

## **The Difficult Questions**

Over the years, many articles have been written about interviewing. Following is a collection of questions considered by many to be the most daunting along with guidelines on addressing them.

Please note that these are not intended to be your answers, but are merely guidelines intended to help you formulate your own carefully considered responses to questions that may be similar to these. Ready, written answers were never nor shall they ever be substitutes for thoughtfully conceived replies.

If I could add one thing to the end of each of these guideline answers, it would be, “if applicable”.

Some strong and very good advice is to be honest and to be yourself. You can never go wrong by doing that.

### **Tell me about yourself.**

Since this is often the opening question in an interview be extra careful that you don't run off at the mouth. Keep your answer to a minute or two at most. Cover four topics: early years, education, work history, and recent career experiences. Emphasize this last subject. Remember that this is likely to be a warm-up question. Don't waste your best points on it.

### **What do you know about our organization?**

You should be able to discuss products or services, revenues, reputation, image, goals, problems, management style, people, history and philosophy. But don't act as if you know everything about the place. Let your answer show that you have taken the time to do some research, but don't overwhelm the interviewer. Do make it clear that you wish to learn more.

You might start your answer in this manner. In my job search, I've investigated a number of companies. Yours is one of the few that interests me, for these reasons...

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Give your answer a positive tone. Don't say, "Well, everyone tells me that you're in all sorts of trouble, and that's why I'm here" - even if that is why you're there.

## **Why do you want to work for us?**

The deadliest answer you can give is, "Because I like people '.

Here, and throughout the interview a good answer comes from having done your homework so that you can speak in terms of the company's needs. You might say that your research has shown that the company is doing things you would like to be involved with, and that it's doing them in ways that greatly interest you. For example, if the organization is known for strong management, your answer should mention that fact and show that you would like to be a part of that team. If the company places a great deal of emphasis on research and development, emphasize the fact. That you want to create new things and that you know this is a place in which such activity is encouraged. If the organization stresses financial controls, your answer should mention a reverence for numbers.

If you feel that you have to concoct an answer to this question - if, for example, the company stresses research, and you feel that you should mention it even though it really doesn't interest you then you probably should not be taking that interview, because you probably shouldn't be considering a job with that organization.

Your homework should include learning enough about the company to avoid approaching places where you wouldn't be able or wouldn't want to function.

## **What can you do for us that someone that can't?**

Here you have every right, and perhaps an obligation, to toot your own horn and be a bit egotistical. Talk about your record for getting things done, and mention specifics from your resume or list of career accomplishments. Say that you are confident that your skills and interests, combined with a history of getting results, make you valuable. Mention your ability to set priorities, identify problems, and use your experience and energy to solve them.

## **What do you find most attractive about this position? What seems least attractive about it?**

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List three or four attractive factors of the job, and mention a single, minor, unattractive item, if applicable

### **Why should we hire you?**

Create your answer by thinking in terms of your ability, your experience, and your energy.

### **What do you look for in a job?**

Keep your answer oriented to opportunities at this organization. Talk about your desire to perform and be recognized for your contribution. Make your answer oriented toward opportunity rather than personal security.

### **Please give me your definition of a \_\_\_\_\_ (the position for which you are being interviewed).**

Keep your answer brief and task oriented. Think in terms of responsibilities and accountability. Make sure that you really do understand what the position involves before you attempt an answer. Or you may say that it is different things to different companies and you'll then be able to discuss it from your current or previous company experience. If you are not certain, ask the interviewer; he or she may answer the question for you.

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

Be realistic. Say that, while you would expect to meet pressing demands and pull your own weight from the first day, it might take six months to a year before you could expect to know the organization and it needs well enough to make a major contribution.

### **How long would you stay with us?**

Say that you are interested in a career with the organization, but admit that you would have to continue to feel challenged to remain with any organization. Think in terms of, "As long as we both feel achievement-oriented..."

### **Your resume suggests that you may be over-qualified or too experienced for this position. What's your opinion?**

Emphasize your interest in establishing a long-term association with the organization, and say that you assume that if you perform well in this job, new opportunities will open up for you. Mention that a strong company

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needs a strong staff. Observe that experienced executives are always at a premium. Suggest that since you are so well qualified, the employer will get fast return on his investment. Say that a growing, energetic company can never have too much talent.

### **What is your management style?**

You should know enough about the company's style to know that your management style will complement it. Possible styles include: task-oriented ("I enjoy problem-solving: identifying what's wrong, choosing a solution and implementing it"), result-oriented ("Every management decision I make is determined by how it will affect the bottom line"), or even paternalistic ("I'm committed to taking care of my subordinates and pointing them in the right direction"). A participate style is currently quite popular; an open-door method of managing in which you get things done by motivating people and delegating responsibility

As you consider this question, think about whether your style will let you work happily and effectively within the organization

### **Are you a good manager? Can you give some examples? Do you feel that you have top managerial potential?**

Keep your answer achievement and task oriented, rely on examples from your career to support your answer. Stress your experience and your energy.

### **What do you look for when you hire people?**

Think in terms of skills, initiative, and the adaptability to be able to work comfortably and effectively with others. Mention that you like to hire people who appear capable of moving up in the organization.

### **Have you ever had to fire people? What were the reasons, and how did you handle the situation?**

Admit that the situation was not easy, but say that it worked out well, both for the company, and you think, for the individual. Show that, like anyone else, you don't enjoy unpleasant tasks but that you can resolve them efficiently and - in the case of firing someone - humanely.

### **What do you think is the most difficult thing about being a manager or executive?**

Mention planning, execution, and cost-control. Recognition that motivating and managing employees is sometimes difficult, especially as a new person

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in the organization, but that you enjoy the challenge and have been successful in the past in this regard. Be prepared to speak to the specifics of the situation.

### **What important trends do you see in our industry?**

Be prepared with two or three trends that illustrate how well you understand the industry. You might consider technological challenges or opportunities, economic conditions, or even regulatory demands as you collect your thoughts about the direction in which the business may be heading.

### **What are the "frontier issues" in our industry?**

Be prepared with two or three key issues.

### **Why are you leaving (did you leave) your present (last) job?**

Be brief to the point, and honest. Refer back to the planning phase of your job search, where you considered this topic as you set your reference statements. If you were laid off in across-the board cutback, say so. Otherwise, indicate that the move was your decision, the result of your action. **Do not mention personality conflicts.**

The interviewer may spend some time probing you on this issue, particularly if it is clear that you were terminated. The "We agreed to disagree" approach may be useful. Remember that your references are likely to be checked, so don't concoct a story for an interview.

### **How do you feel about leaving all your benefits to take on a new job?**

Mention that you are concerned, naturally, but not panicked. You are willing to accept some risk to find the right opportunity for yourself. Don't suggest that security might interest you more than getting the job done successfully.

### **How would you define an ideal working environment?**

Consider these values: a place where people are treated as fairly as possible, where they are given a chance to show what they can do, and where they are rewarded for their performance.

### **How would you evaluate your present (last) firm?**

Unless it is common knowledge that the company suffers from woeful management, or that its officers are being investigated for fraud, be positive. Talk about an excellent company, which gave you many fine experiences (one of which was to prepare you for a job like this one).

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## **Have you helped increase sales? Profit? How?**

Be ready with specific details from your resume or list of career accomplishments.

## **Have you helped reduce costs? How?**

Be prepared with quantifiable details.

## **How much money did you account for?**

Be specific.

## **How many people did you supervise?**

Be specific.

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

Be honest, but mention that you are comfortable with both.

## **What do your subordinates think of you?**

Be as positive and honest as you can. Your answer can be checked easily.

## **In your current (last) position, what have been (were) your five most significant accomplishments?**

Have specific examples ready. If you are asked for five examples, don't give ten accomplishments. If you want to show that you were responsible for more than five major achievements, you can say, "I've given you the five that seem most important to me. There are others if you'd like to hear them." Then, if the interviewer asks for additional accomplishments, you can give them without seeming to brag.

## **Why haven't you found a new job before now?**

Say that finding a job is not difficult, but that finding the right job deserves time and takes careful planning.

## **Did you think of leaving your present position before? If yes, what do you think held you there?**

You might say that the challenge of the job held you in the past, but as that seemed to disappear; you reached the decision that you should investigate other opportunities.

## **What do you think of your boss?**

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Be as positive as you can. A potential boss is likely to wonder if you might talk about him in similar terms at some point in the future,

### **Can you work under pressure and deal with deadlines?**

Observe that both are facts of business life. Take examples from your list of accomplishments to show how you can deal successfully with pressure and deadlines.

### **Did you change the nature or your job?**

Tell how you improved it.

### **Do you prefer staff (support function) or line (directly involved in the business) work? Why?**

Say that it depends on the job and its challenges.

### **In your present (last) position, what problems did you identify that had previously been overlooked?**

Be brief and don't brag.

### **Don't you think that you might be better suited to a different sized company? To a different type or company?**

Tailor your answer to the job being discussed; Say that your preferences for size or type of company generally depend on the job in question. Note that your research has shown you that this organization and this job meet your criteria. Be prepared to discuss your criteria.

### **If you could choose any job where would you go?**

Talk about the job and company for which you are being interviewed

### **Why aren't you earning more at your age?**

Say that this is one reason that you are conducting this job search. Do not be defensive.

### **What do you feel this position should pay?**

Salary is a delicate topic. We suggest that you defer tying yourself to a precise figure for as long as you can do so politely.

If you are asked the question during an initial screening interview, you might say that you feel you need to know more about the position's responsibilities before you could give a meaningful answer to that question. Here, too, either by asking the interviewer or search executive (if one is involved), or in

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research done as part of your homework you can try to find out whether there is a salary grade attached to the job. If there is, and if you can live with it, say that the range seems right to you.

If the interviewer continues to probe, you might say, "You know that I'm making \$\_\_\_\_\_ now. Like everyone else, I'd like to improve on that figure, but my major interest is with the job itself." Remember that the act of taking a new job does not, in and of itself, make you worth more money.

### **Do you have any objections to psychological tests?**

No, you would feel comfortable taking them.

### **What other jobs or companies are you considering?**

Keep your answer related to fields that are similar to the one in which this company operates.

### **Do you speak to people before they speak to you?**

Say that your actions depend on specific circumstances. While you wouldn't normally start a conversation with a stranger in the street, for example, you feel comfortable initiating discussions with people you don't know in normal Social or business settings. The interviewer is probably trying to determine your ability to deal with unstable or unanticipated situations.

### **What was the last book you read? Movie you saw? Sporting event you attended?**

Try to show that you lead a balanced life when answering questions like these. For example, don't say that the last book you read was a business text.

### **Will you be out to take your boss' job?**

Say that while you certainly hope to win additional responsibility in the organization, you have always focused on getting the current job done.

### **Are you creative?**

Be prepared with work related examples of creativity.

### **How would you describe you own personality?**

It may be wise to say that you are the proud possessor of a balanced personality.

### **Do you consider yourself a leader?**



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Take examples from your work experience.

## **What are you long range goals?**

Refer back to the planning phase of your job search. Don't answer, "I want the job you advertised." Relate goals to the company you are interviewing: "In a firm like yours, I would like to...."

## **What are your strong points?**

Present at least three, if you are able. Use concrete, work-related examples to illustrate them. Try to relate your answer to the Interviewing organization and the specific job opening.

## **What are your weak points?**

Don't say that you have none. But make your negative a strength carried just a bit too far. "I sometimes get impatient and become too deeply involved when we are late with a project."

Don't offer a list of weaknesses. A good interviewer is likely to press you a bit by saying, "is there anything else?" You might say, "No, I don't think so on that topic." If he persists, come up with a second weakness, but make him ask for it. Don't offer negative information unnecessarily. If he continues on and asks for a third weakness, say politely that you really can't think of anything else.

Finally, show that you are aware of you' weaknesses and are working to correct them.

## **If you could start your career again, what would you do differently?**

Your best answer is, "Not a thing", if applicable. Present yourself as an individual who is happy with his or her life. You have enjoyed its "ups" and learned from its "downs". You should not, as a result, want to change the things that brought you to where you are today. Mention that it is your past, after all, which has prepared you for the future and for this position.

## **What career options do you have at the moment?**

You should try to identity three areas of interest, one of which includes this company and job. The other two should be in related field. You've dealt with this question during the targeting phase of the search.

## **How would you define success?**

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Think in terms of a sense of well-being. (Consider opportunity and responsibility as components of success)

### **How successful do you think you've been so far?**

You should be able to say that, all in all, you're happy with the way your career has progressed so far. Given the normal ups and downs of life, you feel that you've done quite well and have no complaints.

Present a positive and confident picture of yourself but don't overstate your case. An answer like, "Everything's wonderful! I can't think of a time when things were going better! I'm overjoyed!" is likely to make an interviewer just wonder whether you're trying to fool him ... or yourself. The most convincing confidence is usually quiet confidence.