

Job-Hunting Skills for System Administrators

Adam Moskowitz

<adamm@menlo.com>

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Latest version of these slides

- Conference web site
 - (URL *tbd*)
- My web site
 - <http://menlo.com/picc-2010/>

A Note to The Reader

What you see before you is a combination of the slides I'll be showing during my talk interspersed with my speaking notes. This PowerPoint file isn't intended to be complete, but it's at least more than you'll see on the screen while I'm talking.

I Promise:

**No “Death by
PowerPoint”**

Purpose:

Help you improve
your chances of
getting a (new) job

Agenda

- Finding leads
- Your resume
- Getting an interview
- Interviewing
- Offers and negotiating
- Leaving your current job

- Six topics
- About five minutes per topic
- Time for questions

Note

- No hard-and-fast rules
 - Things change based on company, position, seniority, etc.
- Adapt and modify for each situation
 - Use common sense

- Finding leads ...

Recruiters
or
Networking?

Goal #1

Get past HR

Goal #2

Get to the
hiring manager

Recruiters
or
Networking?

- Recruiters usually work with managers
 - But business is down these days (cost)
 - All the usual problems with recruiters
- Personal network, if large enough, is often better
- Use both, but carefully

- Specifically, make sure you and recruiter don't send your resume to the same place
- I require the recruiter to ask me before sending my resume **every** time he wants to send it
 - But I have a big network

Resume Format

Word?

PDF?

HTML?

Text?

- Recruiters usually want Word
 - Can be talked into taking HTML
- No PDF, since they need to be able to modify
- Text tends to lose formatting

- Web job portals should accept all four
 - But some don't like PDF
 - Recent ones grok HTML (with tables) just fine

- HR probably prefers Word
 - Regardless of what hiring manager wants
 - Will usually accept other forms

- Hiring managers probably don't care
 - As long as it's easily read/printed
- PDF gives you the most control
 - Without forcing you to use software you may not have
 - Or may not like

- I use HTML
 - But the more senior you are, the more leeway you tend to get
 - And I almost always go right to the hiring manager
- I send PDF if they balk at HTML
- Don't ask how I deal with recruiters

Resume Layout

menlo.com/resume1.html

menlo.com/resume2.html

- “Standard” form for less experience or few jobs
- Consider alternate form for lots of jobs

Resume Contents

- “Buzzwords”
 - Operating systems
 - Languages
 - Application software
 - Hardware?
- Experience
- Education/Training
- Extras
 - Publications
 - Conferences
 - Committees
 - Presentations
 - Memberships?

- Make buzzwords really plain and obvious
 - Don't get bogged down in version numbers
- List in order of relevance for each job
 - Assuming you customize your resume each time

Cover Letter?

- I say “don’t bother”
- If anything, tailor your resume for each new position
 - Highlight most relevant experience, skills

Getting an Interview or A Phone Screening

- “Magic happens here”
- Only one tip:
 - Make yourself available as much as possible
- “Old wisdom” was not to appear too eager
 - In this market, that’s a sham

Before the Interview

- Know who to ask for
- Make damned sure you know how to get there
- Make damned sure you get there on time
 - Go early, take a book, hang out in your car or a nearby coffee shop
 - But set an alarm, just in case!
- Go to the bathroom

- Take copies of your resume
- Take a pen and paper or a notebook

When You Get There

- Be prepared to fill out an application
- You can write “to be provided” for SSN, references
- You can cross out permission for background and/or credit check
 - But not resume fact check
 - And not salary

- **BUT ...**
- Doing this runs some risk of being labeled “a problem employee”
- Politely explain you’re concerned about security/privacy, and will supply if the company wants to make you an offer

- They may say “no info, no offer”
- You may have to chose on the spot
 - Probably depends how much you want the job
- Most won't do background or credit unless making an offer

- NDA?
- *“Cult of the NDA”*
- Usually no reason for it
 - Or very limited one (one paragraph)
- I ask if we can do interview without it
 - But always sign if they say “no”

- References: It's OK to say "I need to check with them; I'll send them to you today/tomorrow"
- I **always** ask my references before **each** "use"
 - That's extra formal
- No reason not to provide when asked
 - Provided your references have said "yes"

During the Interview

Two-way Process!

- They learn from you
- **AND**
- You learn from them:
 - Is this the right job for you?
 - Do you want to work with these people?
 - Will this company stay in business?

During the Interview

- Be polite
- Stand up to shake hands at beginning and end
 - Cultural norms permitting
- OK to ask person how to spell name and their title/function

“I don't know”

- Don't guess
- Say "I don't know"
- Give a reason:
 - "Never used that"
 - "Just learning that"
 - "Used to know, but forgot"
- "Do you want me to guess?"

- “I’m not sure; I *think* the answer is ...”
- If interviewer challenges your answer:
 - “I think I’m right, but maybe not”
- Applies to all questions/answers
 - Even if you think you’re right

- Off-limits questions
 - Religion, politics, marital status, medical history, etc.
- “I’m sorry, but I’m not comfortable discussing that”
- Don’t bother mentioning to HR unless interviewer pushes it or asks many off-limits questions

“In SUSE 10.7,
the command `cpp`,
what does the `-P` flag do?”

- Bad question
 - But you still have to answer it
- Safest if probably “I don’t know, but I know about the `man` command and I know how to read man pages”
- Or, “I’ve used and understand `cpp` but not that particular option”

- It's a stupid question
 - But you don't want to say that
- If it's only one such question, see above answers and move on
- If it looks like all the questions are going to be like that, you may want to say "I don't memorize every option to every command; could we please concentrate on the basics of the command themselves and not just the options?"

At the End

- With each interviewer, stand up, shake hands, thank them for taking the time to talk with you
- If you enjoyed talking to him/her, say that, too

- Assuming last interview is with manager or HR, ask what the next steps are
- Ask when you can expect to hear something
- Ask who to contact if no response

- If asked for references, either provide them or say “I need to confirm permission, may I send them to you later today/tomorrow?”

- If they are covering your travel costs, make sure you have the right forms, know what receipts they require, etc.

After the Interview

- Send a thank-you note
 - Even if you don't want the job
- Send to everyone
 - If you have email addresses
 - Or to manager or HR and ask them to thank people for you

- If you don't want the job, say so
- If you do want the job, be a little coy about it:
 - "I look forward to hearing from you again"
 - "I look forward to meeting you/the team again"
 - Etc.

Offers & Negotiations

- Everything is negotiable
 - Vacation time, working hours, parking, conferences, etc.
- You may not get what you ask for
 - But it rarely hurts to ask
 - If ever
 - You may have to trade for it
 - Salary being the most common

- I always ask for:
 - Extra vacation time
 - Paid, else unpaid
 - At least one conference
 - No work Wednesday morning
 - Work late that day
 - Or work one extra hour the other days
- I always get at least some of those
 - And usually all of them
- Obviously, seniority helps

Leaving Your Current Job

- No matter how much you hate it, **BE POLITE!**
 - You never know when you'll work with those people again
 - Or who they know that you'll work with in the future
 - Besides, it may feel good (to be nasty), but it doesn't accomplish anything

- **DO IT IN WRITING!**
- At least two weeks notice
 - Three or four, depending on the situation
- Or, "... can we please meet to discuss the date of my departure?"

- Be neutral, and give few details
 - “I have decided to resign from my position”
 - (Departure date)
 - “I suggest we meet to discuss how best to wrap up my projects or transfer them to my colleagues”

- **Talk to manager before announcing to the group/company**
 - Just in case s/he talks you into staying
 - And so you can agree on a date
 - Some places will want you to leave ASAP

- Unless you and your colleagues truly can't stand each other, make it a point to say good-bye **in person** to everyone in your group and to people in other groups with whom you have worked closely
- Again, you never know what will happen in the future

That's All, Folks

After Today ...

- If you have more questions:
 - *<adamm@menlo.com>*
- Final version of these slides:
 - <http://menlo.com/picc-2010/>
- Thank you!