

Interview Prep Tips from a UW L&S Alumnus

Steve Pogorzelski, CEO and successful entrepreneur

3 Things to Know About Interviewing:

1. Applying for a job is a competition. That is, there are others like you who also want the job, so treat the interview like you would an athletic competition. Practice and prepare to put yourself in peak condition and to beat the competition.
2. First impressions matter because people form the majority of their opinion on someone in the first two minutes of meeting them. Often overlooked factors that contribute to that impression include your shoes, clothing, handshake and ability to make eye contact.
3. Professionals don't use words such as "like," "yeah," "wicked," etc.

Your Brand: Communicating Who You Are and What You Bring to the Table

1. Your generation more than any other has been deeply affected by the power of brands (e.g. Nike, Apple, Facebook, etc).
2. Brands have attributes that make them powerful. Apple's brand stands for unique, hip, and modern. Nike's stands for performance and just doing it.
3. People are brands too. When interviewing, it is very important to write out a brand statement as a means of preparation. Here is how to do it!

What is your personal brand? Write down the things you think are most reflective of your brand.

For example, my brand attributes are:

Leads with a firm hand, warm heart, and a sense of humor
Possess the values of accountability, teamwork, fairness, honesty, and integrity
Analytical thinker Strategic Results-oriented
Global experience Says "we" before "I" High emotional intelligence

Notice that many of those things would be hard to relay on a resume.

Your turn! Write out your brand attributes. How would others describe you? What are you professionally passionate about? What's important to you? What have you noticed about yourself when working with others?

Create Your Elevator Pitch

An elevator pitch is common in the professional world. It means "Tell me in sixty seconds or less what I should know about you, the organization you represent, and your product or idea."

- 1) Your elevator pitch answers the question which is most commonly asked in interviews which is "Tell us about yourself." Most people asked that question are ill-prepared and bounce all over the place with the answer. Because you have prepared like an athlete for a competition, you won't be one of those people.
- 2) The foundation of your elevator pitch is your brand attributes. Simply weave your brand attributes into your response of the question. Write down your elevator pitch. Practice it to the point where it sounds natural.

Prepare for Common Interview Questions

- 1) What are your strengths? Resumes and interviews are one of the few times in life that modest, humble people should not be afraid or hesitant to brag about themselves. Make sure that you are not afraid to speak highly of yourself in response to the question.

➡ Tip: Write out the response to the question and practice it. If possible, tie the strengths back to your practical or professional experience. For example, I'd say that "one of my greatest strengths is my ability to be highly organized and committed to a multitude of activities and my extraordinary work ethic which is reflected in my being CEO of Avention, Chairman of the Board at Goodwill, running a private consulting practice, and serving on either the Board of Director or Board of Advisors of seven organizations." See, no need to be humble because I'm stating facts. As a college student, you are most likely involved in many ways between school, student orgs, volunteering, internships or campus jobs.

- 2) What is your greatest weakness? Turn your weaknesses into strengths:

- 6 Tips for Talking About Your Biggest Weakness in a Job Interview: <http://go.wisc.edu/0111w6>
- The Worst Interview Question (and How to Answer It): <http://go.wisc.edu/9gq295>

- 3) Why do you want this job? Why should I hire you for this job? Most people totally blow this answer. They say things like "I want this job because I need a job" or "You should hire me because I'm the best candidate." I always respond back with "How do you know you are the best candidate?" Or, the really bad ones say "Because I really want the job." That's an answer any of the candidates would use. What sets you apart from other candidates and what do you bring to the position that the employer is seeking?

➡ Tip: What are your goals? Or, why do you want this job or internship? Your answer needs to focus on the short or medium term.

- 4) Do you have any questions for me? Is there anything I can tell you about the job/fellowship/opportunity? Again, most people don't have a list of questions typed out and at their disposal and that's a big mistake. In the age of Google and Wikipedia this is totally unacceptable.

➡ Tips:

- a) Prepare and type out a list of questions that reflect your intellectual curiosity as well as the fact that you did some research.
- b) Along the lines of "the mission of the company is to...," how does this manifest itself in the fellowship program/internship/job or whatever else you think is important? If you know who you are interviewing with, Google them to see if they've made any presentations, written any academic articles, authored any blogs or newsletters so you can say "I saw that in (insert article) that you believe...etc." And then ask them a question that pertains to the article. I have had people come in and say "In your book you wrote that..." and then they finish that statement with a thought provoking question. Those people always stand out in interviews.
- c) If you are meeting with other interns or are interviewing with other employees you should prepare to ask them questions about the company culture, their experiences as interns/employees, etc. You want to be friendly, but professional, in your questions.
- d) For more potential questions, read the following: <http://go.wisc.edu/emvtbq>

➡ TIP: When you write out your answers always try to remember that the interviewer is listening to your answers in the following context:

What's in it for me? What's in it for my department/my company?

Tailor your answer so that it relates back to them.

A basic example for a teacher might be, "My strength of being effective with kids is that your students will be more motivated, resulting in higher test scores as evidenced by my past experience."

5) Your closing statement and your "ask" for the job.

You may get asked at the end of the interview "Why should we hire you?" You should have a 1-2 minute answer that concisely sums up your qualifications, why you want the job and HOW THEY WILL BENEFIT FROM HIRING YOU. The 3 points to cover:

- a. My qualifications/brand (i.e. a shortened elevator pitch)
- b. Why you want the job. (i.e. try to tie the Company philosophy or mission back to your own professional beliefs)
- c. What's in it for you/your company if you hire me

➡ TIP: If you don't get asked the question "Why should we hire you?" and you truly would like the job/internship/fellowship, you should say at the end of the interview:
"Before our time is up, I'd like to say one thing..."

Hit them with your closing statement (shortened elevator pitch, why you want it, and what's in it for them). This shows that you are assertive, that you really want the job, and that you are mature and professional. There is no downside to ever ending an interview that way. I know that in the literally hundreds of interviews I've conducted that this portion of the interview is profoundly important.

Your checklist:

1. Brand attributes
2. Elevator pitch
3. Questions you will be asked in the interview and your written responses
4. Questions you ask in the interview that reflect your genuine interest in the job, your professionalism and your intellectual capabilities
5. Your answer to "Why should I hire you or consider you?" Which also doubles as your "ask for the job"

About Steve Pogorzelski:

A 1983 UW graduate with a BA in Journalism/Advertising, Steve is an accomplished CEO, entrepreneur, author, a frequent commentator on global labor markets on a variety of national and international news outlets, and serves on a variety of board of directors (including our very own UW L&S Board of Visitors). Steve is currently the CEO of Avention and former President of Monster and Group President of Monster Worldwide, Chief Revenue Officer at Vocus, and CEO of ClickFuel.

More on Steve: <http://go.wisc.edu/99p589>

Need assistance with interview strategy and a chance to practice your interviewing skills?

Check out L&S Career Initiative & Career Services interviewing handouts and/or make an appointment to meet with a career consultant by checking out our website: <http://careers.ls.wisc.edu>.