

1 What qualities should an engineer look for in an employer? Are there qualities that job seekers overrate or underrate?

Younger and midcareer engineers should think in the long term and make sure that the firm they join can give them growth opportunities and has a track record of developing careers and mentoring young engineers. They should also look at a firm's record in handling the inevitable ebbs and flows in activity. Do they lay people off when things get slow or do they manage to keep people employed? If an engineer has more experience, he or she can also look at stock options, other types of equity positions, and leadership potential and paths to principalship. It's basically about knowing what you want next in your career and making sure that the firm can offer that.

Salary is often overrated. There is not a huge variation in salary in the engineering world, because pay rates are constrained by the arithmetic of billing. We always encourage people to think long term and to put themselves in a position where they can grow their careers. The money will follow. Work-life balance is underrated. There are firms that really encourage it, and there are firms that let you know that, if you want to get ahead, you'll need to put in more hours than the other folks in the firm. I don't think that one approach is better than the other, but what doesn't work is when those expectations are not aligned with the expectations of the employee.

2 During the application process, what are the most effective ways to set yourself apart from other candidates? How important is the cover letter and how do you ensure that yours is effective?

You have to do your homework; nothing is worse than generic résumés and generic cover letters. You can set yourself apart by simply demonstrating that you know the firm: who they are, what they are, and what they do. You should also try to make personal contact whenever possible. I'm sure there are people who make a nuisance of themselves, but more often people don't make enough of an attempt to meet people personally. A cover letter is really critical. It is the best tool for demonstrating that you know the firm, and it's also an opportunity to talk about yourself and why you are a good match for the firm. You should keep it readable and concise and

Questions

**WISDOM AND GUIDANCE FOR
SUCCESSFUL CAREER BUILDING**

*An interview with Pat Havard, Aff.M.ASCE,
on job hunting* •••• By DAVID HILL

Pat Havard, Aff.M.ASCE, is the owner and manager of Principal Resource Group, an engineering recruiting firm based in Nevada City, California. Established in 1999, the firm specializes in the civil engineering and construction disciplines.



have a personal story that can be delivered in one paragraph.

3 What are the best ways to bolster your résumé outside of the workplace?

I would emphasize professional involvement. By attending meetings and volunteering, you can demonstrate that you care about the profession and that you are aware of the larger issues. Companies do want to see that people are well rounded and have outside interests, so it's good to also have a sentence about hobbies and personal interests. It's also really important that people participate in social media and that they keep it updated and current—but also that they keep it professional. You should be aware that a company is going to look at social media to learn more about you. Advanced or additional non-engineering degrees can also be helpful if they are relevant to your job. If a position involves developing strategies or organizational management, then a master's in business administration can be helpful.

4 What role does networking play in finding a job?

Networking is usually how one finds a job; it's huge. A lot of engineers are cautious about networking because it sounds like sales work, but there are a lot of different ways now to network and give yourself visibility. That could mean being involved in a LinkedIn group or attending ASCE meetings. I often suggest to entry-level engineers that they find creative ways to meet engineers and hiring authorities. If you are bolder and a bit more creative, you can contact engineers and ask for time to talk about the career and about the projects that an engineer might work on for a firm. Organizations want to hire people whom they feel comfortable with, and the way that they become comfortable is by having interactions with those people. If you are trying to win a position at a firm and you know somebody at the firm, then you should

inform that person so that he or she can contact the right person.

5 What resources can professional organizations provide to improve one's job prospects?

The real opportunity with professional organizations is to get people together, face-to-face. Meetings, conventions, and other events are places to meet people. There are also younger member forums and mentorship programs where younger engineers can be connected with established engineers who can help them obtain a foothold in the profession. Attending technical conferences, participating in research papers, and taking advantage of the organization for learning purposes can also definitely bolster one's résumé.

6 How should a candidate prepare for an interview?

The recruiting profession has been turned on its head over the last several years, but this is an area that hasn't changed much. The most important thing is to spend time doing research on the firm and on the people whom you are going to meet. We always ask candidates to write down questions to ask, even if they don't pull them out during the interview. The answers to these questions will give them what they need to know so that they can make a decision about whether the organization is a fit for them. And, of course, you should dress appropriately, be attentive, and make eye contact. I've had one client tell me that their decision is usually made in the first 20 seconds and that the rest of the interview is about either reinforcing or reconsidering that decision.

7 What talking points should a candidate employ during the interview? What questions should he or she ask the interviewer?

You should be ready to explain who you are and what your interests are in

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your career, and you should project an understanding of the company and be able to describe why you would be an asset. You should have two or three stories prepared to answer questions about how you reacted to certain situations, and your questions should be about what the firm does and what its vision and mission are. Also, you should always ask about the next step in the process and always say that you are interested in the opportunity. It often happens that candidates have a mental spreadsheet and a lot of distractions during the interview, and they just forget the simple social exercise of expressing their interest. The overall goal of the entire process should be a real understanding by everyone involved so that both the candidate and the organization make the best long-term decision. **CE**



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