Alumni Job Search Intensive – Networking

Transcript

Slide 1: Welcome alumni. You may have heard that it’s often not the candidate who is best qualified for the position, but the candidate who interviews the best, who gets the job. With that being said, in this webinar we hope to help you prepare for interviewing success!

Slide 2: Let’s start with the goals for an interview; what you the candidate and the interviewer hope to accomplish. Your goals are first and foremost to get the job, or to move through to the next round of the interview process. You do this by being able to successfully demonstrate a match between you and the position, and your fit for the company. You also, however, want to determine if this company is a place where you will feel comfortable, and if this job is the best one for you. In other words, interviewing is a two-way street, and you should “interview” the company while they’re interviewing you.

The interviewer’s goal is to determine if you are the best candidate for their job, both in terms of your skills, and that’s job-related skills as well as other skills like communication, problem solving, and teamwork, and in terms of your overall fit for the company. Can they picture you in this position, and at this company? In addition, the recruiter is trying to sell their company to you, the candidate. They know that you have options too, and will present their company as the best alternative.

Slide 3: The keys to successful interviewing are preparation and practice. The first part of preparation is to know the company as thoroughly as you can. In order to demonstrate that you’re a good match for the position, you have to know about the organization. There are many places to conduct company research, including first and foremost, the company website. This will help give you an overview of the organizational structure, products and services, departments and perhaps key management personnel, and a sense of the company culture. Search online and in business journals for recent news about the company. Sites like GlassDoor and Hoovers will provide in-depth information about companies. Research industry specific sites for information about the industry and trends, the company, and even the competition. The RIT library has resources to assist with your company research. Also check out company pages on LinkedIn and Twitter; these can give you valuable insight into the company culture, key people, and sometimes events you can participate in to network.

You should also research to find out who you might be able to connect with at the company. Use LinkedIn to search for employees who may be RIT alumni or to whom you might be connected, and use the RIT Alumni Online Community to search for employees at the company with whom you can connect. Check your professional association membership directory for members at the company. Once you have potential contacts, check out their profiles to see what their backgrounds and interests are, and reach out to have an informal conversation prior to your interview, to gain knowledge that will help you prepare. Google the company’s Board of Directors and key management personnel. If you can find out
with whom you’ll be interviewing, you can Google them or find them on LinkedIn, to get a heads up and find common interests.

If you know with whom you’ll be interviewing, check them out on LinkedIn as well. Find out how long they’ve been with the company, where they came from, and if you look at the groups they participate in, their areas of interest. This information will help you build rapport with your interviewer, and get a further glimpse of the company’s culture.

Slide 4: The next step in preparation is to know yourself, so that you can market yourself to the interviewer. This involves an in-depth analysis of your skills, both as they relate directly to this position, and also how you will be able to transfer other skills into the role. Every job you’ve had has given you skills that you can into every future job; you have to make the connection for them, however. Take time before the interview to determine what your skills are, and how they will fit into this position – your company research and the job description will be helpful in this process. They key is for the interviewer to be able to see you in the position, so have examples ready to demonstrate your achievements and give them a full picture of what you have to offer. Be prepared to discuss every aspect of your resume, elaborating on the information with stories that emphasize your accomplishments. You can supplement your resume and your stories with samples; a portfolio, writing samples, coding samples, or other applicable materials that highlight your abilities.

If you’re an experienced seeker who may have been out of the workforce for an extended period of time, be prepared to explain any employment gaps; having a ready explanation will forestall awkwardness. There are many valid reasons for extended unemployment, especially in this economy, but you’ll want to have a prepared answer and a confident, positive attitude when responding. Focus on your skills and abilities to do the job, and the extras that set you apart. Hopefully you’ve remained active during your unemployment, and can discuss part-time or consulting work you’ve done, classes or training you’ve taken, or volunteer work. Demonstrating technological prowess will help convince the interviewer that you’re as qualified as other applicants.

Slide 5: A little more on selling yourself. Many people are uncomfortable with the thought of actively selling themselves to prospective employers, believing that their qualifications, based on their resume, should speak for themselves. In today’s competitive marketplace, however, it’s essential to be very proactive in determining just what sets you apart from the competition, and emphasizing this to employers. This is your brand, or what differentiates you from the competition, as with any other product. In developing your brand, you’ll want to assess your strengths, values, attributes, skills and qualifications; together with your career goals, this becomes the essence of your brand, or what you have to offer an employer. So you’re not just an engineer, you’re an engineer with a strong focus in this area, and interests in this area, and strong communication skills that allow you to do this. You’re now differentiated from your competition who won’t have your unique mix of qualifications.

Now you have to match your qualifications to the company’s needs, convincing them that your skills and qualifications will enable you to solve the problems and challenges they’re faced with. This is more than just sharing your past experiences, even your past successes – this is clearly and confidently
demonstrating how these experiences, achievements, and skills will be relevant and valuable to this company. Always think from the employer’s perspective – what can this person do to help me - and focus your answers to convincing them that you’re exactly the right person to do just that.

Slide 6: The next key to success is practice. It’s essential to take what you’ve learned about yourself and practice demonstrating how you’re a perfect fit for this position. The more you practice – out loud – the more you’ll increase your confidence, and confidence breeds success. You have many options for interview practice. Your advisor in our office can do a mock interview with you, asking you questions and giving you feedback on your responses and how you present yourself. You may also want to ask someone in your industry or field to do a mock interview with you, to gain feedback specific to your targeted position. You can find industry contacts through LinkedIn, relevant professional associations, and RIT alumni through the Alumni Online Community and the RIT Professional Network through Job Zone. Before our Spring and Fall Career Fairs, we offer employer mock interviews with experienced recruiters, and you may also do an online video mock interview through our Job Zone system. You can find this on the main Job Zone menu, under the Resources tab. This allows you to videotape your mock interview, and review the tape, or send it to other people for feedback. Take advantage of all these resources; the more practice you get, the more confident you’ll be.

Slide 7: There are several types of interviews you may encounter in your job search. Screening interviews are often done to narrow the field of candidates, most often by phone by a human resources representative. These may take the form of brief, general questions to determine an overall match of your qualifications to the job, or targeted technical questions to determine a match of key skills required for the position. When invited for an on-site interview, be sure to plan all logistics. If it’s local, map out and do a test drive at the time you’ll be interviewing, to see how long it takes. Plan extra time for traffic and weather conditions. If the interview is out of town, get all the details, and determine who will make the arrangements. Find out the proper procedure for submitting expenses not initially covered – the company should cover all related expenses. Get an emergency contact in case of travel issues. Try to get a complete itinerary, so you can plan and research appropriately, get the dress code to pack appropriate attire. You may be invited to meals or other events; get the details on these as well so you’re prepared.

For a phone interview, make sure you have a quiet space where you won’t be interrupted, and practice speaking clearly and at an appropriate volume. Your voice is all they have to go by, so be sure yours projects confidence. Group interviews have become common, with the interviewee meeting with potential supervisors, HR representatives and/or team members at the same time. This can be intimidating, but remember to direct your attention to each member of the group as you speak, and focus on the questions asked, one at a time, as in any other interview. Group interviews also give you a good idea of the company environment and culture, which will be helpful in assessing your continued interest in the company.

Slide 8: For success in group interviews, here are some tips. You prepare for all interviews, but absolutely must prepare for a group interview. Think about all possible questions that could be asked, based on your research of the company and the job description, and also have relevant stories that
support your skills and highlight your achievements. Give quantifiable answers whenever possible, to prove what you’re saying. Work on your body language and facial expressions. Don’t be afraid to engage the interviewing panel in a dialog, a give and take discussion. Asking something like “What’s been your experience with this?” will make you seem more engaged and approachable. Reframe the question; when you paraphrase what you’ve been asked, it demonstrates that you’re a good listener and that you understand them. And incorporate what they’ve told you into your answers. This makes them feel like you already ‘get’ them, and that you’re already part of the team. It’s important to make a group interview feel more like an interactive discussion that you would have with members of your team if you already had the job. This will make the process more comfortable and natural for everyone.

Slide 9: Recruiters are more frequently utilizing virtual alternatives for interviews, many of these virtual. In general terms for all of these options, make sure you’re in a quiet environment with no possibility of distractions. Dress professionally; you will be seen from the waist up. Practice and test the technology before the interview, so you feel comfortable and present yourself in a positive, confident manner. Our office can help you prepare for and practice a virtual interview.

Video screening and virtual recorded interviews have employers record their questions on video, and candidates recording these questions on their own time. This can make the process better for both sides, since employers can save time by asking the question once and having it answered multiple times and candidates benefit from preparing for the questions and giving better answers. Some virtual or online interviews can be timed, with specific start and end parameters.

Companies are also taking their interviews off site, even to places such as coffee shops. This seemingly informal environment can put people at ease, and make it seem like you’re just having a conversation, but remember this is still an interview. There are also added distractions in a public place, and you’ll have to make sure you’ll be heard without being too loud. Again, scout out the location ahead of time, and plan how you’ll deal with this environment.

Slide 10: Behavioral interviews are a common interview format, because they let employers assess how well you’ll fit into their organization. The premise of a behavioral interview is that past behavior is a good predictor of future behavior. So, based on the key qualities a company is seeking, they will ask questions designed to see how you’ve demonstrated those qualities in the past – examples are listed here. These types of questions differ from the more traditional, hypothetical questions like, “how would you handle a difficult client.”

Slide 11: Prepare for behavioral interviews first by doing extensive research on the industry, the company, and position for which you’re interviewing. This should give you a good idea of what skills and qualities are key to success in this role. You’ll then need to prepare accomplishment stories that demonstrate success in these areas. For example, if you know the company emphasizes teamwork, be ready with examples of your teamwork skills. Plan to have a number of stories prepared, so when asked to describe a specific situation, you can use the most appropriate example.

To ensure you have a complete story, use the CAR format. Outline the challenge or situation you were faced with, describe (in detail) the specific actions you took to resolve the problem, and highlight the
results. Be as detailed as you can, to provide a complete picture of the situation and your role in its success – this is the time to toot your horn! You’ll want to emphasize your achievements and strengths in your answer, but include some of the struggles that you faced as well. Choose a story that has a positive outcome, so you can end your answer on a high note, that focuses on your accomplishment. Select examples from all aspects of your life – co-ops/internships, different jobs, volunteer activities, leadership roles you’ve had – so that the interviewer will see that you’ve achieved success in multiple areas.

Slide 12: Technical questions or interviews are now a common part of the interview process for engineering, computing, and other technical positions. Employers want to evaluate your knowledge and skills in the areas most relevant to the job. You can prepare for technical interviews by doing a thorough review of the job description to determine the skills and requirements necessary for the job, and assessing your own skills in those areas. Brush up on those skills prior to the interview as you can, and be prepared to say how you would learn any skills you don’t have before the job starts. You can study for technical interviews by reviewing old jobs, school labs and projects, and by searching online for examples of technical questions and answering them. While you practice, also practice explaining the steps needed to solve the problem; employers want to assess your analytical and problem solving skills. During the interview, be sure to clarify the problem and collect information needed to answer the question. Talk through or write your thinking process; this is more important than coming up with the right answer. If you don’t know the answer to a question, be honest and admit it, but then state how you would find the information to find the answer. Take advantage of websites that offer examples of technical questions, and brain teaser questions. Above all, don’t let these types of interviews unnnerve you; interviewers will also be looking at how well you handle the stress of the technical interview itself. Preparation and practice will help you successfully navigate these situations!

Slide 13: Here are some websites that will help you prepare for technical interviews. I’ll put these on the job intensive website.

Slide 14: Case interviews are common for management and consulting positions, typically for business and MBA students. In essence, case interviews are a role playing exercise, where an employer assesses a potential consultant’s case presentation skills. They’re judging you in the following areas: your thought process, your analytical and logical abilities, your communication and presentation skills, and how you react to different scenarios and data. Your format for responding to a case-based question should be the following: summarize and restate the question, verify the objectives sought, ask questions that clarify the case, and identify and label the case. Here are some other guidelines that may help: try to think of the big picture first, then the details; take notes as you listen to the problem, be creative and brainstorm, and think out loud, so the interviewer can hear your thought process and better assess your analytical skills, be sure to have a strong closure to your presentation, and demonstrate enthusiasm throughout the process. This website has good information and helpful practice questions to help you prepare for a case interview.

Slide 15: Here are few tips for the second interview. This is your chance to strengthen your candidacy, so first go back and review your first interview. What do you feel good about, and what do you think
you could have answered better? Did you not discuss an accomplishment, skill or experience that you’d like to be sure to mention this time around? It’s even more important to rehearse your responses, in a more focused direction. From your first interview you know more about the company and it’s culture, and about the position. Use this knowledge to help you prepare responses for the accomplishments you really want to present. You can also be more assertive – not aggressive – by referring back to your previous responses and strengthening them, or providing different examples. Second interviews may take place with different interviewers, with the hiring manager for example, and potentially even team members. If you’re asked some of the same questions, you can use your focused preparation to provide stronger examples, or additional details that make you an even better match for the position. You can also be more assertive about what you want to know about the job and company. The compensation topic may be raised in this interview, to see if your expectations are in line with the employers’. You can ask for a tour of the company, and for information about training, development and growth opportunities. The second interview can be more of an interactive discussion, with everyone getting to know each other better. As always, though, it depends on preparation and practice.

Slide 16: Here are some general etiquette tips for a successful interview. Prepare for your onsite interview by leaving yourself extra travel time, and plan to arrive early. Appearance is important, and no matter what the dress code will be for the position, plan to wear professional attire. You only get one chance to make a good first impression! Appearance also incorporates accessories, make up, and perfume; again, be professional and keep these to a minimum. Remember to turn off your cell phone; even when silenced, the noise is audible. You can leave the company’s main number as necessary for emergencies. Bring a portfolio or case to carry materials, bring extra copies of your resume, in case you meet with people who don’t have a copy, and this is the time to bring your references sheet. Once you enter the building, the interview officially starts, so treat everyone you meet with respect, including any gatekeepers (receptionists, secretaries, assistants). These employees are often asked for their impressions of candidates, and are integral to the success of an organization, so it’s important to take extra time to make a good impression. During the interview, be aware of your non-verbal communication; unconscious habits like hair-twirling, using your hands too much, or not maintaining eye contact can distract the interviewer and detract from what you’re saying. You also want to make sure to maintain an energetic and enthusiastic attitude, to show you’re genuinely interested in the company and position.

Slide 17: The standard interview format begins with an opening, which allows you to make a positive first impression. The interviewer usually tries to make the interviewee comfortable with small talk; this is a good way to establish a connection based on commonalities – another good reason to Google the interviewer or look up their LinkedIn profile ahead of time.

The candidate sell is your opportunity to sell yourself, answering the interviewer’s questions and matching your skills and qualifications to the job and company. Remember to provide detailed examples and stories that support your relevant accomplishments.

The employer sell is the interviewer’s opportunity to sell the company and position to you – remember interviewing is a two-way street. This will also be your opportunity to ask questions of the interviewer.
You may find questions to ask the recruiter to follow up on the information they provide, which will further demonstrate your interest. More on asking questions shortly.

Finally, there will be a closing, in which you should restate your qualifications and interest in the position, and clarify what the next steps in the hiring process will be, which will help in your follow up.

Slide 18: Here are some typical interview questions that are considered difficult to answer. The good news is that these are questions for which you can prepare answers in advance. The key to a good answer is to determine their reason for asking – what qualities or information they're really looking for with each question. Your research on the company and position, together with your knowledge of your assets and accomplishments, will help you formulate strong answers that highlight your relevant skills and achievements, and how you will apply these strengths to this position and be an asset to the company. Again, you’re trying to make the best match possible between you and the company, so all your responses should be targeted to this goal.

Slide 19: This is a very common first question, and you should prepare an answer in advance. Your response should focus on your best attributes, your skills and experiences that are relevant to this particular job, and that set the stage for demonstrating your perfect fit for the role. Use a 3-part marketing statement, in which you briefly summarize your career history to date; essentially your brand, then talk about how your career developed, including a recent accomplishment that will capture the interviewer’s attention. You’ll finish with a brief summary of what you want to do next in your career, and why this is the perfect role for you. Refrain from including personal information; what you want to communicate is why you’re the perfect match for this position. Keep your answer brief as well, you don’t want to presume to answer all possible questions at once, you want to open the door for continued conversation.

Slide 20: Always a tricky issue, salary questions tend to generate anxiety in candidates. As with other interview questions, preparation will help you successfully navigate these questions. Prior to the interview, it’s essential to conduct research on salaries for your industry, field, and comparable positions, so that you know what you’re worth. There are many salary websites that have comprehensive information; our website has these resources available. From your research, come up with an acceptable range.

During the interview, don’t bring up the salary issue, and avoid giving your desired salary too early in the process. If asked for a salary, first try to defer the question back to the interviewer; indicate you’ll be in a better position to discuss salary after hearing more about the job or ask them what range they are considering for the position. If they press you for an amount, give a range of approximately $5,000 around your ideal salary, again based on your research.

Always emphasize that the job is the most important thing to you, and if necessary, indicate your willingness to take a lower salary (still within your range), especially if there are other forms of compensation, benefits, or the opportunity for advancement.

We will put some salary negotiation resources on the job intensive website.
Slide 21: Most candidates spend time preparing answers to anticipated questions, but don’t prepare good questions to ask the interviewer. As the interview is a two-way street, you’ll be asked at some point if you have any questions for the interviewer. The questions you asked will be evaluated to determine your level of interest in the company, and their goals and priorities. Questions that relate to the company’s vision for the future, goals, and prospects for growth are good ways to demonstrate your knowledge of the industry and research into the company. Inquiring about potential challenges lets you highlight your relevant skills, and suggest possible solutions and your ability to help the company through these anticipated challenges. Use directed questions to solidify your candidacy, and set yourself above your competition.

Slide 22: Follow up is a key step in the interview process, and one often neglected by candidates. Be sure to send a thank you letter – to each person with whom you interviewed – within 48 hours of the interview. Email or hand-written notes are both acceptable. Emphasize your interest in the company and position, and reiterate your qualifications, as they specifically relate to the position. Clarify any responses you didn’t feel comfortable with, and mention any additional examples or key points you feel will help you candidacy.

If you don’t hear back by the date specified in the interview, call the interviewer, just to check on the process and your candidacy. Ask if there are any further questions you can answer or information you can provide, to better help them make their decision. This follow up will help keep you in the front of their mind, and confirm your interest in the position.

Also after the interview, review the interview itself – what went right, what you could have done better. This will give you things to improve on and practice before your next interview. Every interview is preparation for the one that follows!

Also contact your references, so they’re aware they may be contacted by the company. Discuss the position with them, and send your most recent resume so they are prepared.

Slide 23: You’ll want to secure at least 3-5 references; some people recommend up to 10, so that you can choose the most appropriate for each job you apply to. They should be a mix of supervisors (past or current), and co-workers, and maybe faculty, if you’re a recent graduate. Be sure you always check first, to make sure people are willing to provide a positive reference for you – if you don’t ask, you may find people have a different opinion of you than you thought, and may give negative information to employers. In fact, it’s good to ask references what they would tell a prospective employer about you so that you’ll know in advance. Manage your references by keeping them up to date on your skills and accomplishments, letting them know what jobs you’re applying to and that they may get contacted by employers, and grooming them to determine exactly what they’ll say about you to each employer. People have lost jobs through negative references, so keep control of this important aspect to your search.

Slide 24: Here are a few common interviewing concerns. Many experienced candidates are worried about being perceived as overqualified, and/or too old. However, it is a legitimate question for a company to ask anyone who has done work similar to the being applied to. They have their own
concerns about any worker they hire and invest in, but sometimes especially with older workers. Here are some of the common concerns. It’s important to recognize these potential concerns and address them head-on with an attitude and responses that are honest and show your determination to get the job. For example, if you know the company is comprised of mostly young people, you can prepare an answer that shows how you are able to take direction – and prove it with a specific example – and that your experiences and accumulated knowledge will help add to their team’s success.

Slide 25: Keep these things in mind when selling yourself to a recruiter. Attitude is everything – maintain a positive, enthusiastic attitude that shows you’re focused on the future, not stuck in the past. Show you’re keeping current with technology and that you enjoy learning. Emphasize your skills – not just the ones that directly relate to the job, but also the transferable skills you’ve gotten from previous jobs and life experiences; communication, leadership and teamwork skills are always valued. Emphasize all your experiences; for example, a leadership role in a volunteer organization is valuable also. If you’re more experienced, keep a positive attitude and emphasize the qualities you have that will be valued by an employer; you have a history of dedication, commitment and maturity that a new graduate does not have. Combined with flexibility and openness to new situations, this makes you a valuable candidate, and if you believe it, you can convince prospective employers also!

To allay concerns that you won’t stick around or feel challenged in the role, be upfront and clear with the hiring manager. Tell them exactly why you want the job and your motivations, and let them know you have every intention of taking the job seriously. Ask the manager what they’re looking for in a perfect candidate, so you can gain insight into what qualities and skills the employer is looking for, and can alleviate these concerns.

Slide 26: Being let go from a company can be humiliating and can negatively impact your job search. Take some time to examine what happened and why, and develop a plan to keep you moving forward in a positive way. If you’ve been laid off, address this honestly in an interview, but be brief. Keep a positive attitude towards your former employer, and show how you’re focusing on the future and how you’re using your current time off productively. Further education, technical training, and volunteering are all productive uses of your time off. If you’ve been terminated due to your own actions, address any issues that may prevent future success, such as anger management, or skills training. Sometimes termination has nothing to do with your performance, but may be a personality conflict with your manager. Again, don’t express any negativity, keep your explanation brief and focus on your skills, experiences, and successes. Bring up the point that you have good references from previous employers who can speak to your abilities and productivity.

Slide 27: Here are some additional tips for successful interviews. As part of your research prior to the interview, Google your interviewer, and check their LinkedIn profile, to gain more information that you can use to make a further connection. Perhaps you’re both members of the same professional association, or have a common acquaintance.

You can also send your LinkedIn profile to your interviewer before the interview, so they can a greater feel for who you are than just through your resume.
Express your confidence by interviewing as if you already have the position. By doing in-depth research, you can actually suggest ways in which you can help solve a problem or improve a process, further cementing the match between you and the company.

Let your true self shine; don’t try to be someone you’re not, as you won’t be able to maintain this persona once you take the job. But present the best of who you are, maintain a positive, enthusiastic attitude, don’t express any negativity about past employers, and always focus on why you’re best candidate. It helps if you can demonstrate your resilience, especially if you’ve been laid off, and your ability to adapt to new situations.

Be prepared to address questions relating to over qualification or perceived ageism that may arise — this also relates to your adaptability. Inquire about their concerns; then you can respond with sincere reasons as to why your experience is a benefit to them, and why you will be a dedicated employee.

Slide 28: It’s ok to take a few seconds to really consider the question that’s being asked, determine what they’re looking for, and respond with a quality answer, instead of just a reactionary response.

Don’t interrupt the interviewer in your enthusiasm to respond. Also don’t ramble; even though you want to elaborate and use stories to support your qualifications, you want to remain concise, and focused to the questions being asked. Rambling is another sign of nervousness, which can be managed through practice.

Consider putting together a one page marketing piece — a document that summarizes your skills and qualifications specifically for this particular job, and can include possible action items should you get the job — and leaving it with the interviewer. It shows you took the time to match your qualifications to the job and company. As appropriate for your industry, bring a portfolio to the interview, to highlight relevant samples of your work.

Slide 29: That’s it for this webinar. Remember you can always reach me by phone or email if you have questions, or would like to be connected with your advisor in our office. Our website is also indicated here.