

Laura Vogt:

Hello. Thank you for tuning in to The Not So Secret Guide to Being a Berkeley Engineer. I'm your host, Laura Vogt, the associate director for marketing and communications in the College of Engineering, and I'm really excited this week we have Marvin Lopez back again to talk about career readiness. So hi, Marvin, thanks for joining us again today. So let's have you do a reintroduction of yourself and your role in ESS.

Marvin Lopez:

Absolutely. Thanks Laura for having me again. I like that I'm becoming a fixture around here, so thanks for the time. So yes, once again, I'm Marvin Lopez and I'm director of student programs in the College of Engineering, Engineering Student Services. And in my role, as I mentioned two weeks ago, I am in charge of the co-curricular support and the programs that we provide students outside of the classroom. So professional, academic, leadership, wellness programs. And so a little bit about me in case you forgot from two weeks ago, I'm in charge of the program that I came to campus seven and a half years ago to take on this role. I came from industry, so I was acting engineer for many, many years ago. I have computer science engineering background. So in that role and in my corporate roles, I was an engineer and I actually coded for a while, but ultimately realized that what I really appreciate is people and developing and coaching talent, and particularly university talent.

So I moved into recruiting and diversity programs. In my last roles before I came to campus, I was in charge of the university recruiting programs at a couple of companies in the valley where I was in charge of all the hiring of interns, co-ops, and new grads around the world. So besides hiring a number of students myself personally, I ran these programs where I did lots of hiring and lots of coaching for students to hire, including many Berkeley students over time.

So relative to today, I've been there, done that, I've been around the block quite a bit in terms of what it takes to land these amazing jobs the students are after. So delighted to be here and share some of those insights with you.

Laura Vogt:

Thank you. And thank you so much for being here again today. So let's start-

Marvin Lopez:

Of course.

Laura Vogt:

... off with the definition of, "What does career readiness mean?"

Marvin Lopez:

So career readiness to me is really three parts, and as I tell students, it's sort of three concentric circles that work together. At the center of that concentric circle, the first part of career readiness is understanding your mission, understanding, "Why is it that you're an engineer?" For our engineers out there, what is your purpose as an engineer? What difference do you want to make as an engineer? Whose problems do you want to solve as an engineer?

Education and engineering education is a tool. The knowledge that we're all gaining, that you all gain is a tool. So the first question is, what are you going to do with this tool? There's lots of problems out there you can solve as an engineer, which ones speak to you? And that's important, because companies want to know that what you care about is what they care about. They're not hiring an expert as a college grad, somebody who has 10 years of experience in this one thing. They're hiring somebody who has aptitude and passion for something. And so they want to know that the passion that you have is the same passion that they have.

Every company has a mission and has a purpose. They want to know that what they care about is what you care about. The number one question is, "Why are you an engineer?" The workshops that I do and the conversation I have with students is all about, "What do you want to do as an engineer? Where do you want to apply this knowledge?"

Number two, the next circle out that I believe is part of career readiness is then, "What do you want to do? Where do you want to do this? What jobs?" So there's lots of jobs out there, lots of titles, lots of companies.

So having a sense of where are these jobs where you can apply the skills and the knowledge that you've gained as an engineer. And doing the research through LinkedIn, through Glassdoor, through our career center, through Handshake, understanding all the kinds of roles and jobs that are out there with the understanding that the job you'll do out of college and as an intern will change. And so what you do today will be completely different than what you'd be doing five years from now. But having a sense of what kinds of roles, who's got those jobs, how do you get there is number two.

And then finally, number three is the mechanics of landing those jobs. And I think very often career readiness is seen as that. It's just the resume, the LinkedIn and there you go. And to me that's the last part of the step. The number three is the mechanics. So it's having the elevator pitch and the resume and the LinkedIn and your profiles and Handshake and all that, the mechanics of how you align in your job that are critical, but starts with the why. Why an engineer, what do you want to do with this education? So you put all three together and the magic happens.

Laura Vogt:

So how do we go about teaching this to the students to make it so that it's this more understandable idea than this tangible, whatever the word I'm looking for is.

Marvin Lopez:

Right, right, right. So funny enough, we have workshops on that. So I partner with the career center, where we spend time having conversations on, for example, the elevator pitch.

The elevator pitch is the sum total of you, is the sum total of who are you, tell me about yourself kind of question. And it's really the 30-second sum total of you as a candidate, as a person, as an engineer. And so we have workshops on that and we have conversations in the workshops through the resume and LinkedIn that start with that question. So if you notice, the first thing in our resume is often the objective. It's the sum total of, "Why are you an engineer?"

If you go to LinkedIn and there's the About section of LinkedIn, it's basically the elevator pitch that talks about, "Why are you here as an engineer?"

So through the workshop and the conversations we have, we encourage students to think about that, before they think about the mechanics, to think about why they want to be engineers. And I have to say, the career center does a great job of putting things on, like networking events and meet and greets with engineers, to help guide them through that conversation of what is driving them to be an engineer? What do we want to do with this education beyond just having a job? So there's lots of resources for that that we in the Engineering Student Services program and the career center provide to help them through that conversation.

Laura Vogt:

And how can students find out about those workshops that you have?

Marvin Lopez:

The newsletter. So if you haven't heard from me already, if it's not in the newsletter, it does not exist. So please read the newsletter. Everything we offer, we put in the newsletter. A lot of the career readiness conversations, we partner with the career center, so they put it in their newsletters and their marketing channels. But above all, the ESS newsletter is the place to be, in addition to our website, engineering.berkeley.edu/ess that has all the information and all the workshops that we offer.

Laura Vogt:

So what type of goals-

Marvin Lopez:

In addition to-

Laura Vogt:

Sorry.

Marvin Lopez:

In addition to coming see us, if you have a question, come see us. We're more than happy to talk to you.

Laura Vogt:

And what kind of goals should students set when it comes to being career ready?

Marvin Lopez:

I think the first goal they should have, and early on in their careers, is to start thinking about what is it that excites them as engineers, what kind things do they want to solve, and where can they explore those questions too? Because obviously as a freshman, you may not know what kind of challenges they are. As I think you know, the NAE, the National Academy of Engineering, has the Grand Challenges, right? And that's a program that's actually a little bit on hiatus at the moment. But the idea of these Grand Challenges that the NAE has defined for engineering... Students should take a look at, "What are those 14 Grand Challenges that engineers are supposed to solve?" Things like cyber security and delivering drugs and climate

change. So what are those challenges that students want to face? What things excite them to solve?

So first, have a sense for that. And I would encourage students to talk to their friends and ask what do they see them excited about? Talk to their families, come see us, go see your university's advisor that knows you and has a sense of what excites you, the career center. So goal number one is have a sense of what is it that you want to do. Number two is then figure out where are those jobs? What kind of work, could I find an internship, a co-op, or even research to explore those fields, explore those jobs, to one, either gain exposure, so apply the skills you've developed, but also gain new skills, gain visibility, but especially explore the field that you're in, because just as important as it is to apply those skills and get exposure to field is understanding if that field is really for you.

Sometimes it may not be for you, you think that's what you want to do and maybe you don't. And in the end, you do it and it's not for you. And I've known many students who have come through that process, and that's okay. Knowing what you don't want to do is almost as critical, if not more important, than knowing what you do want to do. So again, number one is the why, understanding why you want to do this. Then number two is finding, "Where are those opportunities?" Putting yourself out there in all these places, the Handshake and LinkedIn. And then number three is have all your preparation ready. So your resume, your elevator pitch, your LinkedIn, your profile in Handshake, knowing when the career fairs are happening, make sure you sign up for those, all of that in that order. I think it's critical that you have that in that order so that you have a good experience for the career journey.

Laura Vogt:

So what resources are in place for students to get feedback on all this prep work that they're doing?

Marvin Lopez:

So the career center has great resources in terms of you can meet with a career counselor and have these conversations around your purpose and in particular the mechanics of your resume and all that. And we partner with them on workshops. In fact, at the end of September, on September 28th and October 5th, we're having a quadruple set of workshops where we're going to cover resumes, LinkedIn, interviewing and job offer negotiation all in two sessions. And you can bring your questions and we can provide you feedback on your resume, on your LinkedIn profile, so that in the moment, you know if you're heading in the right direction, so we can have that. You can come see us, you can see me and have a conversation with me about it. So lots of resources that you can have to have that conversation around feedback, not just in the mechanics of recruiting, but your purpose, your sense of purpose, and where are you going with your education.

Laura Vogt:

Can you tell me more about the mentorship opportunities that students have?

Marvin Lopez:

Yes. So mentorship is broad, it's not just for careers, but the Berkeley Mentorship Cohort is a program that we run in the Engineering Student Services program that provides mentorship, peer-to-peer mentorship for students. And so this is a program that you can apply into the program as either a mentee or a mentor, and we'll assign you a mentor that will then guide you through a number of questions, including professional development. So it's likely that these students have already gone through internships, they've had professional experience. And so they'll guide you through and share their insights into how they landed the things they've landed and how they got to do the things they've landed both professionally but also academically. They'll guide you through what classes to take or not to take and which classes to take combined with other classes and how to navigate virtually as a whole, academically, professionally, personally. So great opportunity for engaging with a mentor. So I highly, highly encourage you to apply through our website, the BMC webpage, and the deadline is the end of August. So we encourage you to please sign up as quickly as possible.

Laura Vogt:

And I feel like one of the big things about being career ready is to know how to be resilient with those non-job offers.

Marvin Lopez:

Absolutely. So thank you for that. So yes, through the process of recruiting, you will get rejected, guaranteed. And the story comes to mind that, I think I mentioned it last time in our previous podcast, a student that shared with us in one of our workshops how he received 41 rejections and he really wanted to be at this one company. And so in trying to get there, he received 41 rejections in various places. And after every rejection, he just took the rejection, posted it, kept it on his Jamboard and went on to the next one until he finally landed the one he wanted. And I think that is the epitome of resilience when it comes to recruiting, is accepting that the recruiting process is a bit of a black hole. Who applies, who comes out and is selected or not selected, there's almost no rhyme or reason, right?

I haven't been there myself many years in the recruiting world. Who gets selected often has no rhyme or reason. There's all kinds of reasons why people get selected and not selected. And it's hardly ever personal. It's not that you personally get rejected. It's not you, Laura, that we don't want. It's your candidacy, or we chose somebody else for some other reason. And so accepting that is critical, understanding that you get rejected from one place and you move on to the next one and the next one.

And as long as you put yourself out there, as long as you have a sense of purpose, as long as you have a network that'll recommend you and refer you, things do work out. But it's hard. It is hard. It is difficult to read that email that says, "No, sorry, but we chose somebody else." Or, "Sorry, you're not qualified." You just have to accept that that is part of the process and just keep going, keep going, keep going, and things do work out. I'm a big believer that things work out for a reason and they always do work out. But it's a journey. It's a journey that may not always be... It's definitely not linear and not always smooth, but that's okay.

Laura Vogt:

How do you think students can advocate for themselves as they go through this process?

Marvin Lopez:

So I think the main thing that students can do is, above all... So I'm a big believer that success in the career world happens when two things meet. I'm a big believer that when preparation and opportunity meet, the magic happens. So what does preparation look like? It is having all the things that I talked about it is having a sense of where you're going. What do you want to do with your education? Knowing, having your elevator pitch ready, your LinkedIn, your resume, knowing how to network, knowing how to do a job offer negotiation, having your professionalism, how you present yourself, how you speak to people and all that. Having all that ready and being good at all those things is part of the preparation. But the other is the opportunity.

Something that I always find interesting that students come to me and say, "Oh, I need a job. Where do I find a job?" There is no The Place for a job. Yes, there's Handshake and there's other... But there's no The Place. It's all of these things, right? It's putting yourself out there at the career fairs it is Handshake and LinkedIn and going to the conferences and going to the tech talks from companies visiting here. It's engaging with student organizations when they come to campus and they bring companies and recruiters and other representatives. It's when companies are... I recall some years ago, GM brought their cars to showcase, being involved in that. So it's putting yourself in all these places, and especially in front of human beings. I think we become a little too dependent on just, "Apply, apply, apply remotely, and the magic happens." No, the magic does not happen. It can happen, but it's about putting yourself in front of people and having the courage to put yourself in front of people with your sense of purpose clearly stated, why there's alignment to this company.

And through that, you advocate for yourself in the things you want to do. And why you're an amazing candidate for this position over others, and I think when you do that, when you put yourself out there, the magic happens. Now, a lot of people think, "Oh, well that's great for extroverts. What about... I'm an introvert, I'm an engineer, I'm an introvert. That doesn't work." No. All these things that I just mentioned, putting yourself out there, doing all these things and having all this preparation, those are skills. People are not magically born with this knowledge, and introverts are not bad at it, inherently bad. And extroverts are not inherently better at it. It is simply a skill. I have known great extroverts who are terrible at engaging with people, because they don't know what to say or say the right thing. And I've known introverts who are really good at this, because they practice, they practice the elevator pitch, they practice their delivery, they practice how they engage with people, they practice and they find out where to go, what events to be at, and they land amazing opportunities.

Something I want to dispel is that myth that, "This is for extroverts, and introverts are not good at it." It's neither. It's purely a skill. And how you apply those skills in the process of landing is the great things you want to land. And above all, putting yourself out there with confidence, with courage.

And another thing I want to also mention is not comparing yourself to others. It is, "Yes, other students will have, three, five, whatever, internships before, and they've done all kinds of things." That's nice. Let them live their story. You live your story in the things you bring, the passion you bring, the alignment that you bring to a company and put it out there and let it go where it should go. And if you do that, you put yourself out there with courage, with confidence.

You align the things you want to do. So it sounds straightforward because it is, but of course it's not easy. So it takes practice, it takes courage. And we have the resources and the workshops and the events, between us and the career center, to do that well, and I've seen students do it really well.

Laura Vogt:

Is there anything else that you want to add to our conversation today?

Marvin Lopez:

Let's see... I think above all, Laura, that I think the message I want to leave students with, in terms of career readiness, is to put yourself out there, have the courage, have the confidence to really look at yourself and think about, "What can I bring to an organization? What are the skills that I bring?" Technically, all the things you've learned here in your classes and in your project. And, "What are the non-technical skills that I've gained through my club and through projects and through coming to ESS and all the things that I've done? And the sum total of that, plus the things I care about. What do I care about as an engineer?" And if you bring... you pitch it, and the things that you overcome to be here and to get here, and if you share that with companies, you share it with the recruiters and with the company reps and faculty, if you wanted to research, things happen.

And it's all about putting yourself out there and being comfortable doing that. So I encourage you to be mindful of that. Come to the workshops that we have, come to the sessions, the activities that we have where we teach you how to do that. And we guide you in the process of putting yourself out there. And if you do, the magic happens.

Laura Vogt:

Well, thank you so much for being here again today. There's just so many opportunities for students as they embark on their time here at Berkeley, and being ready for the next step of their career is just right at the top of what I think a lot of people are thinking about. So thank you so much for your tips and your experience and your resources.

Marvin Lopez:

My pleasure. And come see us. I'm more than happy to chat with anybody. So my email's on the website and the newsletter. So happy to chat with any of you anytime. So thanks again for the opportunity and good luck to you all.

Laura Vogt:

And thank you everyone for tuning in to The Not So Secret Guide to Being a Berkeley Engineer.