

MOST DIFFICULT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

When preparing for an interview, go through the following list of questions and write down appropriate responses. Don't memorize your answers; review them for content before you interview.

PERSONAL

- ◆ **Tell me about yourself.**
Respond by asking, “*What specific information or details would you like to know?*” Be careful with an interviewer who allows you to talk as long as you wish on this question. Limit your answer to 2 minutes, don't ramble and avoid discussing details. Your answer should relate to the job opening so discuss qualities, which show how you could benefit the employer.
- ◆ **If hired, how long would you stay with us?**
“*I am looking for a career opportunity; I would like a challenging position that would lead to additional responsibilities with the same company.*”
- ◆ **How soon are you ready to make a move?**
“*I am ready to accept an offer from your company immediately. However, I don't want to leave my current position abruptly without letting my supervisor and coworkers know the status of my work. I would like to give my current employer 2 weeks notice. However, I would be able to start learning your software and operating procedures in the evenings during that time.*”
- ◆ **What factors are involved in a move for you? Do you have a family or personal obligations that could keep you from moving?**
Do not give the interviewer a list of problems or potential problems? Stress the importance of your position to your family. Your spouse or significant other wants you to work in a position where you are happy.
- ◆ **Why are you leaving your present job? Why did you leave your most recent job?**
Stick to one response – don't change answers during the interview! “*Due to economic cut-backs...*” OR “*Reduction in the work force due to economic problems...*” OR “*To obtain a position that offered more opportunity and challenge*”. ***Do not*** cast any negative shadows over your employer or boss, ***no bridge burning parties*** or you might as well get up and leave now. You should have a legitimate reason that takes little conversation like health reasons or family issues.
- ◆ **How do you feel about leaving your benefits?**

“My main objective is to find a challenging and responsible position. Benefits are secondary.”

- ◆ **Describe your ideal working environment. If you had your choice of companies and jobs, where would you go? What qualities do you look for in a job?**

“My main objective is to find a challenging opportunity which will afford me the chance to make a meaningful contribution.” OR “I have enjoyed all of my previous positions and accept each new assignment as a challenge and an opportunity to continue to learn and develop.”

- ◆ **What do your co-workers think of you?**

“I have always worked well with both the employees in my department as well as the employees in other departments.”

- ◆ **Why haven't you found a new position by now?**

“As you know, the employment market has been affected by the economic downturn and I want to make sure the position I accept is the right one.”

- ◆ **Have you thought of leaving your current position before now? If so, what has kept you there until now?**

“I have been approached for a few opportunities. Although I have considered them, I have been pretty satisfied with my current employer and did not want to make a move unless I was sure I had found the right opportunity.”

- ◆ **Do you believe you might be happier in a different size company?**

If you received most of your experience at companies similar in size to the one with which you are interviewing, make a point of it in your response: *“As you can see from my background, I feel I can perform at my best in a _____-sized company. However, I am flexible and can adapt to different working environments.”* If you have experience in companies of varying sizes, emphasize your flexibility: *“As you can see from my background, I have been successful working in companies of various sizes.”*

- ◆ **Do you have any objections to psychological tests?**

NO!

- ◆ **What other types of jobs/companies are you considering?**

“I have several other possibilities under consideration and I am presently evaluating which one would offer me the most challenge and provide me the opportunity to contribute.”

- ◆ **Have you kept up-to-date in your field? If so, how?**

“I subscribe to publications and trade magazines.” Name 2 or 3 of the publications and magazines published in your field of expertise.

◆ **What was the last book you read/movie you saw/sporting event you attended?**

It is always positive to show an interest in reading – especially of professional/industry development materials. However, you may want to also include interests away from work so the interviewer will see you have a personality aside from your work interests. Movies and sporting events show the interviewer more about your personality and how you might fit in with other employees.

◆ **How would you describe your personality? Give me 3 adjectives that describe you.**

“I am friendly and like meeting and working with people.” OR “I am successful, fair but firm and expect to give anything I do 110%.” OR “I am friendly, hardworking, conscientious, truthful, organized and thorough.”

◆ **What are your goals? What are your short range (1 to 3 years) and long range (4 to 6 years) objectives?**

Talk about the job for which you are interviewing. *“My immediate goal is to obtain a position, which is challenging and will offer me the opportunity to continue to learn and advance to more responsible and challenging assignments.” OR “My immediate goal is to find the right position which will offer a challenge and afford the opportunity to reach my full potential.”*

◆ **What are you doing or have you done to reach those objectives?**

“As you can see from my background, I have been assigned increased responsibilities and more difficult assignments as I had the experience to handle them. I see this next opportunity as one more learning process to accomplishing my objectives.”

◆ **What new goals have you established recently?**

“To continue to gain as much as possible from each new experience and opportunity.”

◆ **How do you feel about people from minority groups?**

“I get along and work well with people from all ethnic backgrounds.”

◆ **How would you feel about working for a man/woman?**

“I respect and work well with my superiors regardless of their gender.”

◆ **If you could begin your career again, what would you do differently?**

“I have been very fortunate to make the most of the opportunities offered to me; therefore I would not do anything differently.”

◆ **According to your definition of success, how successful have you been to this point?**

“I would say I have been very successful. I have always had challenges, which I have been able to meet and have been able to make meaningful contributions both on and off the job.”

◆ **What hours are you used to working?**

“I usually arrive at work early so I can organize my day and work until I finish the project I’m working on which often requires working past regular business hours. Basically, I arrange my schedule around projects at work – I do whatever it takes to get the job done.”

◆ **Did you bring a resume?**

ALWAYS bring several copies of your resume as you may meet with several individuals.

◆ **If hired, what do you see in your future?**

“An opportunity to contribute towards increased efficiency and profits which in turn will provide me with a challenge to continue to excel. I want to grow professionally by making meaningful contributions and gaining added responsibility. I feel promotions will come as a result of hard work.”

◆ **Will you be out to take your boss’ job?**

“No Sir/Madam, my main objective is to work hard and make a contribution and an impact on this organization. I feel if I do so, promotions will come.”

◆ **Isn’t this a career switch?**

“No, I do not feel any change is a switch. I feel we gain skills, knowledge and experience from everything we do which is applicable in almost every other area of endeavour.”

◆ **What else do you think I should know about you?**

This normally is asked toward the close of the interview and provides you with the opportunity to either summarize your strengths or to point out any areas of your background, which you feel, was not covered during the interview. Have 2 or 3 strong points to make in less than 2 minutes, which will recap how you can make a difference to the company with which you are interviewing.

◆ **Do you generally speak to people before they speak to you?**

“It really depends on the situation. I will introduce myself to new people if it is appropriate. If someone is speaking and I feel it is appropriate to give my input or ask questions, I will contribute. I also try not to interrupt conversations when it is apparent it is a closed conversation or presentation.”

SKILLS

◆ **Why should we hire you? What can you do for us that someone else can't do?**

Relate past experience, which represents success in solving problems, which may be similar to those of the prospective employer. *"As my record indicates, I have made a meaningful contribution to my previous /present employer and I will be able to bring the same experience to your company."* OR *"My qualifications and experience gives me the necessary skills and abilities to make a meaningful contribution to your company."*

◆ **How long would it take you to make a meaningful contribution to our firm?**

"My previous experience has proven that I am a quick learner. Since this position and my previous assignments are similar, I will be able to become productive immediately."

◆ **You may be overqualified or too experienced for the position we have to offer.**

Possible answers: strong company needs strong employees, experienced people are at a premium today, emphasize interest in a long-term association with the company, employer will receive a faster return on investment because you have more experience than required. *"My previous experience just means I can do a better job in a shorter period of time. In addition, I can assist your organization in more areas."*

◆ **Have you helped increase sales/profits? Is so, how?**

Site one or two specific examples.

◆ **Have you helped reduce costs? If so, how?**

Site one or two specific examples.

◆ **How much money did you ever account for?**

If you were not directly accountable for money, explain your role in terms of budgeting, sales, etc. (profit or revenue related).

◆ **Do you like working with figures more than words?**

Answer this question with the available position in mind but do not limit yourself to one or the other, exclusively. *"I have more experience working directly with figures but I have also been responsible for reporting conclusions and reasons behind those numbers in our executive reports and meetings."* OR *"Most of my experience has involved writing reports and preparing presentations interpreting financial data."*

◆ **What were your most significant accomplishments in your current or most recent position?**

Site specific examples: *"I assisted in the development of a new product line which increased the company's revenue by 23%."*

- ◆ **Would you describe a few situations in which your work was criticized?**
“In regard to my work, my dealings with my Superiors and fellow employees have been very positive.”
- ◆ **If I spoke with your current or most recent boss, what would he or she say are your strengths and weaknesses?**
 Give three strong points and relate them to the interviewer’s company and the particular position for which you are interviewing. *“I am organized; I can accomplish objectives.”* Give only ONE weakness and turn the negative into a positive. *“I am sometimes impatient and do the work myself if the project is running late.”*
- ◆ **Can you work under pressure, deadlines, etc?**
“I have never had a problem working under pressure or meeting deadlines. As you can see from my resume, many of my previous assignments were completed before schedule.” OR *“I have always been able to do my best work when under pressure or have short deadlines to meet.”*
- ◆ **Are you creative?**
 Give one or two examples.
- ◆ **Are you a leader?**
 Give one or two examples.
- ◆ **Are you analytical?**
 Give one or two examples.
- ◆ **How did you do in school?**
 If your GPA was high or you graduated with honors, emphasize these points. If your GPA was average, explain the reasons in a positive way. *“I carried a full course load while working 30 hours a week at a public accounting firm.”* OR *“I was Treasurer of a business fraternity, a reporter for the school newspaper and recognized as an outstanding member of the ABC Society.”*
- ◆ **What is your leadership/management style?**
“I can adapt to the management style of the company I work for as well as that of the individuals under my direction.”

SUPERVISORY SKILLS

- ◆ **Are you or could you become a good supervisor? Why do you feel you have management potential?**
 Give an example. *“I was responsible for a support staff involving 5 employees made up of 4 project assistants and a secretary.”* OR *“I was not officially a supervisor, however, I was responsible for various temporary employees in my*

department which involved anywhere from 1 to 6 temporaries at various times.”
OR *“As you can see from my background, each of my prior positions has increased in responsibility and authority. Based on this I am confident I that can handle managerial positions.”*

- ◆ **Did you ever fire an employee? If so, what were the reasons for firing the person and how did you handle it?**
- ◆ **What do you think is the most difficult task as a supervisor?**

INTERVIEWING COMPANY

- ◆ **What do you know about our organization?**
Discuss products, services, revenues, problems, people and history. *“ABC Company employees 500 employees involved in the manufacturing of widgets. 1998 revenues were \$56 million and you are presently expanding your operations with the addition of 2 new manufacturing facilities.”*
- ◆ **Why do you want to work for our company?**
You would like to be part of a company project, solve a company problem, etc. You like what you’ve heard about the company’s policies, goals, management, etc. *“I understand your company is interested in employees who want to work hard and make a meaningful contribution.”*

POSITION

- ◆ **Please give me your definition of... (The position for which you are interviewing).**
- ◆ **What position do you expect to have in 2 years/5 years?**
“I have not identified a specific position down the road. I am more interested in the contribution I can make and feel with hard work, the right position will become available when I am ready for it.”
- ◆ **How would you structure this job?**
“I am not in a position to make this determination. I do not fully know how your company is structured or how each position relates to the other positions.”

\$\$\$ SALARY \$\$\$

- ◆ **Why aren’t you earning a higher salary with your level of experience?**

- ◆ **What salary do you feel this position should pay?**
Be careful – the market value of the position may be the answer. *“My understanding is that a job like the one you’re describing may be in the range of \$_____.”*
- ◆ **What salary do you think you are worth? What kind of salary are you looking for?**
“I am sure your organization offers a competitive salary, however, until I learn more about the position and the responsibilities, I would like to defer that question.” OR *“I am here for the opportunity and will consider your strongest offer.”* **DO NOT GIVE A DOLLAR AMOUNT!!!**

PREVIOUS EMPLOYERS (BE POSITIVE!)

- ◆ **How would you evaluate your present or most recent firm? What do you think is wrong with your current or most recent company?**
“My last employer gave me an excellent opportunity to contribute by offering me increased responsibilities and challenges.” OR *“My last company was a good place to work. My boss and coworkers provided me with an opportunity to grow and develop.”*
- ◆ **What features of your current or most recent position did you like most/least?**
“I liked the opportunity to contribute and make a difference in my department and the organization.” OR *“I enjoyed having the opportunity to make a meaningful contribution requiring innovative concepts and teamwork.”*
- ◆ **Which of your previous jobs did you like best?**
“I have enjoyed all of my previous positions. Each provided me with an opportunity to continue to gain more experience and responsibility.”
- ◆ **What do you think about your current or most recent supervisor?**
“He/she provided me with the opportunity to continue to learn and make a more meaningful impact on both my position and my contribution to the over-all operations.”
- ◆ **In your current or most recent position, what problems have you identified that had previously been overlooked? How have you saved your company or department time, money or unnecessary problems?**
Give one or two examples.
- ◆ **How did you obtain your past positions?**
“Most of my prior positions were obtained through my own contacts.”

QUESTIONS TO ASK THE INTERVIEWER

(Have a few ready!)

- Why is this position open?
- How often has this position been filled in the past 5 – 10 years?
- What are the primary reasons given when past employees have left this position?
- Why did the person who most recently held this position leave?
- What would you like done differently by the next person who holds this position?
- What are some of the objectives you would like accomplished in this job?
- What objectives are most pressing? What would you like accomplished in the next 2 to 3 months?
- What are some of the long term objectives you would like accomplished through this position?
- What freedom would I have in determining my work objectives, deadlines, and methods of measurement?
- What type of support does this position receive in terms of people, finances, etc.?
- What are some of the more difficult problems one would have to face in this position?
- How do you think these could be best handled?
- Where could an employee go who is successful in this position and within what time frame?
- In what ways has this company been most successful in terms of products and services over the years?
- What significant changes do you foresee in the new future?
- How will the performance of the employee in this position be judged? What accounts for success?