Ultimately it would really depend on the role itself, and the other benefits associated with the compensation package.

**Mock Behavioral Interviews:**

Your mock behavioral interview will be completed during class time on your assigned day.

* Do not worry, your instructors know that you are all interviewing and you will not be penalized for missing any portion of your class time.

You will receive a calendar invite for the day, time, zoom room, and most importantly, the COMPANY you are interviewing for.

* Please make sure to accept the invitation when you receive it.
* Don’t receive one? Check your spam/junk? Still nothing - Please reach out to Elizabeth Heaton right away.

Career Services will conduct the interview as it was a real interview, so please make sure to prep and research just like you would for any other type of interview.

Job Descriptions can be found [here](https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1i8hbLumPmqim0OpqjHKzHzAEkfuUqRKE) (these were also saved to Career Services folder).

Grand Circus Alum: Josh Colorito

Previously designed e-learning courses and felt his skills would translate well, then went through the C# Full Time Bootcamp. Was hired at United Wholesale Mortgage (UWM) for the Dev-X program, which is essentially a Bootcamp with them. This built on the skills he learned in the Grand Circus Bootcamp and help familiarize him with the way the company does things. After that he was hired into his current role, which feels like being a code detective, as he is debugging the existing code.

If you haven’t already started networking, then he highly recommends that.

What was the most challenging thing he discovered during the job search?

* He was thankful that he really didn’t have a difficult search as his networking helped him land his position within the DEV-X program.