



Interviewing For Interviewers

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Success is not final; failure is not fatal: it is the courage to continue that counts.

- WINSTON CHURCHILL

Agenda

Introduction

Technical interview

Cultural fit

Candidate resume

Interview problems

Interview preparation

Introduction

INTERVIEWER AND INTERVIEWEE PERSPECTIVE OVERVIEW

Why did I create this lecture

Some people still do not understand that in IT we are now on “buyer’s market”

We are losing great candidates with “red flag” questions

- “Where do you see yourself in three years”
- “Why did you apply for this position”

Most people learn interviews through mistakes, and you do a lot of damage along the way

If you, as IT manager, do not know how to interview, HR cannot “save the day”

- Their role in IT interviews is to cover your blind spots, not to do recruiter’s job

You need to know what you are looking for before you start the interview

Candidate perspective in IT

Companies no longer „offer the job“, but answer a key question – “what’s in it for me?”

These answers include aspects of company perceived brand value, age of technology stack, personal growth options, culture and, more and more important, management style – non-technical managers focused on “utilization and delivery” style no longer hold value on serious modern market

- “Brick and mortar” banks are no longer “desired employers” in most of the criteria mentioned above

This is buyer’s market, and company is here to service your career path, if you are any good and keep your skills up-to-date

- Any company that ignores this fact will get only mediocre applicants.

“We are CEOs of our own company: ME Inc. To be in business today, our most important job is to be head marketer for the brand called you.”

- Tom Peters

Interviewer perspective in IT

Interviewer has to be, in one person or as team...

- Engineering and people manager - very different from “utilize and deliver” traditional management
- Experienced individual IT contributor
- Reviewer and advisor
- “Grow people into their desired careers” mindset oriented – key is not what manager needs, but what people want – if a person does not know what he wants, this is a problem – answer “sit in your chair in two years” is a valid answer

When you start interviewing for the first time you have no idea where to start, usually you are not trained, you are too eager to “get this great person” and you lack required skillset

- HR can only support on blind spots, but cannot do the job for you – they do not have proper engineering mindset

Types of interviews

Job interview	Informational interview	Casual interview
Behavioural	“20 minute interview”	Always happening
Technical	Company intro, industry, role	“Fishing for information”
Panel	Information gathering	Judging right fits
Phone/video	Networking focus	Impromptu
“Is this the right person”		Casual doesn't mean lazy

Interviewer role in the job interview

Assess the candidate

- Can he do the job?
- Fit into our team?
- Help us grow?
- Work well with customers and prospects?
- **How do we assess?**
 - Your questions
 - The conversation
 - Their experiences (stories)
 - Your observations

Sell the opportunity

- The projects
 - The team
 - The company
 - The perks
 - Their contribution/impact
- **How do we assess?**
 - Preparation
 - Promptness (“I care”)
 - Attitude and vibe
 - Your stories

Interviewee role in the job interview

To sell his/her skills

To sell cultural fit

To learn more about the role

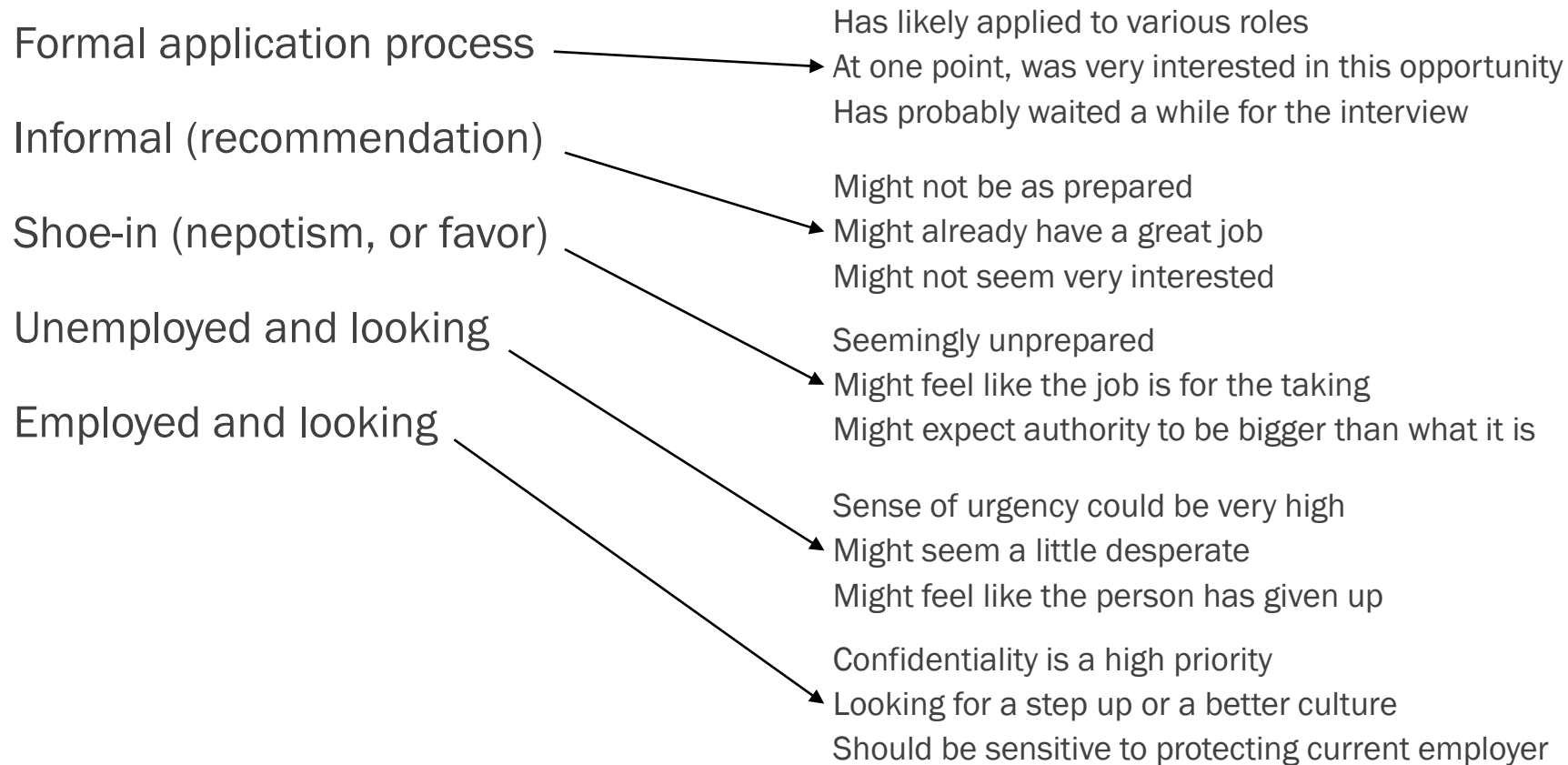
To assess a personal fit

To show drive, ambition, leadership, teamwork, etc.

How? Sell, learn, assess, and show:

- Stories
- Concise answers
- Thoughtful questions
- Choice of words, body language, and kindness

Interviewee path to interview



Owning the interview

This is about power

Power can transfer

Who is in control, when?

Who drives the conversation?

Who has “the cookie”?

Conversation vs. interrogation

Trained to ask questions

If you are not prepared, it will be obvious

Using questions effectively

Yes/No

Conversations are the best

Follow-up questions

“Right” answers

Checklist of questions

Purpose of each question

Time is limited

Limit your talking

Increase your observation

Ask the right question to the right person for the right role

Stay purposeful

Key takeaways

Define what you want to get out of your interview

List tasks you will do as interviewer

List questions you will ask to discover what you need to discover

Write down statements you can use to recapture control of the interview

Contrast questions you would ask in a formal interview vs. a casual interview

Technical interview

ASKING TECHNICAL INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Why are you asking each question?

Purpose of Technical Questions

- Breadth
- Depth
- Breadth + Depth

Breadth (horizontal) questions

How many technologies?

How many languages?

How many business units?

How many types of users?

How many industries?

Depth (vertical) questions

How many years?

How complex of a problem?

How complex of a solution?

How many complex problems?

How long did projects last?

Breadth + Depth questions

Have you done the job before?

Can you do this job, this time?

Can you learn how to do the job?

Technical Questions: When and Where

You should give the candidate homework to assess their technical abilities

They can use Google... that's how developers find answers to their questions.

Talking to someone about the homework helps you evaluate their level of understanding

Template for questions and answers

Always know what you want to ask

Purpose

- Why are you asking this question?

Underlying question

- What are you really getting at with this question?

Example question... what do you want to ask?

- Listen to more than the words in their response.
- What is their body language, and the underlying message?

Breadth - technologies

How many technologies have you worked with? How would you rate yourself on each of these?

Purpose

- To see if they were advanced enough to troubleshoot and resolve, trusted to take over a project or task, and see how they approached the problem.

Underlying Question

- You listed these technologies... are you really that good at them, or did you just read some articles and list them on your resume?

Listen

- When you ask for more details, how do they talk about the technologies?
- Do they seem to get stuck?
- Are they apt to learn new tech?

Breadth - languages

Which languages are you proficient in? Which languages could you teach to others?

Purpose

- To get beyond the list on their resume and see how good they are with languages... and learning new languages.

Underlying Question

- Are you really going to be able to do this job, or are you more junior than we are looking for?

Listen

- Do they stay superficial, or give simple examples?
- If you dig deeper, can they keep up with the conversation?

Breadth – business units

Which business units have you worked with? What projects have you done for different business units?

Purpose

- To understand the diversity of projects they have worked on, and their understanding of the needs of different customers.

Underlying Question

- Will we be able to switch you to other projects that are outside of what you are used to doing? Do you understand how business works?

Listen

- Did they work, in-depth, on different projects?
- How did they learn skills for different customer needs?

Breadth – types of users

Tell me about the users you have worked with? What do your users do that make you upset?

Purpose

- To understand the breadth of technical experience based on users (ecommerce, corporate, finance, HR, etc.).

Underlying Question

- Has having varied users helped you to learn more technologies and methodologies and designs than you would have otherwise learned

Listen

- Listen for any clues about the needs of users the candidate has worked with/for.
- Bonus: understanding what they think of users.

Breadth – industries

What industries have you worked in? Tell me about the differences in technology between those industries?

Purpose

- To start a discussion about the different technologies and environments the candidate has worked in.
- Dig deeper into the responses.

Underlying Question

- Do you have experience in totally different environments?
- How well did you transition, or learn other environments?

Listen

- Can they talk about the different environments in-depth?
- How did they handle the learning curve?

Depth – years

How long have you worked with this language? What are the best and worst changes you've seen since you started?

Purpose

- To determine how well they understand a technology... are they a novice, or an expert, with given technology?

Underlying Question

- You listed a technology.... Do you really know a lot about it, or did you list it just to beef up your resume?

Listen

- Listen for how comfortable they are when talking about the evolution of the technology they say they are expert in.

Depth – complexity of problems

Tell me about the most complex problem you worked on. How did you come with the right solution?

Purpose

- To understand how deep the candidate has gone, and how they handled the complexity.

Underlying Question

- Did you really work on the solution of a complex problem, or was someone else on your team the driver of the solution?

Listen

- Can they really describe the complexity of the problem, and their solution?
- Do they sound excited about their solution?

Depth – complexity of solutions

What is the cleverest technical solution you worked on? What was so clever about the solution?

Purpose

- Gives them a chance to talk about someone else's solution, and what they learned from it.

Underlying Question

- What have you learned from working with others? Did you work with people who were at or above your level?

Listen

- Do they only talk about their own solutions?
- Listen for their ability to work with others.

Depth – quantity of complex problems

Tell me about the last three hard problems that you worked on. How did you work through them?

Purpose

- To learn how recent the last three complex problems where... and dig deeper into the process to solve them.
- Systematic, or happenstance?

Underlying Question

- How often do you face complex issues?
- How do you face them?

Listen

- Do they seem resentful or frustrated that issues come up?
- Or are they fun challenges?

Depth – length of projects

Tell me about some of your longer projects. How long did they last, and how did you manage them?

Purpose

- To get an idea of how many large projects the candidate has worked on.
- Longer projects might mean very complex projects.

Underlying Question

- Have you worked on multiple long, complex projects?
- What was your role, and are you okay working on very large projects?

Listen

- Did they get bored working on long projects, or were they able to stay focused and productive?

Ideas for technical questions

If you were asked to present to a group of engineers about a particular technology, what would you present?

Is there a technology that people look to you for mentorship in your current (or previous) workplace?

What about [insert technology here] are you passionate about?

What technical projects do you do at home? If you had more time, what technology would you study?

Who/what do you look to keep up with your most used technologies?

Tell me about the different ways you have seen the development cycle implemented. What is QA's part in the development cycle?

What do you think of working with older technology? What is a technology that you would love to learn?"

When you are learning a new technology, what process do you use to bring yourself up to speed?

How do you create an accurate estimate of a development project?

...

Key takeaways

List 10 technical questions

- Remember, they can change based on who you are interviewing

Decide when/how to ask each question

Define the purpose of each question

Define the underlying question

Write out what to listen for in response to each response

Repeat as necessary for different people

Cultural fit

ASKING CULTURAL FIT QUESTIONS

Will they fit in with your team?

Do you know what is your culture?

Culture is...

- ...intangible
- ...hard to describe
- ...if you've experienced it, undeniable
 - Soft and people skills
 - Teamwork and learning
 - Respect
 - Customer centric
 - Casual or fast-paced
 - Loyalty
 - Competitive
 - Innovative
 - Entrepreneurial

What kind of person would not fit in your team?

Cultural questions – when and where

“We don’t do technical interviews. We interview technical people.”

“We’ll pass on someone if they don’t have anything in terms of soft skills.”

“We are looking for general aptitude and the right attitude, which are character qualities that would lead someone to be a really good developer.”

“If they don’t have the skill we are looking for, they’ll shadow someone who does, and we’ll see how quickly they pick up on it. We look for the ability to learn and adapt.”

Gabe Gunderson, Founder of Izeni

Questions vs Conversation

Avoid the temptation to talk too much.

You are there to learn about them, not to tell stories, instruct them, and do all the talking!

Culture - teamwork

Tell me about a team you worked on that failed. What was wrong with the team, and what would have helped it?

Purpose

- To learn what the candidate thinks about teams, teammates, and team leadership.
- Is this candidate a team player?

Underlying Question

- We work a lot on teams here... is that okay, or do you prefer to work alone?
- Respect and communication are a big part of how we work.

Listen

- Does the candidate feel comfortable working with others, or do they feel like teams just hold them back.

Culture - learning

What is an ideal system for a developer to stay current on technologies? How have you kept current?

Purpose

- To understand what the developer thinks about continual education and learning... are they proactively staying current?

Underlying Question

- Do you take an active interest in staying current?
- Do you have a personal system in place to stay current for the rest of your career?

Listen

- What is their attitude regarding working in an environment of constant change.
- Are they jaded and tired, or excited and serious?

Culture - respect

Who has a more important role, the developer, QA, or the project manager?

Purpose

- To see what the candidate thinks about his self-importance, and the roles of others on the team.

Underlying Question

- Are you going to treat our QA, project managers, and others with respect, or are you “better” than they are?

Listen

- What is their attitude towards others they will work with?
- Will they respect what everyone brings to the project?

Culture – customer centric

What do users do that really bug you? How do you work with users who always find issues with your system?

Purpose

- To learn what they think and feel about customers and users... even the difficult users.

Underlying Question

- We love and respect our users... are you going to respect them, or will you resent them and their requests?

Listen

- How do they talk about users, and their nuances?
- Are they patient and appreciative, or are they resentful and bitter?

Culture – helpful

When you are working on a tight deadline, and a colleague comes to you for help, how do you respond?

Purpose

- To learn how they work with others, and how willing they are to help others in their time of need.

Underlying Question

- We need to help (and mentor) one another, and if you are asked for help, will you be helpful, or will this only frustrate you?

Listen

- How do they feel about helping others?
- Will they contribute to a culture of teamwork, kindness, and moving projects forward?

Culture – flexible

Have you worked on a project that was cancelled by management? What did you think about that?

Purpose

- To get an idea of how the candidate will work in an environment where change is inevitable.

Underlying Question

- Sometimes we must shut down a project that you might be really invested in.
- How will you handle that?

Listen

- Will they be able to adjust to change in your fast-moving environment?
- Will they be able to move on to the next project without resentment?

Culture – cohesive

What do you do when you see a colleague is approaching a problem the wrong way? Let them do it and learn, or...?

Purpose

- To get a feel for the relationship the candidate will have, and the communication style of the candidate, in a tense situation.

Underlying Question

- When you see something wrong, are you willing to risk a little to make it right?
- When does it make sense to not intervene?

Listen

- Are they always going to intervene, or do they respect the learning process, if the product isn't compromised?

Culture – innovative

Have you been involved in a project to innovate a team, product, system, or approach? Tell us about that.

Purpose

- To get an idea of their inclination to be innovative, creative, and try new things.
- Also, to understand their ability to implement new ideas.

Underlying Question

- We want you to bring innovation to this role.
- Will you speak up and add your creative ideas?

Listen

- Do they have a history of innovation?
- Or do they prefer to just take a list of work orders and work on them, without question?

Culture – entrepreneurial

Tell us about an idea for a product or app that you have had, or worked on, that could be its own business.

Purpose

- To understand how creative and proactive the candidate is with ideas that can change the world.
- To learn about their passions.

Underlying Question

- Will you proactively contribute ideas to make our products better, more marketable, and more responsive to the market?

Listen

- Do they constantly think about improvements, or are they done at 5 p.m. each day and don't give a second thought to their work?

Culture – precision

When you find a mistake in someone else's code or design, what do you do?

Purpose

- What does the candidate think about our commitment to excellence?

Underlying Question

- What level of pride do you have in our finished product, even if others won't see any deficiencies?

Listen

- Are they willing to sacrifice accuracy and precision for getting something delivered?

Ideas for cultural questions

For developers – What have you seen that works well with QA (or doesn't work)

For QA - What can a developer do to help you QA them better?

...and how did you like that?

How do you mentor others with this technology?

What have your managers done in the past that you did not like?

Have you ever had to clean up someone else's mess? What was it, and how did you go about it?

Do you read books? What are the last three books you have read?

...

Key takeaways

Define your culture (or, components of your culture)

List 10 questions to assess the fit

- Remember, this could change based on who you are interviewing

Define the purpose of each question

Define the underlying question

Write out what to listen for in each response

Candidate resume

ASSESSING A CANDIDATE RESUME

What is the purpose of a resume?

You get ten identical resumes; they are all candidates that want to get an interview.

What can you get from a resume?

- You can learn about the candidate
- Compare to job requirements
- Prepare relevant questions

How to use resumes?

Generate questions for the candidate

- Tell me more about this?
- In your resume you say you accomplished this... how did you do that?
- When you were working at this company, how did you handle _____?

Multiple copies for each interviewer

Space to make notes

- Responses
- Your reactions
- Follow-up questions
- Rating system

What to care about in a resume

Grammar

Spelling

Formatting

Customization

Quantification

Dates

Job hopping

Gaps

A perfect resume doesn't mean you'll have a perfect hire.

What to look for?

Does the candidate have:

- The right technical requirements?
- The right experience?
- A background that matches what you want?
- Companies worked at
- Titles / responsibilities
- Progression in career
- Depth and breadth of technology
- Links to portfolio, profile, website, etc.

Your questions

Tell me more about this?

In your resume you say you accomplished this... how did you do that?

When you were working at this company, how did you handle _____?

Key takeaways

Highlight important claims

Note questions you want to ask

List any real issues to follow-up on

Rank resumes against one another, aligned with the job description

Interview problems

AVOIDING INTERVIEW PROBLEMS

Three Pitfalls of Interviewing

Talking too much

Wasting time

Illegal questions

Talking too much

The purpose of the interview is not for the candidate to sit quietly as you talk the entire time.

You need to learn about them... so give them a chance to talk!

- Ask questions
- Let them answer
- Ask more questions
- Keep YOUR part of the conversation concise

Wasting time

Too much ice breaker

Distractions (water spill)

Recovering from a long answer

“We only have 40 minutes left...”

“Sorry to interrupt, can you clarify how you would...?”

Illegal questions

Consult HR

Consult legal counsel

Never do interviews alone

In general: if it doesn't have to do with performance, don't go there.

Illegal questions

Dealing with repercussions of this is NOT FUN!

- Age
- Religion
- Arrested (vs. convicted)
- Married
- Children
- Weight
- Personal finances
- Alcoholism
- Health
- Nationality
- Disabilities

Key takeaways

Decide how you will stop a long answer and reclaim the interview

Decide to not talk too much, but to focus on getting the interview to talk more

Make a list of topics that you WILL NOT approach

Interview Preparation

HOW TO PREPARE FOR THE INTERVIEW

Read, Set, Go...? What am I missing?

Job description - have current copies of the job description

Ideal characteristics - have a list of the ideal characteristics of the successful hire

Resumes - have multiple copies of the candidate's resume

Candidate master list - have list of all candidates you are interviewing

Canvas colleagues - ask people in this role, or who work with this role, what you should ask

Specific questions - have a list of questions specific to the role or candidate

Read, Set, Go...? What am I missing?

General questions - have a list of general questions to ask all candidates

LinkedIn profile - review the candidate's LinkedIn profile

Review other portfolios - spend time on any other online portfolios

Prepare other interviewers

- The purpose of the interview
- What you are looking for in a candidate

Remind each interviewer - of the schedule, and your expectations of each of them

Read, Set, Go...? What am I missing?

Meeting room - make sure the meeting room is scheduled

Prepare the front desk - let the front desk know who is coming and when, so they can get a nice greeting

Note taking - have reliable tools to take notes

Create the agenda - create an agenda for the interview, and ensure there is time between interviews to debrief

Prepare the introduction - prepare your introduction to start the interview

Read, Set, Go...? What am I missing?

Prepare the closing - have a closing that sets the expectation of what will happen next

Selling points - create a list of your selling points to properly communicate the value of the opportunity

Arrive early - arrive early to the interview location and ensure the environment is right

Relax - relax, you got this...you are prepared!

Key takeaways

Prepare...

Prepare...

Prepare!

Thank you for your time

