

HOW TO INTERVIEW

Interviews are usually dialogues of questions and answers - you should expect some of the basic questions as certainty. Of course, you can't anticipate everything so be prepared for the "off the wall" stuff as well. The best way to deal with the surprise question is to remember to maintain your cool: smile, ponder, say "that's interesting" or "that's a good question," or ask for clarification to buy a little time. Of course, sooner or later you will have to answer to the question. Often, the strange questions are asked just to see if you can handle yourself well under pressure so stay calm and keep your sense of humor!

A Few Questions to Expect and How to Answer them:

What exactly do you want from us? Describe your ideal job.

If you are interviewing for a Restaurant Managers position, but you tell the interviewer that your dream job is to be creative writer, you're in trouble!

If you give a safe, generic, standard answer you may waste an opportunity to sell yourself into the job. Outline an answer that will coincide with the job as defined and include a few bullets about your strengths and how they apply to the job. Think about this before the interview. Also, give a major statement linking you to the job requirements such as: "I enjoy solving problems and developing fast customer solutions in a hectic environment" or "I like to be part of a team and to make my contribution one that helps achieve the objectives."

Why did you leave your last job? Why do you want to leave your current job?

Most interviewers have a silent understanding that there are some things, or a lot of things, you don't like about your present situation. Generally, when someone starts looking for another job it is often because the person has "had enough" with the current position. The key idea here is silence! No one wants to hear you tell them how bad it is or how so-in-so is a jerk. Negatives about the company are one thing and negatives about people are another so be careful. Do not talk about personalities because it will cause the interviewer to question your people skills and ability to get along with others. Personalities are taboo!! Negatives about the company are OK if they are very obvious, e.g, "My company has been acquired four times in the last three years, and the constant changes have become a hindrance to getting a job done."

All in all, you are better off minimizing the negatives and shortcomings about where you are and concentrating on the future, specifically the future that it seems the company you are interviewing with can provide. Talk about what you want to move to rather than what you want to move away from. "My company has been good to me, and I have learned a lot. Now I am ready to move into and on to...and your company offers that kind of opportunity."

Why are you switching careers?

The interviewer is looking for a logical and well thought out reason for the proposed change - an answer that shows maturity and thought - so don't say "I was just looking for a change" or "I just want something new." While these answers might be the most common responses to the question, neither shows much depth. Explain how you have thought this out and how the move will help you improve your ability to contribute and reach your longer term goals.

Interviewing Tips

Where do you want to be in 5 years from now?

You need an answer to this question and it should be consistent with the position and company you are talking to. Interviewers want to know that you are looking toward the future and that you have goals that are consistent with what they can provide. They don't want to hear that you have not thought about the future at all or that you want to "own your own business" or that you want to do something that they cannot provide. These answers indicate that you are a short term player, and no one wants to hire a person that may leave after a year or two. Make longer term goals part of your response but focus on the things you can do now and want to do now that are consistent with the job for which you are applying. The interviewer basically wants to know you are interested in the future, but you really want to do the work that is at hand now.

What is your greatest accomplishment?

Respond with results not responsibilities. Describe your accomplishments by starting with the big picture and relating how your efforts and expertise made it happen. Usually, interviewers are looking for things you did that exhibited good judgment, an understanding of the situation, your ability to overcome difficult situations, your use of creativity, and your determination and unwillingness to give up until reaching your goal. It is OK to list several things as your accomplishments - even to say that your greatest accomplishment is your family or involvement with the church. Be sure to follow up with something or a list of things in your business life as well, but it is OK to mention and put your family first.

What are your strengths?

Be ready to talk about at least three and have two "in reserve" if asked for more. Remember, you must be able to substantiate your strengths with meaningful benefits to the company. I can't tell you how many people will answer this question with "I learn fast and I like people" and leave it at that. In all my years of interviewing thousands of people, I have never met anyone who said they were slow learners and did not like people - everyone says they learn fast. How do you prove it? The point is if you use these trite examples of strengths you had better have some good stories to back them up. Otherwise, they will land on the interviewer as simple hot air, and you won't get interview points!

What are your weaknesses?

There are several approaches here, so you have to be the judge. Some people will counsel you to offer vague weaknesses that could be strengths, e.g., "I tend to be impatient" or "I work too hard." Both of these responses are vague and imply you are a person who gives a lot to the company. Although interviewers won't believe these things, they have heard these answers so often they will not be surprised and will be ready to move on. Interviewers don't actually expect you to tell them things which would disqualify you for the job. Your response shows how you deal with a little pressure and offers some insight into you as a person. Your objective here is to finish the question with a neutral or positive score without leaving anything to compensate for it. You might say "I tend to work on too many things at one time and sometimes this impairs my ability to complete tasks on times because there are so many things going on. I deal with this by really working hard to prioritize my work and being careful to delegate when I can do so effectively. "Only mention one or two weaknesses and solutions then move on. This is not the place to really sell yourself.

Interviewing Tips

What about a time you failed?

Your best answer here is to identify a failure and what you learned from it. You can then point out how the failure was really an opportunity to learn and thus keep you from failing at that again. If you give no answer at all, the interviewer knows you are not being truthful. Remember that having failed at things is not a bad thing; rather, it is often an indicator of how much you are learning by trying. Failure is the opportunity to begin again, and as the Gretzky says “you miss 100% of the shots you don’t take!”

Tell me about a boss you didn’t like?

The best answer is to say you never had a boss you really didn’t like, that basically you get along well with people, and have had the good fortune to work with real professionals. You may say that you had differences of opinion as well all do but never introduce personality into the discussion.

Questions about age, health, marital status, number of children.

These are not legal questions; however, if someone asks you one of these it is best to just answer the question. If you make an issue of it, the interviewer won’t want to hire you, and you would be starting off on the wrong foot. Usually, the only people you ask these questions are the ones who don’t know better, and it is best not to create an issue with them if you really want the job.

Other Interview Tips

It is often not what you say but how you say it. For example, if the interviewer asks, “How do you feel about wearing a beeper?” you could say “I hate beepers!” Alternatively, you could say “I really don’t like having a beeper, but I know they are needed and would not be opposed to having one if it is a requirement of doing the job properly.”

Treat the other people nicely. Many job offers have not been made because a secretary or receptionist reported that the applicant was abusive or rude. Conversely, many applicants have improved their chances for the jobs by getting a positive comment from someone not directly involved in the interview process.

Lunch!

Don’t order the cheapest or the most expensive thing on the menu. Don’t get a doggie bag!!! Don’t drink alcohol. Don’t smoke, chew gum, or eat fast. You are not there to eat; you are there to perform and interview so be more conscious of that than the food.

Keep a sense of humor!

Author Unknown