INTERVIEWING IN A NUTSHELL

Jennifer B. Li

In my experience, there are three main types of interviews. My favorite type is in the form of a conversation. The interviewer and you are each trying to get a sense of each other's personalities, likes, dislikes. It's very informal and can be quite fun. There's nothing you can really do to prepare for those types of interviews. The other two types of interviews, technical and behavioral, are a lot more structured. I'll go into more details about what you can do to prepare for each type. These types of interviews can actually work in your favor since you are able to prepare and "study" beforehand. The most important thing is to know your resume. If you put a skill down, you must be ready to be tested on that skill. If you put an experience down, be ready to talk about it.

Technical Interviews

There are two books I've used that have helped me tremendously in my technical interviews. The first is <u>Ace the Technical Interview</u> by Michael Rothstein and Daniel Rothstein. This book is broken down into categories such as C/C++, Java, and SQL. Each category has three levels of difficulty and contains real technical questions that people have asked in the category. I've actually encountered many interviews where the questions asked came straight out of the book. All the materials are presented in Q&A format, so it gets right to the point.

The second book is <u>How Would You Move Mount Fuji? Microsoft's Cult of the Puzzle – How the World's Smartest Company Selects the Most Creative Thinkers</u> by William Poundstone. This book contains many puzzles that Microsoft has asked in the past, as well as answers to these puzzles. Even though Microsoft might not ask you these questions specifically, it is a fun book to read and can get you to think outside of the book.

The most important thing to remember for a technical interview is that the interviewer is trying to get a sense of how you think. So even if you don't know the answer, talk out loud about what you are thinking, what approaches you might want to try out. Most of the time, the interviewer will work with you to reach a solution. Try to attack the problems one state at a time. Talk about a possible approach, think about the new state of the problem, and go from there. Here's an example of a problem I've been asked by Google, and I'll explain how I approached the problem.

You have a sentence of words without any punctuation. How would you reverse the sentence when you only have memory to allocate 2 variables?

The first step is to make sure you understand the problem. This can often be done by an example input/output pair. Let's say you have the sentence "I am reading a book", then the

output should be "book a reading am I". The first thing that came to mind when I heard the word *reverse* was to use two pointers, and swap the first word with the last word, 2nd word with the 2nd to last word, and so on. But this cannot be done simply because you don't have memory to store or tokenize each word. So you can literally reverse the whole sentence, the words include by swapping character by character. This will give you "koob a gnidaer ma I".

This current state of your sentence is actually a good step to the solution. By examining the new sentence, you'll see that all you have to do is reverse the characters of each word individually. This makes it a lot easier to deal with. You just need to find the beginning and ending of each word, and you can easily reverse the characters. You can do this by starting at the beginning of the sentence and mark the beginning of the current word. You then proceed to look for a space or end of line, and you can figure out the location of the last character of the current word. With these two pointers, you can easily swap all the characters of the current word. Do this for all the words, and you'll end up with "book a reading am I".

Behavioral Interviews

Interviewers use behavioral interviews to get a sense of how you have approached problems in the past. Therefore, when you are answering behavioral questions, be sure to bring up as many past experiences as possible. By giving examples of problems or situations you've dealt with in the past, and how you successfully handled these situations, you are giving a convincing argument for why you are going to be a motivated, team-oriented, diligent, and flexible employee.

There are certain behavioral questions that can "trap" you into talking about a side of you that you wish the interviewer would not find out. These questions include "tell me about your worst quality" or "what is the one reason why we shouldn't hire you". Obviously, you shouldn't go off and list your worst attributes. The best solutions involve an answer that put you in positive light, but can still be conceived as a negative quality.

For the question "tell me about your worst quality", you can talk about a fault of yours, but one that you've realized and are actively working to overcome. You then proceed to present a situation where this quality was a problem, but talk about how you successfully dealt with the problem and are now a better person because you overcame the problem. This allows you to end the interview question with a positive note about yourself.

The question "what is the one reason why we shouldn't hire you" has a smaller subset of "correct" responses that you can use. The most typical reason you can use revolves around the fact that you are extremely hard working, and your fault is that you are an overachiever, a perfectionist, and that you expect the best from yourself and those around you.

For behavioral interviews, it is important to be yourself, be convincing, and use real experiences from your life. It always helps to end each response with a positive outcome or a lesson learned. Here are some sample behavioral questions:

http://www.careerfair.com/tips/behavioralinter.asp#example

Interview Formats

It always helps me when I am able to go into an interview knowing exactly what to expect. For this reason, I am going to provide the formats I had for some of the big companies that you might be interviewing for. Hopefully this will help you get in the right mindset for an interview you are going to have.

Accenture is purely behavioral. Since this is a consulting firm, they look for people skills. The first interview is in person, second over the phone, and third onsite.

Amazon is almost entirely technical. If you do well in the initial interview, you are invited back for three additional technical interviews the following day.

AMS is also purely behavioral. It's another consulting company so they look for people skills.

Bank of America is behavioral. If you do well, you are invited to a Super Saturday in Charlotte.

Bank One is behavioral. You can interview for positions in Ohio and Chicago.

Boeing is strictly behavioral. The first interview is a structured phone interview. If you do well, you are invited to go on site.

Cerner is strictly behavioral. If you do well, you are invited back for two more interviews the following day. They then select candidates to go onsite for a sell day.

Citadel is half an hour of behavioral and half an hour of technical. If you go onsite, it is almost an equal number of behavioral and technical interviews.

Citigroup uses natural flow of conversations without a super structured way for interviewing.

Dolby uses conversations and includes a few easy technical questions.

General Motors uses behavioral based questions in conversations to find out what you've done.

Goldman Sachs is behavioral and conversation-based for the first round. The onsite is mostly technical and you meet up to 12 people with mostly different questions.

Google is purely technical and does not really care about past experiences. The first round is over the phone. Onsite included 3 interviewers from New York and 2 from Mount View. Number of rounds can range from two to four.

Harris is purely behavioral. If you do well, you meet with various managers with different behavioral questions for interviews onsite.

HP is purely behavioral and the interviews are often done by HR people. You are then selected for specific job openings.

IBM was purely conversation-based in order to find out what I'm interested in. But I might not have gotten any behavioral or technical questions because I interned there.

IBM Extreme Blue was all done over the phone and technical each round. The initial screening consisted of part traditional technical and part design. If you do well, you are asked to take

an online timed thinking test called IPAT. You are then interviewed by project mentors for specific projects.

JP Morgan Chase had first round behavioral over the phone. Onsite consisted of one technical, one behavioral, and one writing + programming test. In the writing test, you are asked about your knowledge of the firm as well financial IT. Programming test is very easy.

Lockheed Martin is purely behavioral. Onsite can be done in a building specifically for interviewing, with managers from various locations.

Merrill Lynch is purely behavioral. The onsite is a day of interviews with different managers in a specific division.

Microsoft can have phone or in person first round that includes a few technical questions and a possible brain teaser. The onsite starts with a behavioral interview from an HR person, and follows with 3-5 interviews depending on how well you do in each interview. The interviews I had for a program manager position were exceptionally non-technical.

Raytheon is purely behavioral. After your initial interview, you apply online to specific openings.

UBS is behavioral with maybe a technical question here and there. If you do well, you are invited to a Super Saturday in Stamford.

Wells Fargo has first round behavioral. Onsite includes a day of interviews with managers picked by a recent hire based on your interests. This includes some technical questions.

Final Words

Have more questions? Just ask =)

Good luck with all your interviews. You can prepare beforehand, but be sure to relax and be yourself during the interviews. Most importantly, know your resume! And it always helps to smile!