

How To: Ace the IT Job Interview

One of the most fascinating – and counterintuitive – dynamics of the white-hot IT hiring market is an increased selectiveness on the part of hiring organizations. Today’s managers are well-informed about industry trends and know that they are competing in a demand market. So why pass on qualified, available candidates and risk putting projects on hold?

For good reason: savvy business leaders understand the broader consequences of their IT decisions. They know what it takes to advance the ball in their organization and expect to see these qualities on display during the interview. IT professionals, buoyed by recruiter overtures and hype over the technology “skills gap,” can be caught off guard when their job interview goes beyond mere formality.

As Howard Systems’ Senior Technology Recruiter, Andrew Sokol, points out, confidence can be a double-edged sword. Candidates should remember: while their credentials landed them in the interview chair, it’s their attitude, research and strategic insight that will be under scrutiny.

To help our IT community navigate these waters, we’ve compiled a few tips from our tenured recruiters and other industry experts. Herewith, the New Interview Essentials:

1. Be an active listener.

Mapping out common interview pitfalls in the Huffington Post, writer Scott Willyerd advises candidates to remain fully present:

“While it’s always beneficial to rehearse an interview beforehand, it’s just as important that you stay actively engaged during the interview. Taking time to listen will give your body and mind a break from being on the hot seat where it feels every nuance is being detected.

“When asked a question, be careful not to simply recite a scripted response. Actually listen to the question being asked and make sure you understand it before giving a response.”

Most professional interviewers, when surveyed, report that the most memorable interviews are the ones they recall as conversations more than interrogations.

2. Don’t veer off course.

Sokol, a 15-year veteran IT recruiter, has seen many a candidate derailed by taking a “kitchen sink” approach.

“Lately, the issue that comes up most often is candidates so busy selling themselves during their interview that they fail to focus on the essential aspects of the job. Since the recession, our clients have been forced to do more with less. On the plus side, this has created a wealth of IT specialists with diverse skills sets who are eager to share the experience they have acquired.

However, we've learned from client feedback that many candidates fail to concentrate on – and speak to – the main job responsibilities of the position. They think they are showing a client the benefit of hiring them, when in fact the takeaway is, 'he or she is overqualified' or, 'they wouldn't be happy doing this job role.'"

Sokol cites one recent example of a programmer who touted client interfacing experience, while interviewing for a heads-down programmer position – a tactic that ultimately backfired.

3. Polish up your storytelling skills.

While selling these targeted skills, take a page from the narrative playbook of great public speakers. Renowned career coach Arnie Fertig advises candidates to flesh out their accomplishments with a few polished examples:

"As you prepare for your interview, think about what kind of qualities and personality the employer might deem best, and assume that you will encounter some questions that will probe to see if you fit. Come to your interview prepared with stories that demonstrate how you have exhibited these kinds of actions in your current or past roles. You will likely find an opportunity to tell your stories in response to questions that begin with something like: 'Tell me about a time when you...'"

With a company's very mission on the line, technology's stakes have never been higher. Even the most sought after IT skills need to be packaged in a strategic, professional light.

For more career insights or learn about current IT opportunities, call (800) 326-4860 or visit careers.howardsystems.com