

## INTERVIEW QUESTIONS: ADVICE AND GUIDANCE

Although interviews can vary tremendously, from an informal chat to a panel interview, some questions always seem to crop up. It would be a good idea to review the list below as part of your interview preparation.

### A Few General Rules:

- Speak up when answering questions.
- Listen to the content of questions and answer concisely.
- If you are nervous try pausing before you answer. You are more likely to give a measured and considered response.
- It is best to admit you don't know the answer to something than to embellish the truth. You could get caught out. Be prepared for hypothetical situation questions. The best way to respond is to relate your answer to an actual situation you have experienced before.
- Try to get in the habit of asking questions in an open manner. A closed question starts with is, can, will or do....? and tend to end up being answered by a simple yes or no. You will get much more interaction from the interviewer if you use how, why, when, where and what.....?

### Likely Questions:

**Q. What made you apply for this position? (Employer seeks clarification of your motivation and interest in applying for the position)**

R. Explain succinctly and positively why you applied for the position. It may sound obvious but the client is only going to hire someone genuinely enthusiastic about the role.

**Q. Tell me about yourself (Standard employer question whereby they want to listen to how you talk and whether you can keep your answers concise and to the point)**

R. Always be prepared for this question or you could end up droning on and on. Feel free to ask the interviewer for clarification about which area he would like to hear about e.g. education, skills or experience. Generally, keep it brief. Talk about your qualifications, career history and range of skills. Emphasise those skills that are relevant to the position on offer. You could think of this question as "Tell me something that you have which will give you an advantage in this role or company".

**Q. Briefly, please summarise your work history & education for me?**

R. This is a good test of your listening skills. Respond with a brief summary only of your background and relevant education and qualifications.

**Q: Can you describe for me one or two of your most important accomplishments? (The interviewer seeks to establish whether you are successful?)**

R: Select a couple of achievements that are career related. Identify the skills you used in this situation, the obstacles, your initiative and ability to meet or exceed goals and quantify the benefits.

**Q: What has been the most challenging situation you have been recently faced with and how did you deal with it? (The interviewer is looking to discover your problem solving skills, your initiative, powers of logic and also what you consider to be difficult or challenging)**

R: Be careful how you respond to this question. Make sure that you select a difficult work situation where you were not the cause, the possible options that were available to you, why and how you selected the appropriate option and why it resolved the situation with a positive outcome.

**Q: What are your strengths? (The interviewer is looking for honesty, confidence, what value you can add, what have you got to offer that is different and what you can bring to the organisation. A note of caution - they may also be seeking to detect any arrogance)**

R: This question in one form or other is very likely to be asked. List three or four of your main strengths that could benefit a new employer in the particular role on offer. Strengths you should consider to include are technical proficiency, fast learning ability, determination, positive attitude, strong inter-personal skills and team spirit. You should only provide examples which show you in a positive light.

**Q: Why do you wish to leave your present job or why did you leave your last job? (The interviewer seeks to establish your motivations for leaving your last or current employer)**

R: Do not fall into the trap of giving negative reasons for leaving. Provide positive reasons such as looking for more challenge, responsibility and experience. Do not give reasons such as lack of stability. The interviewer might think you have a flexibility issue or he might think that although the company is stable now, periods of economic downturn or growth can create instability. DO NOT criticize your last or current boss. This could ring alarm bells with the interviewer and they might think you do not respond well to criticism or authority.

**Q: What did you like least or do you like least about your last or current job? (This question is similar to the previous question. The interviewer is trying to establish what might disinterest or de-motivate you or what could cause you to leave the prospective employer. If you were dissatisfied before, you may be dissatisfied again if there are similar circumstances)**

R: You are best advised to focus on tasks or career progression rather than politics and people. However, avoid saying you disliked the repetition. The interviewer may worry that you may eventually find the role repetitive. Your best approach is to concentrate on tasks, stating that having given the question some thought you were on the whole very satisfied with your job but a certain task or responsibility which was unusually or disproportionately time consuming took you away from using your real strengths. The question is something of a trap as it is asking for a negative answer. Do not give a negative response about your boss or your company. You might talk yourself out of a job. One of the purposes of this question is to find out if you're going to be satisfied in the job for which you are being interviewed for. The interviewer may feel that if you were dissatisfied before, you may be dissatisfied again if the circumstances are similar.

**Q: Everyone has weaknesses. What are yours? (The interviewer is trying to discover a reason not to employ you, what may disinterest you, where you might need help, what might prevent you from succeeding in the role and how much do you know about yourself)**

R: Never say you do not have any. The interviewer will think you are either not telling the truth or lack self assessment ability. You are best advised to use a professional weakness such as some experience which is not essential for the job you are being interviewed for. You could take a negative trait and make it sound like an asset. For example, say you are a stickler for meeting deadlines and will stay on top of a project until it is done according to your specifications, which may cause you to sometimes work late nights. You could describe a personal or professional weakness that you have identified in the past, the inability to use macros in Excel for example, and how you have done home study or been on a course to correct this and now you are highly proficient.

**Q: In what circumstances do you find it difficult to make decisions? (The interviewer seeks to discover your decision making ability or lack of it)**

R: You should give examples of decisions that you have had to make when you have had insufficient information. Be very careful not to show weaknesses or allow your answer to display you as someone who is reckless.

**Q: Why do you want to work for this company? (The interviewer is looking for an answer which shows you have thought about where you want to work)**

R: The answer to this question will make you stand out as a more informed and competent candidate provided you have researched the company and the industry before the interview. Your answer to this question should incorporate the fact that you have researched the company, the knowledge gained about the company and where your background, experience and skills can be used in a positive beneficial way. You should also include a statement providing two reasons why the job is a good match for your skills, strengths' background and experience. Your answer must demonstrate your interest and enthusiasm for the company and its aims and how you could be a member of the team. Let the interviewer know you are being selective about where you want to work and you're not just going to take any job offered to you.

**Q: Tell me about a time when you had to juggle priorities to meet a deadline? (If you hear at interview "tell me about a time when", the interviewer is using behavioural interviewing techniques. The basis of this technique is to use your past experiences and behaviour as an indicator of your future success. In other words, if you can demonstrate through examples that you accomplished something before, the interviewer is likely to believe you are equipped to do it again.) This particular question seeks information about how you handle priorities and deadlines, respond to pressure and your flexibility.**

R: Your answer must give a specific example or examples and end with a positive conclusion.

**Q: How would you describe your personality? (The interviewer is asking this question for two reasons. Firstly to hear where you place the emphasis on your description and secondly to see how quickly and creatively you can think on the spot.**

R: This may appear to need a straightforward answer. It does not. This question presents you with an opportunity to distinguish yourself from other candidates by describing yourself uniquely and at the same time selling yourself. Use your personality trait and describe how you use it in a work situation. For example, do not only say "I am highly analytical", say "I am very strong at analysing data and transforming it into meaningful information". Say "I take pride in never missing a deadline" instead of "I am reliable". In other words provide personality traits plus benefits. Your answers must convince the interviewer that your personality is the best one for the job.

#### **Other Questions:**

#### **WORK HISTORY**

- How much supervision have you typically received in your previous job? (Interviewer seeks to discover how much responsibility you had)
- Describe one or two of the biggest disappointments in your work history? (Interviewer seeks to establish what demotivates you and where you have been unfulfilled)
- What is important to you in a company? What things do you look for in an organisation? (Interviewer wishes to discover if your values and requirements match the employer's values)
- Why do you want to work in this area of this company?
- Why do you think you are qualified for this job?
- Why do you want to work in this industry and why would you enjoy doing so?

#### **JOB PERFORMANCE**

- What are your strong points for this job?
- What would you say are areas that need improvement? (Interviewer looking for your weaknesses)
- What were the results of your most recent performance evaluation and what were some of the good points and bad points of that rating?
- When a problem in your job performance has been identified, what have you typically done?
- How does your job fit into your department and company? (Gives an idea of level of responsibility)
- Do you prefer working alone or in groups?
- What example can you give me of when you have been out of your depth?
- What do you think about working long hours and/or weekends?
- Which of your achievements were recognised by your superiors?
- Give me an example of your skills in managing or supervising others?
- What are some of the things you would like to have to do in a job and why?
- What kinds of pressure do you or did you encounter in your current or previous job?
- What is the key single thing you are looking for in a job?
- What are some of the things in your current/last role you felt you have done particularly well or in which you have achieved the greatest success and why?
- What were some of the things in your last job that you found most difficult to do?

- What are some of the problems you encounter in doing your job? Which one frustrates you the most? What do you normally do about it?
- What did you particularly like about your last job?
- Do you consider your progress on the job representative of your ability? Why?
- How do you feel about the way you and others in the department were managed by your supervisor?
- What would your current (most recent) employer say about your ability in your current/last role?

### **DEALING WITH PEOPLE**

- Tell me about the last time you disagreed with your boss. How did you resolve this?
- Where have you been unable to get on with others? (You should give an example and say how you resolved/overcome the situation)
- What types of people do you find it most difficult to work with and why? (You should answer this question very carefully)
- What kinds of people do you like working with? (Be careful when answering this question)
- Tell me about a time when you felt it was you against everyone else. You thought you were right and that everyone else was wrong. What did you do? (Give specific example but only if you end up being right and not detrimental to your colleagues)
- Tell me about a time when you were working with someone who wasn't pulling their weight, and they had a different value system than yours. How did you deal with this person? (Give specific examples)

### **CAREER- GOALS**

- What is your long-term employment or career objective?
- What kind of job do you see yourself holding five years from now?
- What do you feel you need to develop in terms of skill & knowledge in order to be ready for that opportunity?
- Why would you be successful in such a job?
- How does the role you are being interviewed for fit in with your overall career goals?
- What in your past experience affected your present career objectives?
- If you had this job, what would you most like to accomplish?
- What do you see this job leading to?
- Why do you think you would like this role?

### **SELF-ASSESSMENT**

- Can you describe for me a difficult obstacle you have had to overcome? How did you handle it?
- What kind of things do you feel most confident in doing?
- How would you describe yourself as a person?
- Why would you consider yourself a self-starter?
- What do you consider to be your greatest achievements to date and why?

- What things give you the greatest satisfaction at work?
- What frustrates you the most and how do you usually cope with them?
- What reservations should I have about you as an employee? (Interviewer is asking you about your weaknesses)

#### **CREATIVITY**

- In connection with your career, what have you done that you consider truly creative.
- Can you think of a problem you have encountered when you had to come up with a new solution?
- What kind of problems have you recently been asked to solve at work and the solutions you came up with?

#### **DECISIVENESS**

- Do you consider yourself to be thoughtful and analytical or do you make up your mind quickly?
- What was your most difficult decision in the last three months? What made it difficult?
- The last time you were unsure what decision to make, what did you do?
- How do you go about making an important decision affecting your career?
- What was the last major work problem that you were confronted with and what action did you take?

#### **MOTIVATION**

- Do you have a professional goal and what is it?
- How do you determine what constitutes top priorities in the performance of your job?
- What motivates you?

#### **WORK STANDARDS**

- What are your standards of success in your job?
- How do you measure your own performance?
- In your position, how would you define doing a good job? On what basis was your definition determined?
- When judging the performance of your subordinate, what factors or characteristics are most important to you?

#### **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT**

- In your present job what approach do you take to get your people together to establish a common approach to a problem?
- How do you get your people to accept your ideas or department goals?
- What specifically do you do to set an example for your employees?
- How often do you meet with your immediate subordinates as a group?
- What sort of leader do your people feel you are?
- How do you get people who do not want to work together to establish a common approach to a problem?

- If you do not have much time and they hold seriously differing views, what would be your approach?
- How would you describe your basic leadership style? Give specific examples of how you practice this?
- Do you feel you work more effectively on a one to one basis or in a group situation?
- Have you ever led a group of people who do not report to you, but from whom you have to get work? How did you do it? What was satisfying and disappointing? How would you handle the job differently?

#### **ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS**

- Have you ever made any group or public presentations?
- Have you made any individual presentations recently and how did you prepare for them?

#### **WRITTEN COMMUNICATION SKILLS**

- Would you rather write a report or give a verbal report? why?
- What is the extent of your participation in major reports that have to be written?

#### **FLEXIBILITY**

- What do you think about continuous changes in company operating policies and procedures?
- How effective has your company been in adapting its policies to fit a changing environment?
- What has been the most significant change made in your company in the last six months which directly affected you, and how successfully do you think you reacted to or implemented this change?
- What types of changes in the workplace have caused you difficulty and why?

#### **STRESS TOLERANCE**

- When do you feel pressure in your job?
- What has been the highest pressure situation you have been under in the last 12 months and how did you cope with it?

#### **STABILITY & MATURITY**

- Describe your most significant success and failure in the last three years.
- What do you like to do best?
- What do you like to do least?
- What in your last review did your superior suggest you needed to improve?
- How have you reacted when your work has been criticised? (Give an example including the outcome which should show you in a positive light)
- What have you done about it?

#### **INTEREST IN SELF DEVELOPMENT**

- Who or what has been the most important influence in your own self development?
- What kind of books and other publications do you read?
- Have you ever taken a management development course?
- How do you help your subordinates develop themselves?



- What skills do you want to improve? (Relate the answer to the role on offer)
- What do you do in your spare time?
- How do you see this job developing your skills and experience?