Candidate Preparation

DATAPATH SEARCH INTERVIEW PREP

This information has been assembled into the most comprehensive and concise candidate preparation that we've seen anywhere. By spending twenty minutes or so with this prep, the candidate will eliminate nearly all of the pitfalls and questions that surround the interview process. We hope you will find it useful and informative, and good luck on your interview!

1-3 days before interview -

The Candidate should absolutely utilize every bit of information they can assemble or access on the company with which they are going to interview. Being unfamiliar with the company will hurt you 95% of the time according to a survey of hiring managers. Also, be sure your LinkedIn or similar professional on-line profile is updated and current!

Actual Prep Briefing

- *Bring a couple of hard copies of your resume and get there 15 minutes early to fill out the application. Unless of course you were asked to fill it out on-line prior to your in-person or phone/on-line interview.*

- *Fill it out completely. Do not use the phrase "see resume", since most companies will rely on the application as part of your permanent record, and not the resume.*

- *Be sure to note 'Datapath Search' as your referring agent in the applicable box or space.*

- *Also, when you're filling out the box marked "salary desired" or a similar listing, simply fill it out with "open" or "negotiable". Do not list a specific dollar figure, (more on this later).*

Lastly, BE SPECIFIC!

It is imperative, (as more and more companies do thorough background checks), that your information is accurate and exact. Academic background, salary, bonuses, financial history, (bankruptcies, etc.) work history and any arrests will all surface during a background check.

It is substantially better and easier to list an 'incident' and subsequently explain it during the interview process than having to defend why you did not list said 'incident' after its discovery during the background check. This heart-breaking discovery is usually not made until the offer has been extended and you're preparing to resign! Many 'youthful indiscretions' have and will be overlooked in the interview process. However, an inaccurate or false statement discovered later… is never forgiven! Obviously, this also goes for the information on your resume.

The first 15 minutes of the interview are the most crucial. They will set the tone for the entire interview. As with any other interaction, first impressions are lasting ones. So make these first minutes count.

Perhaps the most important question you can ask of each individual you'll meet with is the following: "I understand you're looking for a (job title), can you tell me exactly what you need this person to accomplish for you?" If you ask every person you meet with this same question, you'll wind up getting each person's version of the position, and what exactly each of them is looking for. This benefits you, the candidate, in two ways:

First, it focuses the presentation of your background only on the relevant skills that are critical to the particular opening.

The second benefit is by asking this question, you'll find that their answers will vary based on their relationship to the position; i.e. (peer level, immediate supervisor, human resources, etc.). The benefit of these variances is that you'll wind up with a much better and more well-rounded perspective of what the position actually involves. Otherwise, you can wind up with an assumed or partial description of the job.

Once you've established what the individual interviewer is looking for, tell him/her <u>why</u> you can do their job. If you just inform them that "Yeah, I can do your job", or you simply tell them what you've done in the past, this will not be enough to separate you from your competition.

Simply stated, you haven't shown the interviewer how you might accomplish the primary objectives of their position. It is generally acknowledged that a candidate who tells the company why he/she can do the job will have a much higher ratio of 2nd interviews (about 4:1) than the candidate who doesn't (about 10:1).

As the interview progresses, and both you and company are establishing exactly what the position involves, gaps will inevitably occur between your skill set and the position's requirements. The good news is that rarely, if ever, is a candidate hired with 100% of the skill set listed in the job description. More often than not, the figure resides around 75%, since most quality placements are made with candidates who are hired for both their expertise and potential. This allows for a learning curve and career growth within the organization.

Most quality candidates feel a strong obligation to themselves and to the interviewer to make sure that the company is aware of the skills that he/she does not have that the position requires. Candidates tend to spend a lot of time talking about what experience/technology they don't have, so that should they receive an offer, there will be no question on the company's part as to what the candidate can and cannot accomplish. The huge negative here is that instead of discussing their achievements, many top-flight candidates will waste valuable interview time stressing what they don't know!

Obviously, as a candidate, you should be honest about what kind of on-the-job experience you have. However, make sure you spend the majority of the time on the positive, (what you do know) and not on the negative (what you don't know). Remember that no company is going to extend an offer to you if they don't feel you're capable of handling the position.

Once you've established that you're somebody who can get the job done for the company, hopefully a rapport or "chemistry" has developed between you and the interviewer. During this part of the interview, money and benefits will usually come up for discussion. Rule of thumb; never ask for information on either of these subjects. Wait until the details have been offered to you. The interview is not the time or place to ask about medical benefits, vacation time, salary, etc. Your DataPath Consultant will make sure that all your questions on these subjects are answered.

These issues are usually addressed after the interview process is complete, but before or during the offer process.

ALWAYS REMEMBER, THE PLACEMENT PROCESS IS A TEN RUNG LADDER:

You're informed for the first time about the job.

You express some level of interest, and your resume is forwarded to the company.

The company expresses interest in your resume, and a first interview is scheduled.

The first interview occurs.

The candidate expresses interest/disinterest in the company to your DataPath Consultant.

The company expresses interest/disinterest in the candidate to DataPath.

If mutual interest exists, a 2nd & sometimes 3rd & 4th interviews are scheduled

If mutual interest still exists, your DataPath Consultant will discuss money and benefits with both parties.

An offer is extended to the candidate.

The candidate decides whether or not to take the offer.

One of the singular, tragic, career errors made by candidates is skipping this logical sequence, (often from rung one to ten) based on a simple knee-jerk response to say, "No, I'm not interested". REMEMBER: The time to say no to a position is when you've received an offer! Until then, it's nothing but self-indulgent speculation to make a decision based on 25%, 40% or 70% knowledge of the total picture.

After all, when was last the time you purchased anything without knowing the price?

What was the last significant life decision you made with 40% or 50% of the facts?

There may be rare (1 to 5% of the time) situations where there is an obvious mismatch between you and the company, but these instances are extremely uncommon. Do not decide in the midst of an interview that this is not the job you want. Inevitably this disinterest will be evident in your presentation, and you will rule yourself out before the process even begins!

Money - As far as money/salary is concerned there are two cardinal rules to observe:

1. When asked what you are making currently, or were making on your last job, tell the interviewer exactly and honestly what your base salary is/was, what bonuses/profit sharing your entitled to, any stock options you may have had, and finally, any impending review dates (60 days or less).

2. When asked what kind of salary you might be interested in, NEVER cite a specific dollar amount. An answer along the lines of the following is far more productive: "Although salary is one of my key priorities, it's not my number one priority. I'm interested in a position that will enhance my career path and where I feel comfortable that I can make a significant contribution. Therefore, I would be willing to listen to any firm and reasonable offer that you'd care to make me."

If you're pressed further, a range that begins at what you're currently making and extends through an additional twenty per cent is an excellent rule of thumb. Let's take a look at a specific Example:

Well into the interview for a middle management role, the interviewer says; "What are you currently earning?" You answer honestly: "I'm currently at a 150K base plus a 10% bonus." The interviewer then asks; "What are you looking for dollar-wise?" You respond; "165K." Suppose (as is often the case) the interviewer was thinking about at least 170K and was even prepared to go to 200K+. Can you guess what your offer is going to be? There is no doubt that once that interviewer heard that you would be happy with 165K, that's exactly what you're going to be offered. Rest assured, your Datapath Consultant will get you as much money as possible.

(Remember the bigger your salary, the bigger our fee!)

Closing the Interview -

As with a successful first date (less the first kiss!), there's usually a mildly awkward moment when all the necessary information that needed to be discussed has been, and the interview is concluding. Most candidates will leave it up to the company to handle this moment, but when used correctly, it can be a great opportunity to capitalize on a solid interview. Ask the interviewer one of the following questions:

i. (Multiple Interview) - "What can you tell me about the next person I'm going to be meeting?"

ii. (Final Interviewer) - "What's the next step in your process, and when might I expect to hear from you?"

Or, if you feel the interview went exceptionally well; "I've really enjoyed our discussions and wanted to let you know how interested I am. Where do we go from here?"

Another item to remember is to ask for a business card from the interviewer. This will allow you to remember their name and title accurately and give you their contact information for the follow-up thank you note.

These seemingly obvious questions are often overlooked. The interesting part is how effective they can be in giving you a strong idea as to the company's interest level in you, their urgency, time frame for filling the position, and what you might do to prepare for your next interview. Again, this is another technique designed to separate you from the pack.

Typical Questions Employers Ask

Why are you looking for a new position? What do you like/dislike about your current/prior company?

What are your long and short-term goals and objectives?

When and why did you establish these goals and how are you preparing yourself to achieve them?

What do you see yourself doing five years from now?

What do you consider to be your greatest strengths and weaknesses?

How would you describe yourself?

What motivates you to put forth your greatest effort?

What qualifications do you possess that will make you a success in this organization?

What do you know about this organization?

What have you learned from your mistakes?

What criteria are you using to evaluate various organizations?

What will be the deciding factors behind your next career move?

What is most important to you about a company?

Difficult Questions - Throughout the interview process, historically there are some tough questions that can trip up unprepared candidates. The one common denominator that transcends all of the following situations is to... BE POSITIVE!

Whether its discussing why you are looking for a job, what your relationship with your old boss or company was, or what are your biggest weaknesses, always answer in a positive light, thereby preventing the interviewer from labeling you as a malcontent, troublemaker, or failure.

<u>Why do you want to work for this company?</u> - If you've done your research, this question should pose no problem. However, frivolous answers like "It's convenient to my home" or "I hear the benefits are good" can really hurt you here.

<u>Why are you leaving your present job?</u> - Again, avoid the negatives here. Answers like; "Although I'm not unhappy where I am now, I'm always on the lookout for greater challenges and increased responsibility that your situation appears to offer" or "I'm interested in exploring the potential career opportunities that exist within your organization that simply are not available to me with my present organization." are the way to go. This style of answer shows you bear no malice to your present organization, and therefore keeps you from being seen in a negative light.

<u>Where do you see yourself in five years?</u> - Somewhere along the line somebody thought that a good answer to this question is "in your chair". This is a very dangerous answer, and is generally perceived as being cocky and presumptuous. A significantly stronger answer would be along the lines of "I see myself spending a reasonable amount of time paying my dues and

learning about your company's way of doing business, then gradually gaining increased responsibilities and skills".

<u>What are your weaknesses</u>? - The best answer here is to communicate your weaknesses as disguised strengths. For example: "I tend to view my users as my clients. Not that I practice the old saying that the customer is always right, but in my mind their needs are my priorities and I will often frustrate my co-workers by trying to inform and accommodate the user community rather than just issue them system's doctrine."

Or make use of your possible lack of technical skills with a specific position as a weakness. You can always learn technical skills and you can illustrate this by referring to your past achievements.

<u>What are your most significant accomplishments and/or strengths?</u> - You should be prepared to list at least three, and no more than five, accomplishments from your career. For example; "I was a key member of team that researched new technology, made recommendations to management, brought that technology in-house, and developed a new system/process that saved the company approximately over a million dollars annually." As for strengths, individual personality traits such as high energy level, enthusiasm, assertiveness, tough-mindedness, maturity, and social sensitivity are all good answers.

Great Questions to Ask Employers

How will I be evaluated in my job? How often?

How does your company encourage employees to keep pace with advancing technologies?

What would distinguish one candidate from another for this job?

How do I prove myself and my commitment to the company?

When would you want me to start this position?

What projects are in the development stages right now?

Do you have plans for expansion?

What is the financial stability of the company?

Who are your competitors?

What plans does the company have for becoming more competitive in this industry?

What makes your company different from its competitors?

What do you like most/least about your company?

If I am hired, what will be my job responsibilities?

What do you wish you knew about the company before you started?

Will I be working on a team or independently?

What is the company's philosophy toward its employees?

What do you see as the biggest areas of needed improvement within the company?

What are the short and long-term strategic directions of the company?

What characteristics do the achievers in this company seem to share?

Conclusion - This has been a lot of information to absorb, don't try to remember it word for word.

Keep in mind that this interview preparation is nothing more or less than the "rules of the game". How you play the game is as individual as you are. If you can just keep these relatively simple rules or tools in mind, your interview should be fun, enlightening, and interesting.

And don't forget to call your DataPath Consultant as soon as possible after the interview.

Good Luck!