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A Fact Sheet

Highlights

When answering interview questions, you should:

1. *Give succinct, clear answers.*
2. *Listen intently to what the interviewer is saying whether he/she is simply talking or asking specific questions.*
3. *Think before you respond.*

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Job Search 101: Answering the Right Interview Questions (Part I)

Most interviews begin with the interviewer asking the applicant questions about his/her skills, experience, training, and work philosophy. Giving the applicant time to ask questions about the company and the specific job typically follows. The interviewer(s) will be taking into consideration both the quality and content of both the answers given as well as the questions asked. The applicant's ability to navigate this part of the process competently demonstrates his/her ability to handle the pressures of the job as well as meet company expectations. Needless to say, being prepared to give the best answers possible **and** to ask the essential, pertinent questions are essential to landing the job.

How does an applicant prepare answers for unknown questions? First, consider the possible questions an interviewer might ask. Samples of all types of interview questions are provided on pages 3 and 4 in this issue of *The Workplace*. Prepare possible responses, keeping in mind that there is a fine line between giving too much and not enough information. Some questions, especially those that relate to previous employers and hypothetical questions are sometimes designed to see if there is something in your background that might be a problem if you are hired. If faced with such questions, answer honestly, but do not take this as an opportunity to vent frustrations with, or hard feelings about, your previous employer.

Second, understand the types of questions that may be asked. This may be the hardest part of the interview process. Nothing stops the momentum of an interview more than answering a question that was never asked. Most interviews usually follow a logical progression from simple, generic questions to more specific and tougher ones and usually fall into one of three categories: basic, qualifications, and hypothetical. Most interviewers will ask in one form or another



Rehearse your answers aloud until you feel comfortable with your own qualifications.

a group of basic questions. Some may ask as few as two to three, others 10 to 12, of these generic types of questions. One of the main purposes of basic questions is to put the applicant at ease. Other interview questions may relate specifically to your qualifications for the job, to your career goals, and to your background, including your education and training

“The hardest part of the interview process [may be to] understand the types of questions that may be asked.”

and your work experience. The questions are asked to gain further insight into the qualifications and the work experiences of the applicant. Some may ask tougher, often hypothetical, questions to determine how well you might fit into the company or departmental culture and your philosophy or temperament for handling problems. Some may even ask about your salary requirements.

Third, rehearse your answers aloud until you feel comfortable with your own qualifications. Having an objective friend play the role of interviewer will help you “think on your feet” when a similar or related question is asked. If you have prepared well for your interview and have done your homework on the company, you should be confident in your answers.

Regardless of the type of question you are answering, you should:

1. Give succinct, clear answers.

2. Listen intently to what the interviewer is saying whether he/she is simply talking or asking specific questions. Instead of asking one question after another, some interviewers engage the applicant in a discussion that is more conversational. Nevertheless, your responses are equally critical and should be carefully constructed. If you do not understand what is being asked or are not following the discussion, don't be afraid to ask a follow-up question for clarification. Just be sure that your follow-up question is significant and contributes to the overall discussion.
3. Think **before** you respond. Collect your thoughts and then begin speaking. Speak with a clear, distinct voice, using correct grammar. Using “buzz” words to impress the interviewer is dangerous unless you know what they mean and exactly how they should be used.

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Table 1: Sample Interview Questions¹

Common Interview Questions

- Tell me about yourself.
- What are your strengths/weaknesses?
- What attracted you to our company/this position?
- Are you interviewing with other companies? Which ones?
- Why did you leave your last job?
- What motivates you in your work?
- How do you work best—by yourself or with others?
- What are your career goals?
- Tell me about your hobbies/sports.
- What do you do on your present job?
- What jobs have you liked most/least? Why?
- What have you contributed to your present job that no one else could have?
- What have I forgotten to ask?

Background and Qualification Questions

Qualifications

- What can you do for us that no one else can?
- What makes you qualified for this position?
- What have been your greatest accomplishments?
- Give me an example of your taking initiative to _____.
- What kind of people do you prefer as colleagues?
- What skills, etc. would you bring to the job?

Career Goals

- What type of job performance do you expect from yourself?
- What is your plan for achieving the level of performance you expect from yourself?
- What type of job performance do you expect from others?
- How can you help others perform to your expectations?
- What are your expectations from this position? This company?
- Are you able to relocate/travel/work weekends?
- What hours can you work?
- When can you start?

(Continued on Page 4)



Background and Qualification Questions (continued)

Education and Training

- How did you choose your major/field of work?
- How has your education prepared you for this job?
- Tell me about additional or specialized training/continuing education classes you have had?
- What is your plan for remaining current in your field?
- What type of software do you use in your current position?
- What skills do you have that would not be a part of the position for which you are interviewing?

Experience

- How does your experience prepare you for this position?
- Tell me about the previous jobs you have held.
- What were your responsibilities on your previous job that would compliment this position?
- What has been your least favorite job? Most favorite job? Why?
- Whom may we contact for references?
- Do you have any samples of your work with you? May we see them?

Tough Interview Questions

- How do you handle stress/rejection/failure?
- Give an example of a project that did not turn out as planned.
- Describe your typical workday.
- What is your interpretation of “work until the job is done?”
- What did you not particularly like or agree with at the last place you worked?
- What would you do when you have a decision to make and no procedure exists?
- How would you handle _____?
- What do you do when _____?

¹The list of questions in Table 1 is not a comprehensive list of questions interviewers may ask.