

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR A CNC

The time will come, for every JD Edwards shop, when you will need to hire a replacement CNC. You may be searching for an in-house resource, or maybe you're looking an outsourced CNC to support you. Either way, what is the professional experience that you should look for? What kind of personality traits? Most importantly, what kind of technical questions should you ask to determine if they are qualified? In this article, we'll explore those burning questions.

Let's start with their professional background. From the candidate's resume, you should look for these aspects of their work experience. **At least two to three years of CNC administration.** It takes quite a bit of training and on the job experience to master the fine art of CNC. A candidate with prior **Infrastructure/Networking/Server support** is highly desirable. Much of the day to day troubleshooting of the CNC job requires an admin to discern whether an issue is cropping up because of the application, a malfunctioning server, a database issue or a LAN/WAN issue. That experience can't be taught, it is strictly on the job experience. In some smaller shops, the CNC is also the **database administrator**, if so, experience on your database platform is helpful. As a bonus, if the candidate has some prior **JD Edwards programming experience**, that could be useful. But programming is not an essential CNC skill.

In the interview and reference checking process, you should be looking for certain required skills and personality traits. Key to the CNC role is **troubleshooting ability**. A JD Edwards system is highly complex, with tons of moving parts. A CNC needs to know how each of the pieces work, how to stop and start the pieces, and how to fix the system quickly when it breaks. A CNC job is much like a small town firefighter, 99 percent quiet and routine, 1 percent adrenaline-filled stress. A CNC needs to be very **customer service oriented**. As CNCs we deal with knowledgeable and inexperienced end-users, programmers, senior managers and other IT staff. The job does not exist in a vacuum, so the CNC needs to address and support all of those people's needs. Along that line, the CNC needs to be both **self-directed and team oriented**. The CNC profession is highly technical and specialized, so there generally are very few, if any, other CNCs to bounce ideas off of. The CNC needs to know how to juggle multiple projects, constantly adjusting priorities. They also need to work well with the other IT professionals in their team. Beware of a "cowboy" CNC. If the candidate's attitude is "my way or the highway", show them the highway. Lastly, you need to look for a **strong work ethic**. CNC work is definitely not a nine to five job. The system is running 24 hours a day. The CNC needs to keep a cell phone handy and be available to think on their feet when the phone jars them out of bed at 3:00 a.m. Some routine aspects of the job, like package deploys and computer maintenance, require working outside of normal business hours. An experienced CNC knows all that going in.

Now let's turn our focus to the interview process. Following will be an assortment of interview questions, brief answers (denoted as A) and the skill set that the question is testing (denoted as S). The most important aspect of these questions is to look for pose and confidence. If a candidate stumbles on these questions, then you'll know that they stretched their resume.

1. ON ENVIRONMENTS – WHAT IS AN ENVIRONMENT? WHAT IS A PATHCODE? WHY WOULD YOU NEED MULTIPLE ENVIRONMENTS IN A PATHCODE?

A) An environment is the combination of business data and application code. A pathcode is a set of related environments. In the development life cycle of JD Edwards, application code advances from the Development (DV) pathcode, to the testing or prototyping (PY) pathcode, on its way to the production (PD) pathcode. A company may have several related environments in a single pathcode to allow for multiple projects. My company has six active PY environments. They all share the same application code, but have different sets of business data. Having that many PY environments allows us to run multiple projects simultaneously. The changes that one project makes in the business data does not impact the other PY environments.

S) The skill set that we are looking for here is basic CNC knowledge. Environments and pathcodes are taught in the very first CNC class.

2. ON SECURITY – WHAT IS A ROLE? WHAT IS A GROUP? WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN AN OPEN SECURITY MODEL AND A CLOSED MODEL?

A) In ERP 8 and below, groups of users were called security groups. All members of a group have the same access to JD Edwards. In 8.9 and higher, the terminology changed to the word Role. It means the same thing. Here is a great trick question, in XE, if you used Solution Explorer, you needed to create BOTH security groups AND Roles to assign Solution Explorer menus.

An open security model is essentially no security. It relies on custom menus to lock users out of applications. A closed security model locks down all of the applications and reports and has customized menus. If your organization has an "open security" model, look for the CNC to recommend locking that down.

S) All CNCs will have some knowledge about security groups (roles) and why they are important. An experienced CNC knows that an open security model is defiantly NOT the way to run JD Edwards. If you have a separate security person, then the CNC will not need to be an expert in this topic, but they need to demonstrate knowledge of the basics.

3. WHAT IS AN ESU, AN ASU AND A SERVICE PACK (TOOLS RELEASE)? BRIEFLY DESCRIBE THE PROCEDURE TO APPLY ONE.

A) An ESU is a bug fix from Oracle. An ASU is new, enhanced, code. A service pack, or tools release (depending on your version) is an update to the foundation code supporting the application. You deploy these enhancements from the deployment server using the tools provided by Oracle.

S) Again, this is a core skill required for the job. This isn't day to day work, but is an essential skill. The answer might not be smooth here, since these types of changes are infrequent, but you are looking for familiarity and confidence.

4. ON CONFIGURATION – WHAT IS AN OCM? WHAT IS A SERVER MAP? WHAT IS A SYSTEM MAP? HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT?

A) OCM is the acronym for Object Configuration Mapping. That is the process where a CNC admin tweaks the system to match the needs of the customer. We turn objects on and off, control where and how an object runs, and what environments a configuration is available in. For example, for the PY7333 environment, we can designate that all print jobs run on Server A. For the PD7333 environment, all print jobs run on Server B. This keeps test jobs separate from production jobs and optimizes performance.

A system map is a table that controls how the users interact with the system. A server map is a table that controls how the enterprise servers interact with the system. You use the OCM process to configure the server and system maps. OCM is probably one of the hardest concepts for a new CNC to wrap their head around. The candidate needs to demonstrate a thorough understanding of this.

S) A CNC candidate needs to demonstrate very strong knowledge in this area. This is the area that helps set JD Edwards apart from other ERP applications. An end-user would have no knowledge of this area, a former developer some knowledge. An IT person who has not supported JD Edwards would be totally stumped. This set of questions will truly separate the wheat from the chaff. If a candidate stumbles on this topic, show them the door.

This is far from a comprehensive list, but should serve as a good set of screening questions to separate the "wannabes" from the "been there, done that" crowd. These questions are good starting point to hiring a CNC to do the day to day support for your system. If you need a senior CNC to set up your system, or for a major upgrade, then the list of questions will be even longer. I would highly recommend using a practicing CNC as one of your screeners for that process.

About the Author

Gregg Larkin is the North American CNC for a Fortune 500 industrial gas manufacturer. He manages a complex set of servers including clustered enterprise, logic, web, terminal, scheduler, and Webmethod servers serving over 3000 users in five countries. Gregg has over twenty-two years of IT experience. In his spare time, he is pursuing an MBA in International Management at Niagara University. Gregg holds a professional membership in Quest and has presented CNC topics at the last three Collaborate conferences.