mechanical engineering

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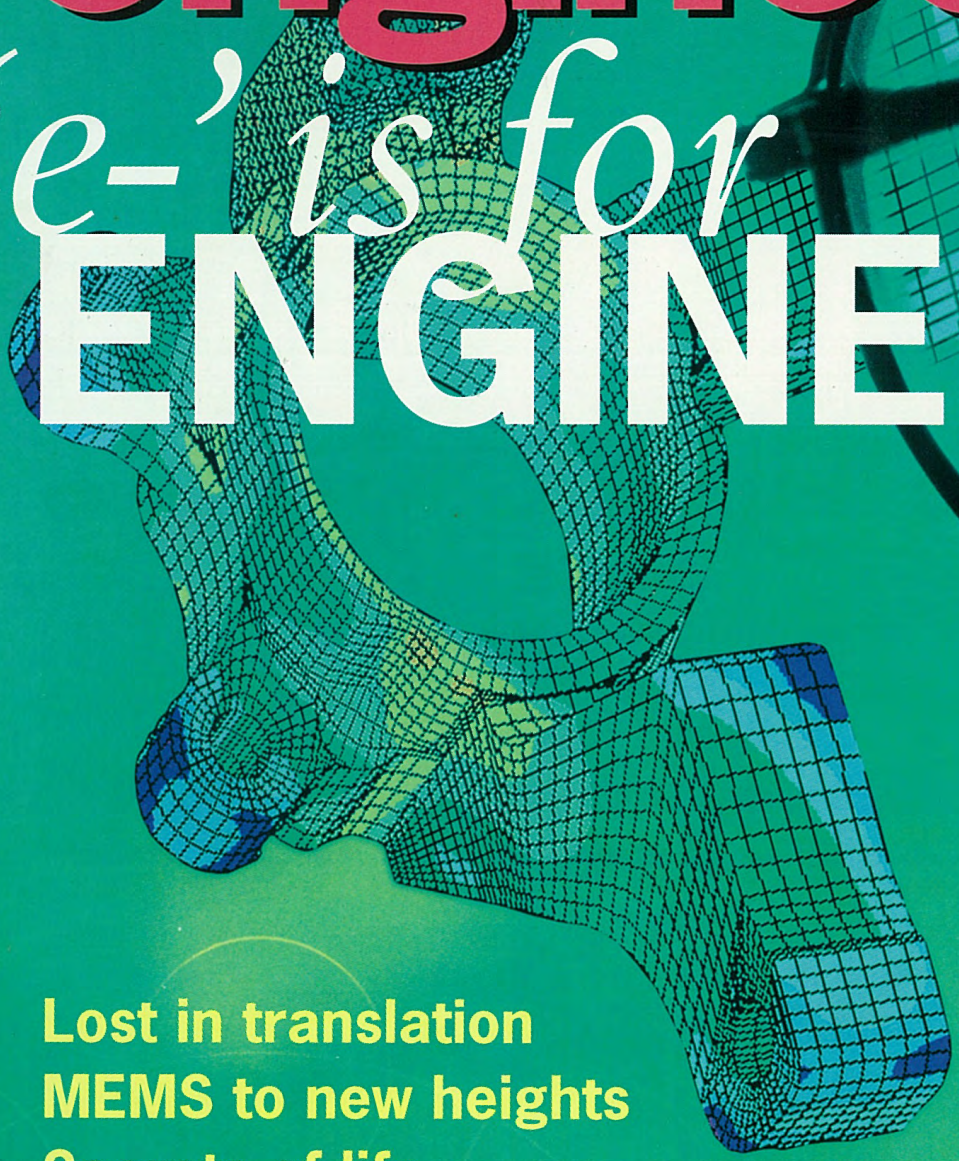
'e-' is for ENGINEER



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OURSELVES—OR SOME OF US—AS OTHERS SEE US

After 19 years of owning an agency that mainly puts engineers into jobs, a recruiter learns that most people have the basic common sense to know the do's and don'ts of interviewing: Be yourself, be humble, be honest about what you do and don't know, do ask questions about school systems and local athletic associations (indicating you would want to set down roots), and of course, maintain good eye contact.

In 19 years, a recruiter also learns that some people do and say bizarre things when they try to make a good impression. A vast lore of the unexplainable has grown up among headhunters and human resources directors.

For instance, a candidate, who applied for a position and got it, said the job was everything he was looking for. The money was more than he asked for, the work was just what he wanted to do, and the company was ideal. But because he read that one should never take the first offer that comes along, he would have to decline.

Candidates have been known to spend companies' money on flights for interviews, with no intention of taking the position.

Asked if he will relocate to take a job, a candidate answers no. Then why did he pursue the job in the first place? "I would like to see what's out there." Right.

Usually the company pays travel expenses up front to make it simpler for the candidate, but of late I have recommended in certain situations that companies require the prospective employee to put the flight on his or her credit card, just to show a little commitment. No matter what ensues, the interviewee would be reimbursed immediately, but there is just too much abuse of free two-day jaunts nowadays.

On the other side of the fence, a company that interviews a candidate and waits more than two weeks to make a decision is essentially saying good-bye. It is often difficult for a company to bring in all of its candidates in a short time, but in this job market companies must act quickly and assertively, if possible within 48 hours of the interview. If the company waits, the candidate can be exposed to new opportunities. In addition, the candidate's enthusiasm after the interview will fade to some extent.

Companies that can't come close to meeting someone's salary demands sometimes read the candidate a laundry list of his shortcomings to justify a lower salary. Bad idea.

Another bad idea is intentionally lowballing on the first offer knowing well it will not be acceptable. The only thing this does is to create a confrontational negotiation from the get-go.

> People do some strange things when they're trying to make a good impression.

Money can do strange things. A company's choice for a job asked for more money first. When the company said yes, he turned down the job after all. He said he feared the higher salary would create too high an expectation of his performance.

Then there is this story of an interview: "A telephone call came in from his wife on his cell phone. His side of the conversation went like this: 'Which company? When do I start? What's the salary?' I said, 'I assume you're not interested in conducting this interview any further.' He promptly responded, 'I am as long as you'll pay me more.' "

People can do some strange things, even when they're trying to impress a prospective employer. For everything you read here, there is someone who swears that it's true.

One woman applying for a job announced she hadn't had lunch. During her interview, she proceeded to eat a hamburger and French fries and wipe the ketchup on her sleeve.

One prospective employee promised that, if he were hired, he would demonstrate his loyalty by having the corporate logo tattooed on his forearm.

One candidate cleaned his ears with his car keys during his interview.

Another wore a Walkman. According to the interviewer, "She said she could listen to me and the music at the same time."

Two managers interviewed another engineer, who made good eye contact with them, but also kept making eye contact with someone to their right who wasn't there.

A balding candidate abruptly excused himself in the middle of an interview, to return to the office a few minutes later, wearing a hairpiece.

One job candidate asked to see the interviewer's résumé to see if the executive was qualified to judge his abilities.

Another interrupted to phone his wife for advice on answering specific interview questions.

During one exchange, a man's wristwatch alarm went off. He apologized, saying he had another interview.

A fellow responded to a question by putting on a Boston accent and replied loudly, "Ask not what your company can do for you, but what you can do for your company." About 10 seconds of silence ensued.

A district sales manager showed up for an interview with a sports jacket over a "Van Halen World Tour" T-shirt.

A designer had such bad body odor that three interviewers cut the proceedings short.

It takes all types, and remember, these reports come mostly from the hiring side. God knows the stories candidates could tell.

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