



Looking for a Job?

Part 2: Research and Interview Techniques to Land Your Next Job

By Jennifer Anderson

When embarking on a successful job search, it is paramount to effectively research companies and interview with them.

The information gathered allows you to make a better decision on a company when changing jobs. You want to make a good move... moreover, companies want you to make a good decision too. They are putting a lot on the line when adding a new person to the team.

In Part 1 of this series (STRUCTURE, January 2017), the article provided insight into how to approach the job search differently. This article focuses on research preparation and interview techniques that make a difference in how well you perform in an interview.



Effective Research

Thorough research is essential to determine if a company is a right fit before applying for a position. Today, companies are more transparent; they share updated information on websites, company blogs, LinkedIn, Facebook, and other social media sites. (*NOTE to hiring managers: Make sure you are leveraging the internet to tell the story of your company so that you will attract the right candidates.*)

Leverage that public information as much as possible. Four key areas of research include Social media, SEA websites, company websites, and [GlassDoor.com](#).

Many social media sites host company profiles:

LinkedIn® – Review the LinkedIn profiles of the company's team. Browsing a wide variety of people in the firm, not just the President and Principals, provides an idea of the collective talent including individual educational backgrounds, previous employment, groups, and associations. Individual recommendations can be very insightful as well.

Twitter – Follow the company and the employees who have Twitter accounts. The posts give you timely and relevant information about the company. If they do not have a Twitter account, it is not a bad thing; it is just not a priority for the company.

Facebook – Follow their company page to learn more about the company culture. Do

NOT friend anyone at the company, unless you actually know them. Facebook has the potential to be a good source of information about what it is like to work at the company and the culture of the firm.

NCSEA, local state SEAs, SEI, and CASE firm websites are sources of information regarding structural firms. You will find information about award programs that showcase areas where the firm is recognized. You can also find out more about how they interact in the structural engineering community. Good firms make it a priority to participate by encouraging team members to be involved in growing the industry.

Keep in mind that companies typically do not post any bad press on their website. However, it is still important to learn about the leadership team, projects the firm specializes in, job descriptions, and more. Take the time to read company blog posts – hopefully not all marketing hype – to understand more about the culture of the firm.

Smart companies recognize that transparency about their firm is an ideal way to attract the right team members. [GlassDoor.com](#) encourages current and past employees to rate companies for a multi-dimensional look at the firm. If the company does not have a GlassDoor account, don't think that they are hiding information; they may not have realized the power of the tool yet.

All-in-all, plan to invest about 40 hours of research per company with which you

interview. While that may seem like a lot, the time spent educating yourself about the company helps you to make a more strategic decision about your next job.

Effective Interviewing

After spending hours networking and researching, all that hard work has paid off – it is time for the interview! Although an interview can be nerve-wracking, it is better to view the process as an excellent opportunity to connect with people. Getting to know people at the company is important; you will be spending a big chunk of your day with them, every day.

There are two main things to consider when preparing for an interview; first what you want to know about them and second what you want them to know about you. Each party is evaluating the other for a good fit. It is critical that you prepare these two items ahead of the interview.

Ask Solid Questions

Write down your questions before going to an interview. I cannot tell you how many times a manager has been upset that a candidate did not have any questions. Preparing thoughtful and conversational questions helps you to uncover if you want to work for the company and shows that you prepared. Do not just ask about the pay and benefits package. Instead, prepare 4 or 5 questions for each of the following categories: about the company, the

leadership team, the position, and the team you will be joining.

Bring Professional Materials

Prepare information about your experience to bring to the interview. Help them to understand your experience by providing a professional portfolio and professional recommendations.

Your professional portfolio can easily be shared using a personal website, a PowerPoint, or printed materials to showcase what you have accomplished professionally. While some projects are private, most are quite public; you should be okay to share information about what you have worked on in previous roles. However, be careful to respect NDA and privacy laws. Update your portfolio regularly, so it is ready when needed.

Professional recommendations are a fantastic way to leverage what other people have to say about you. Gather recommendations from past bosses, peers, vendors, educators, and customers. In fact, your marketing team may have asked you to get recommendations from customers on projects on which you have worked. Keep copies of recommendation letters for your records. An easy way to keep track of your recommendations is on LinkedIn – where recommendations stay with your profile no matter where you work.

Prepare Mentally and Physically

Take these steps to relax and enjoy the interview time with the prospective new employer:

- 1) Take the day off from work. You have no idea how long the actual interview will last, and you want the flexibility to spend as much time with the company as possible. Recruiters try to give you an idea of how much time to plan to be at the company, but you can relax and be more confident if you are not trying to squeeze in an interview during a long lunch break.
- 2) Wear clothes that are comfortable and colors that look good on you. Be professional in a way that reflects your personality. Check your clothes a week before the interview.
- 3) Gather all your documents for the interview the night before or earlier. Print out your questions and use a padfolio to take with you. Include a nice pen, business cards, your portfolio, two copies of your resume, and copies of your recommendations.
- 4) Get a good night's rest and eat healthy food. If you do not get enough sleep or are too wired from caffeine, you could

find yourself jittery and anxious in an interview. If you have the time before the interview, get some exercise. Even a 30-minute quick walk will energize you more than an energy drink.

The Interview

During the interview, keep the following situational tips in mind to help you maximize this valuable time with a prospective company:

- 1) Arrive 10-minutes early. Unless instructed otherwise, arriving too early causes stress on the manager interviewing you, but 10-minutes early shows that you care to arrive on time and that you are respectful of the interview process.
- 2) Do not chew gum, but maybe a mint to freshen your breath. I once witnessed an applicant walk up to the entrance of a building and then suddenly stop, look around, and spit out his gum into a bush just outside the front door. The manager was there waiting for the applicant and saw this happen. Do you think he got the job?
- 3) If there is more than one person meeting with you at the same time, like a panel interview, write down all their names across the top of your notepad in the order that they are sitting. It is okay to tell them that you are writing down their names to remember them, if they ask. It reduces interview stress if you can readily recall their names.
- 4) Some companies like to have candidates do a series of back-to-back interviews, which can be exhausting. If you need a break, for bathroom or water, let them know. You are human, and it is ok to have a short 5-minute break.
- 5) If they invite you to lunch, you should go. If you have specific dietary concerns, suggest a couple of restaurants that work for your needs. However, be flexible about eating out and just find something on the menu that aligns with your dietary needs. Never pass up the opportunity to eat with a prospective employer.
- 6) Do not be afraid to tell them that you prepared some questions – remember that managers get upset if you do not ask questions. Use your question sheets to write down short notes during the interview.
- 7) After the interview, you should send handwritten thank you notes, so make sure to get business cards from the interviewer and anyone else involved in talking to you. Send a thank you note within two days of the interview. You may be tempted only to send a thank you email but if you

want to stand out, send a written thank you note as well.

- 8) One of the most significant stressors of an interview comes after the interview when you have not heard from the company for a week... or three weeks. Before you leave the interview, find out what the next steps are in the interview process. The managers and HR team are busy with more than considering you as a new team member, so be reasonable with how much time they need to follow-up with you after the interview.

After the Interview

Set aside time after the interview to think about what you have learned about the company. You can take that information and do some additional research.

With answers to your well thought out questions, you hopefully have a better understanding of the firm, their projects, the team, leadership, and overall company culture. Take some time to reflect on what you learned and think about if the company is aligned with what you want to be known for in your career (a.k.a. your personal brand).

If you have concerns, questions, or misgivings, honor that your gut is telling you to do more research. Hopefully, during the interview, the door was left open for you to follow-up and ask more questions if needed. You may need to talk to people who used to work at the firm as well – again, LinkedIn is a source to connect with individuals who used to work there. Please do not take a job knowing there are red flags; it has the potential to be a disaster later. You owe it to your career to get answers up front before accepting a job offer.

At this point in the job search, you know what you want your personal brand to be, you have networked, done your research, and prepared for and participated in an effective interview. You mailed thank you notes to everyone with whom you met. You know approximately when to expect to hear back from them. Well done! Hopefully, you will get an offer. When you do receive any job offer, you are poised to make a thoughtful and educated decision as to whether you want to join a new company.■

Born into a family of engineers but focusing on the people side of engineering, Jennifer Anderson (www.CareerCoachJen.com) has nearly 20 years helping companies hire and retain the right talent. She may be reached at jen@careercoachjen.com.